

Les Films du Poisson & UFA Fiction

present

EAT THAT QUESTION

Frank Zappa in His Own Words



a documentary by
Thorsten Schütte

France/Germany • 90 min. • 2016

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LOGLINE

Eat That Question—Frank Zappa in His Own Words is an intimate encounter with the iconoclastic composer and musician told through rare archival footage, revealing a 20th-century musical genius whose provocative worldview reverberates into the present day and beyond.

SYNOPSIS

Frank Zappa—self-taught composer, musician, bandleader, producer and independent thinker—created blunt, eccentric and satirical compositions spanning nearly four decades. Impatient with any division between popular and high art, he bridged musical genres with masterful ease and demonstrated a mastery of pop idioms ranging from jazz to rock, penned electronic, orchestral works and novelty music.

Zappa has for many decades been the brilliant and uncompromising voice of dissent of the music scene. He combined acid, fun-poking humor with political wit, tempered his borderline misanthropy with a high regard for human potential, and had a strong belief in free speech and the ideal of democracy.

Eat That Question—Frank Zappa in His Own Words is an energetic celebration of Zappa told entirely through archival footage culled from the performer's 30-year career in entertainment. Weaving together rare TV interviews and performances from around the world, the film explores Frank Zappa's unconventional and irreverent handling of the media, his irrepressible quest for enlightenment and his witty self-dramatization.

At odds with the press since the beginning of his musical career, Zappa grabbed the opportunity more than any other musician, to capture and undermine the media and understood better than anyone how to position his concerns and issues. His caustic comments about state and religion, the music industry and youth culture leave behind an evocative musical and socio-political compendium of his time. The archival film material of Zappa live, once buried in oblivion in broadcasting archives, shows the essence and landmarks of a unique career and creates an unparalleled and eclectic portrait of perhaps one of the most original composers of the 20th century.

Zappa's music and ideas are vital, and they cut across generations, while his goal of freeing the listener from conformity still resonates today.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

For years I've been snuffing out Zappa truffles in television archives and what I found was an amazing treasure trove of interviews, TV appearances and concert recordings. *Eat That Question—Frank Zappa in His Own Words* celebrates the man and his extraordinary musical and political legacy through the prism of this archival footage.

When he died from prostate cancer in 1993, at the age of 53, the world lost one of its most creative and provocative artists. As a rock musician and composer, he was an iconic figure in the musical history of the 20th century. But so little is known about the motives and beliefs of this barometer of his times.

He was notorious for his sharp-tongued lyrics—"Plastic people, you gotta go," "Jesus thinks you're a jerk" being just two—and was routinely boycotted and censored by radio stations and the music industry at large. His compositional form of expression combined with an intransigent point of view provoked and polarized audiences. He played an essential part in the shaping of modern musical history through his steadfast refusal to play by established rules.

Beyond the enfant terrible we think we know, a sensitive and levelheaded individual emerges, an independent thinker who pushed the boundaries of music, art and morality—but who was at the same time inherently conservative and family-focused. Perceived as an outspoken critic of American culture and society, Zappa held core American values. Although he bashed prudish moral conventions, he was surprisingly anti-hippie and anti-drug use.

His comments on the music industry, religion and the role of the state resonate strongly today, and his body of work virtually epitomizes the freedom of speech.

My film consciously avoids the usual trappings of talking-head interviews with contemporaries or experts who insist they knew him. Loaded instead with lengthy interviews with him and a multitude of live performances, it is an exploration of the phenomenon of Frank Zappa, while still taking into account the bad old days of rock 'n' roll. The film provides the necessary time to get into the modes of Zappa's expression and into the patterns of his language, to grasp the complexity of his character, and to feel with the man behind the media persona.

I hope that this fresh look at the composer Frank Zappa will not just be relevant to his early listeners. More and more young music consumers are discovering Zappa for themselves. Zappa's body of work stands as a counter-statement to streamlined and commercialized pop music, in a time lacking controversial, outspoken and polarizing iconoclasts. The life and art of Frank Zappa connects to universal questions that so many can relate to — How can an artist stay true to his art and ideas? How does one handle rejection and the limitations of a creative output? And what is the ultimate price to pay for the freedom of expression?

It fills me great joy that Sundance has chosen the film and that we can show it to the world for the first time here in the U.S. A few weeks ago, on December 21, 2015, Zappa would have celebrated his 75th birthday. I find it promising that he still can be heard and I hope that this film will echo all over the country after its premiere in Utah.

– Thorsten Schütte (January 20, 2016)

FROM THE ZAPPA FAMILY

The Zappa Family is thrilled that 'Eat That Question—Frank Zappa in His Own Words' is finally out in the world. Our mother, Gail Zappa, collaborated with Thorsten Schütte and Estelle Fialon for many years on this project and had great respect for both of them. The film that Thorsten has made provides a new way for old and new Frank Zappa fans to discover more about FZ — in his own words. Gail would be so pleased to see the film in theaters. Enjoy!

– Ahmet Zappa

This film captures so much of the full throttle genius of our dad. He was a misfit who was ahead of his time and who stayed the creative course against all odds. I'm so grateful that this movie may reach even one person who commits (or recommits) to their inherent gifts regardless of the opposing messages the world can spew.

– Moon Zappa

THORSTEN SCHÜTTE, Director

THORSTEN SCHÜTTE has worked for over 20 years as an author, director and producer. He is in charge of the fiction and documentary department at the Filmakademie Baden-Württemberg in Germany and is one of the founding members of the *Stolen Moments - Namibian Music History Untold* Research Group, which is currently preparing an international multimedia exhibition that focuses on the correlation between pop culture and the political struggle under apartheid.

His films have been widely shown in international film festivals and on TV and include *I Was The King Of Porn - The Adventurous Life of Lasse Braun*, *Land Matters*, *Namibia Generation X*, *Trip To Brazil* and *World Jazz*.

ESTELLE FIALON, Producer

ESTELLE FIALON is Associate Producer at Les Films du Poisson, an acclaimed French production company founded by Yaël Fogiel and Laetitia Gonzalez in 1994, which has won a string of international awards. Among the company's accolades are Best Director and the FIPRESCI Prize at the Cannes Film Festival for *On Tour* by Mathieu Amalric; the Camera d'Or at Cannes for *Jellyfish* by Etgar Keret and Shira Gefen; and five César awards (French Oscars) between the films *Since Otar Left*, directed by Julie Bertuccelli, and *Voyages*, directed by Emmanuel Finkiel.

In 2006, Fialon founded the documentary branch of the company. She has since led a number of noteworthy international coproductions. In 2013, she received a nomination for the Academy Awards and for the Producers Guild of America for Dror Moreh's documentary feature *The Gatekeepers*. She produced Blaise Harrison's celebrated documentaries *Summer Growing Up*, which premiered at the 2011 Directors' Fortnight in Cannes, and *Harmony*, presented in the official competition of the 2013 Locarno Film Festival. She is currently developing the new documentary feature by Dror Moreh, *Corridors of Power*. Fialon is also the producer of *The Settlers*, directed by Shimon Dotan, premiering in Sundance 2016 in World Documentary Competition.

JOCHEN LAUBE, Co-Producer

JOCHEN LAUBE studied film production at the Filmakademie Baden-Württemberg. In 2006, Laube founded the production company sommerhaus filmproduktionen, which produced the German Film Award-nominated debut feature by Christian Schwochow, *November Child*, as well as the Grimme-Preis-awarded documentary *Sonbol*. Beginning in 2008, Laube was, as producer, managing the Ludwigsburg office for UFA. Here he produced *The Day I Was Not Born* by Florian Cossen, which garnered two awards at the Montreal Film Festival and two German Film Awards, as well as *Die Unsichtbare* by Christian Schwochow's, which was awarded a Lola at the German Film Awards 2012 and was twice decorated at the Karlovy Vary International Festival. In 2013, Laube produced *Stations of the Cross* by Dietrich Brüggemann, which was awarded the Silver Bear for the best script at the 64th Berlinale. His theatrical fiction feature *We Are Young, We Are Strong* was shown at the Tribeca Film Festival and awarded a Lola at the German Film Awards. After seven years at UFA, Laube left to embark on a freelance career, once again with his production company sommerhaus filmproduktionen.

WILLIBALD WONNEBERGER, Editor

WILLIBALD WONNEBERGER was born in 1982 in Berlin, Germany. He graduated in editing studies from the prestigious Filmakademie Baden-Württemberg school in 2015. Among his previous works are *Into My Dreamland* by Seng Mai Kinraw and *Dwaal Net Rond* by Thorsten Schütte. *Eat That Question* marks his first international appearance.

EAT THAT QUESTION
FRANK ZAPPA IN HIS OWN WORDS

A film by Thorsten Schütte

Producer: Estelle Fialon

Co-producer: Jochen Laube

Editor: Willibald Wonneberger

Executive Producer: Thorsten Schütte

Associate Producers: Yaël Fogiel, Laetitia Gonzalez,
Nico Hofmann, Joachim Kosack, Markus Brunnemann

Line Producers: Claire Babany, Michael Jungfleisch

Archive Producer: Elizabeth Klinck

Sound Mixing : Armelle Mahé

Color Grading : Eric Salleron

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&
UFA FICTION

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ARTE France
SWR

with the support of
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in association with
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duration
90'

languages
English, French, Swedish, Czech
English subtitles