

Dweezil Zappa

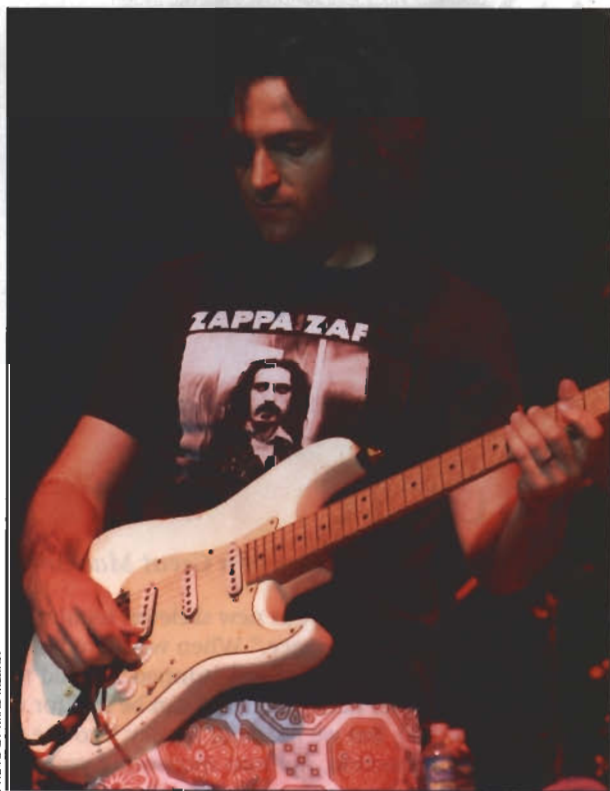


PHOTO BY MIKE MESKER

One thing that really struck me about the Zappa Plays Zappa DVD (Strobosonic) is the direction. The camera is often focused on one band member doing something very intricate with their hands, fingers, feet, mouth, or whatever, and we see it all play out rather than get cut away to something else. We're given plenty of time to marvel at the ability of each musician to play your dad Frank Zappa's music.

One of my pet peeves with music DVD production in general is that, 9 times out of 10, the performances are edited so you don't see what you're hearing. So you'll hear a guitar solo, but you'll see somebody in the audience or watch the bass player or the singer dancing instead. What's the point of that?

My goal when I edited the ZPZ DVD was that I wanted people to get a sense of what was happening at all times with the music. You're able to see if there's a particularly difficult line being played on keyboards, marimba, and guitar. I cut back and forth between all three instruments, and I may even do a split screen so you can see it all. I think it improves your knowledge of the music and helps you understand what it takes to play this stuff. For example, a lot of people may not realize that we're synchronizing those lines together. If

you're there in the audience, you never really get an over-the-shoulder view of how hard it is to play those marimba parts. Instead, you're scanning things and watching people onstage at different times, and you don't have the option to get in close and see all the details like you do on this DVD.

What was your goal with the surround-sound mix?

I love the way surround music sounds, and Frank's stuff certainly lends itself to it more than any other music I can think of because there are so many different textures and frequencies to play around with. The standard thing is to try to create an experience that's, "Hey, I'm right there inside the band!" But I did take a few liberties, especially when I'm conducting the band. I have this one hand signal that goes to the right, and I took all the audio and panned it to the right, because what I'm doing is dictating where the audio is going across the stage anyway. So the sound has a pretty funny little "tilt" there. Those are the only moments I went outside the traditional scheme.

My guitar setup is ripe for surround mixing. I have two stereo signals — one from the big cabinets, and the other from this little Fender stereo amp. I was able to play around with the panning of those signals because it's essentially quad. There are some swirling effects in solos like the one in "Son of Orange County" that are pretty cool because they're panned with the main cabinets in the front left and front right and the little Fender in the back left and back right, with a bit of swirly stuff happening within all that. It's a very natural thing for your ear to want to be immersed inside that kind of sound. I look forward to being able to do more and get even more creative and go deeper with it.

You must have put a lot of pressure on yourself to not merely replicate a Frank Zappa show.

Early into this project, a lot of people were thinking, "Oh, he'll just put together a band of people who were formerly in Frank's bands, whom Frank trained, and he'll just play guitar on a few songs and pretend to be Frank and put on a moustache, and that'll suck." Uh, that's not what I did. [chuckles]

There's a good quote on our Web site [zappaplayszappa.com] from somebody who wrote in after seeing one of the shows. To paraphrase, they said that going to ZPZ was like being taken on a private tour of the world's greatest museum, but your guide never stood in front of the pictures. I try to do this in a very unobtrusive way. I make it not about me, but about the music. I felt it was an important mission to give the longtime core fans something to enjoy, as well as introduce Frank's music to new fans. The younger the better, actually, because ultimately the earlier that people get exposed to it, the better equipped they are to understand what's missing from the world of music today.

S&V

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