

Q: It's actually kinda nice for a change.

FZ: Yeah, I've haven't
been there for a while.

Q: Yeah, that was one thing
I was gonna ask you about.

You ever coming back?

FZ: Well, not likely. I'm
not touring anymore, so....

We still have fond memories
of that one building

at the fairgrounds that says, Swine.

(laughs)

Q: Yeah, so lets talk
about bootlegs for a while.

Have you seen a lot of
bootlegs of your stuff?

FZ: Somebody recently
sent me a book called

"The Guide to the Alternative
Recordings of Frank Zappa."

There were over 400 titles listed in it.

Q: Oh, man. 400?

FZ: That's right. In 25 years
I've made over 50 albums,

so like eight times as many
bootlegs as real albums. I don't
anybody else has been subjected

to that kind of bootleg scrutiny.

Q: And so I take it you're
looking at this and figuring

that other people are
making a lot of money

that you're kind of a cottage
industry for a lot of people.

FZ: Well, I would say that I probably

put a lot of other people's
kids through college.

The fact that they sent them to college.

Q: Other than the idea that obviously

they're making money off you,

are there other problems
that you have with bootlegs?

FZ: Well, if you spend a lot

of time producing an album and trying...

You know producing a real album,

try to get the sound right,

get the performance right

and slave over that,

and then somebody comes along

with a bootleg piece of shit
and seems to some people

it doesn't make any difference

whether you worked hard

on it or it's the result of
somebody with a cassette machine

in the back of the room.

Somebody's buying these things.

Q: Right.

FZ: So yeah, I have a problem with that.

Q: Well, obviously,
you're a lot more generous

than a lot more artists
in terms of putting out

a lot of product for people to buy,

but you don't see any reason
that you could you think

of yourself as a fan and
wanting more than the artist

put out to buy these bootlegs?

FZ: I can understand what
the fans motivation is,

but whether or not they
get satisfied at the point

where they spend the money for
the bootleg is the question,

because I think a lot of the bootlegs

are just ripping them off.

The sound quality is

so bad and some of them

have tried to make themselves
look like official recordings,

like releasing them on a ICA label

and putting sort of misleading
information on the packages

to make it look like I actually
had something to do with it.

Q: Why aren't you cleaning the sound up

on these bootlegs?

FZ: Well, we did to a certain extent,

most of the stuff was stolen
back from the vinyl source.

We spend quite a bit of time chopping out

the record clicks of the
digital editing system

and they've been EQ'd a little bit,

but the basic idea was
to steal it all back,

covers and all and sell it for less.

Q: So what do you think about the bands

like the Grateful Dead who
basically encouraged bootlegging.

FZ: Well, what they
encourage is self-taping.

Q: Right.

FZ: I don't know whether
they encourage somebody else

put their performance on
vinyl or on CD and sell it.

Q: No, I guess you're probably right.

FZ: See that's the difference.

I mean, they put up a
section in their concerts

where the other guy comes in
there with a cassette machine,

record here.

That's different than saying,

"Yeah, Mr. Entrepreneur out
there in the weeds some place,

make your own fake Grateful
Dead album and sell it

and collect the royalties."

That's another story altogether.

I don't think the Grateful
Dead wants you to do that.

Q: No, no, you're right.

Have you ever heard many
of the other bootlegs

besides these 10?

FZ: I haven't even listened to these 10.

Q: Okay.

FZ: And I didn't even
select them, they were done.

That was done by a guy
who works with Rhino

who was an expert on this kind of stuff.

Q: On to other things.
Tell me about Why Not Ink.

FZ: I haven't really been
doing too much Why Not

for the last year,

but I'm getting ready to make
another trip to Eastern Europe.

I've been invited by the mayor
of Budapest to come there

on the 30th of June, they're
having this big celebration

because it's the day last
Russian soldier leaves Hungary.

So at that point I hope to meet

a number of Hungarian businessmen
and government officials

and get some idea what kind
of things their interested

in doing and see if I can help out

by helping businessmen
find out who to talk to

and what's wanted or what's
needed at different points.

Q: Okay, so will you
be doing much business

or are you more of a link between business

and the people over there?

FZ: More of a switchboard
kind of a function.

Q: Uh-huh.

Why did you want to do this?

FZ: I think it needs to be done,

I think if you believe that
democracy is a good idea

and you want to see it
spring up all over the world

and if you think that free-market economy

is a good idea and you want to see

that spring up all over the world,

I think you have to do more
than just wave a flag at it.

Q: Yeah.

And you don't think that our
government would have taken

on such a duty?

FZ: Well, I think that our
government should have,

be built in to our foreign policies.

Fact is we've spend God
knows how many trillions

since the Cold War began
fighting communism, okay.

Q: Yes.

FZ: It collapses under its
own weight right before

your very eyes, what do we do?

You remember what Bush's response was

when the Berlin Wall came
down kinda like a ho hum?

Q: Mm-hm.

FZ: I mean, there's something
that smells bad here.

If what they've said all along

about the dangers of Communism

how evil it is, and how undesirable it is

and how people suffer under this system,

and when there's an opportunity to help

a country move in another direction

and the U.S. Government
doesn't step right in to help

make it work, I think that's a mistake,

and it belies all the other rhetoric

that we've been listening to
since the end of World War II.

Q: You have any theories
on why the government

has been slow, or not even
slow to act but inactive?

FZ: Well, I think there are a couple
different reasons. One because
the whole Cold War was a joke.

Two, the rhetoric never
really squared with reality

with what the United States Government

has been telling the U.S. population.

And another reason is I
don't know whether or not

we can really afford it.

Q: You, I would say, are probably, along

with The Dead and Todd
Rundgren, one of the artists

that are really revered and
loved deeply by their fans.
Do you think about that much?

FZ: Well, yeah, sure, especially
when you get wonderful letters.

Q: And what are people...

FZ: They're about
satisfaction that you've had

a positive influence on somebody's life.

Q: And in general what kind of influences

have you had on people,
have they told you?

FZ: Well, a lot of the letters that we get

have to do with the fact
just because I stood up

for what I believed in and
didn't turn into a commercial act

and just kept being myself,

it gave other people
courage to do the same thing

in their lives, and
that makes me feel good.

Q: Does it make you at all nervous

that people put so much faith in you?

FZ: No, it doesn't make me
nervous. I don't expect that
I'm ever gonna let them down.

Q: Okay.

FZ: I mean, I don't feel like,

"Oh, I'm trembling on the edge
of suddenly going commercial

and everybody will go
'oh he let us down.'"

I mean that ain't ever gonna happen.

Q: No, I didn't think that,

but it just seems like it's a
huge amount of responsibility

for somebody to take on.

FZ: Well, I didn't get
into it in order to take on

that responsibility. It's just something

that seemed to develop,

but no I do respect the position
that I've been placed in

and just to the imagination
or perception of the people

who like what I do.

I have no intention or
desire to let them down,

I hope to always be able
to continue to stand up

for what I believe in and keep doing it.

Q: In the past, well, I
guess it's about 30 years now

that you've been doing this almost,

you've gone from...

FZ: Only 25.

Q: Oh, okay, 25 years.

You've gone from being the

you know outlaw-ish in a way

to a sort of respectable
for lack of a better word.

I mean, between being on Johnny Carson
and testifying before Congress.

What does that say?

FZ: Well, first of all

I think your evaluation is not correct.

Q: Okay.

FZ: Because I doubt
whether I'm respectable.

But there's certain people who respect me
and there's a difference there.

I'll say that mainstream press does not
find me respectable at all and
will do everything they can
to make sure that I never become that way.

One of the reasons why
it's difficult for me
to trust anything that I
read in the press because

I think I am respectable
and always have been.

Q: I'm a member of the
mainstream press, I suppose,

and I find you respectable,
but then again I didn't find you,
you know all that
outlandish when other people
were freaking out over
what you were doing.

FZ: Yeah, but your attitude
may be somewhat different

than the guy who owns the
newspaper you work for.

Q: Yeah.
(laughs)

FZ: That's the point.

It's made from the top down,
not from the street up.

What's really happened in this country

never really gets reported

because of the filtration system

and all it takes is one phone
call from one of the big guys

to another one of the big guys

and certain important stories disappear

and other stories of no importance
become major world news.

I've spent the last well five or six years

being pretty deeply involved in that.

I went to Washington and testified and just got a whiff...

Q: Weren't you treated, you know, weren't you given an

incredible amount of credence going before Congress

from the news media?

FZ: Not really, because here's what happened. I testified, well, I was on the stand maybe 40 minutes,

and I read my prepared statement for amount 10 minutes

and then asked some questions.

And out of all that the only thing

that CNN ran on the air was the...

when Slade Gorton, this apoplectic Republican

from Washington state who I guess

was the designated hit-man on the team.

See under the Senate rules you can't speak unless spoken to

and unless the guy asked you a question

you can't open your mouth,

so when it was his turn to ask a question,

instead of asking a question he made a speech

which basically was, "Mr.
Zappa, you don't anything

about the First Amendment."

And that's all he said
and that's all CNN ran.

Q: Oh.

FZ: You see what I mean.

Q: Yeah. What about the TV Networks

and New York Times things like that.
Was the coverage more balanced?

FZ: I'm not sure that it was.

I'll tell you one place that
was really very unbalanced

was in Rolling Stone.

Because prior to the Senate
hearing, Rolling Stone

which is basically financed
by the record industry,

took a pro-PMRC stance.

I don't know whether you know that part

of recent American history.

Before the Senate hearings occurred,

they had an article
that was kinda pro PMRC

and the reason was that

the record companies

had always intended to
cave in on this because

they were trying to protect

a piece of legislation
called the Blind Tape Tax.

And so the editorial spin
as far as Rolling Stone went

when they first covered
the issue of record ratings

was basically on the side of the PMRC,

which was a very shocking thing to find

in a rock and roll publication
of any description.

So after the Senate hearings occurred,

I was getting short shrift in a reportage

of the Senate hearing and
the major positive puffery

in a piece was given to Danny Goldstein

who wasn't even there and...

Q: Who is that?

I don't know who that is.

FZ: He's a guy who at
that time was running

an outfit called Gold Mountain Records

and had made some
anti-censorship statements

and eventually became the head of the ACLU

in Southern California. He wasn't then.

But he was like a record industry guy.

Q: Oh, I don't know, that seems strange.

FZ: Well, all you gotta
do is go back and look

at the coverage and you'll see that

I'm not making this up.

Q: No, no.

FZ: The other thing that was very odd

about what Rolling Stone did with it,

in that second article,

the second major article,

which came out after the
Senate hearings they had like

kind of a Rolling Stone
editorial point of view

which was enclosed in a box
inserted into the article.

Basically what they had
in the box was gleaned

from my testimony with
no credit given to me

for the source of the stuff.

It was just a weird thing.

Q: Are you in a position where you

could call Rolling Stone and
find out why that happened?

FZ: I don't even care because you know

my basic speculation is that Rolling Stone

is an extension of the personality
of the guy who runs it.

Although I've never met this man

I don't think he likes
me very much based on

how they've covered me and
the way they've treated me

over the years.

Knowing that all publications live or die

by the revenue offered by the advertisers,

if your publication is
basically owing its existence

to major record manufacturers

I think that there has to be

a certain amount of input

into the editorial policy from those guys.

Q: All right.

On the other hand, one
other question in this vain

and that is when you
were on The Tonight Show,

I thought that you got a
pretty tremendous reception

from the audience. They
seem to be in support

of what you were saying.

FZ: Well, that's the discrepancy that

has always freaked, because
the way in which I'm treated

in so-called mainstream press is always

to regard me as a lunatic.

I'm the convenient lunatic
whenever they want to have

the whole of an example
of what you shouldn't be

as an American they'll often point to me.

But if I get in front of a,

let's say an audience like
a Johnny Carson audience,

which is not very avant
garde would you say.

Q: I would agree with that.

FZ: They know me and they like me

and they treat me like I'm
okay like I'm a human being,

and this is a,

this kind of reception is at
odds with the official line

that is decidedly maintained
by all mainstream press.

The only reason that I can
see that this continues

it's an editorial policy which is decided

for political reasons.

Q: Onto other things.

Any thoughts on turning 50?

FZ: Well, I've already turned 50.

Q: Yeah, I realize that,

but you know it just seems
to be kind of a threshold.

You turned 50, Bob Dylan turned 50

and I wonder if you go through any trauma.

FZ: I didn't.

Q: No, okay.

FZ: Didn't go through any
trauma when I turned 20,

turned 30 or turned 40, you
know I hope I get to turn 60.

Q: Yeah.

So not exactly a milestone in your life?

FZ: No.

Q: In over the 25 years,

you done anything that
you'd like to take back?

FZ: No, not really.

Q: Nothing in the lyrics
or anything you've said

or anything you've done, nothing?

FZ: Well, there's certain
things I might have said

in a different way you know.

But basically there it is.

Q: Can you give me an idea
of what that might be?

FZ: Well, I think I
probably would've handled

the song Jewish Princess
in a different way.

Not that I wouldn't have written it

but based on all the
uproar that came afterwards

I think I might've maybe made it stronger.

(laughs)

Q: Yeah that's another one of those

kind of crazy things that
blew up over really nothing.

FZ: Well, yes.

Very difficult mountain out of a molehill.

They demanded that I
apologize for doing it

and I told them no.

I guess there's not too many
Americans who will stand up

to an organization like that and say no,

and if you look at

the way politicians
cave in whenever the...

That law begets a hold of them,
they quake in their boots.

Q: Yeah, when Alan Dershowitz

was on the radio last night
he was saying somebody called,

I think it was on Larry King,
and somebody called and said,

"Would you think about running for

the Senate in Massachusetts?"

And he said,

"Politicians are not free
to say what they want,

I like to say what I want."

FZ: Well, I respect Alan Dershowitz.

I don't always like the
people that he represents,

but Alan Dershowitz is a Talmudic scholar,

that's what he was before
he became a lawyer.

I think that he's got a lot of depth

and his appreciation for the Constitution

is really quite fundamental.

I'm always interested
in what he has to say.

I think that he does say what's on
his mind. I don't always agree with
it, but this is a guy with a brain

and I'm glad that he gets a
chance to be on television,

because there are too few guys

with brains any place on television.

Q: Do you think you're intimidating?

FZ: To some people sure.

Q: I take it that, is that good?

FZ: No it's just a fact.

Q: Yeah.

I wondered if that works to your advantage
or your disadvantage.

FZ: Depends on the situation,

I mean I'm really not a one of these guys

who thinks about power lunch

or whether you have a psychological
advantage over somebody.

I don't deal in that world.

I mean, I do what I do,

I am what I am, if you like it fine,

if you don't that's fine too.

The people who are
usually intimidated by me

if they can ever get over
it they wind up liking me.

You see most people don't know me

that is also a fact, a statistical fact.

Q: Yeah, well.

FZ: What they do know
about me is a product

of what they really read
about me or what they've heard

about me or something,

very little of that
has to do with reality.

It's possible that any intimidating aspect

of my personality is a
figment of their imagination,

not something that I projected.

Q: I think you're right. You're
probably as misunderstood as anybody
because of selected things that
are said or written about you. I
remember I think it was Dave Barry

the columnist for the Miami
Herald read something about

your appearance before congress and said,

well, I think he said well in
general he agreed with what

you had to say, he said
you were also a guy

who once wrote a song about
having sex with a rutabaga.

FZ: That's not even accurate.

Q: Yeah, I think he was joking but I....

FZ: But you know, that
sounds like a good idea

for a song though.

Q: [Marc] Yeah.

(laughs)

In the book you said there
are several reasons why

my music has never really
been explained in the press,

for one thing people
don't care how it works

or why it works. I care,
so can you explain it?

FZ: Well, I think that
it's gonna rely on the book

that there's probably better explanation

and more detailed explanation in there

and rather than have me
answer it off the cuff

use the precise terminology
that's in the book,

that would be the best way to do it.

Q: You also say in the book,

"I'm not a virtuoso guitar player

and that you still have
to look at the neck

to see what you're playing."

Which comes as something of
a surprise at least to me,

because I always thought of you as one of

the more amazing guitar players.

FZ: Well, the thing that's
amazing about what I play

is that I manage to get away with it.

(laughs)

Q: Yeah, well that's...

FZ: A lot of wiggling
your fingers and hoping

that you get it right involved in there.

And I really am not a virtuoso,
but I can't read music

and I don't practice and
I can't play anything,

virtuosos can play anything. I can't.
I can only play what I imagine.

And there's something
interesting about what I play

it has more to do with what
I've imagined than my technique.

Q: So how does that work?

You hear it in your head
or you're thinking about

the sound that you'd like to create

and then you go about trying to create it?

FZ: Well, it's situational.

And it's also kind of ouija board like.

You know you have to have
a optimum environment

in order to play a really good solo.

If the collective expression

you are at the mercy
of the rhythm section.

If they are sensitive and in
tune with what you're doing

and have the desire to make
what you're doing sound good,

then you can produce good music. If
they're just scrambling through their
day, then no matter what you play it's
gonna come out half-assed. Because
it doesn't mesh with the rhythm.

Q: Okay, let me give you a song if I can.

If you could tell me how ... Black Napkins

is one that I'm real interested in.

How did that come about?

FZ: Black Napkins was a piece that I wrote

and that's a planned piece of music.

The solo itself is an improvisation,

but you know it's one of the first tunes

that I wrote for the guitar,
the guitar solo instrumental.

Q: That's one of those songs where

when I hear it you know
it just shakes you up,

because the playing is like nothing else.

I've never heard guitar played that way

and I guess I think it's really great,

but I also...

FZ: I played that song every night

on that tour practically.

Q: Yeah.

FZ: You know some nights it was better

than the recording,
some nights it was not.

That was the smallest band that

I ever had on the road, I think.

Pretty compact, just bass,
drums, keyboard, sax and me.

So maybe during that tour
I had to put a little bit

more effort into what
I was playing because

there wasn't anything else.

Q: How we doing time-wise,

because I've got a bunch
more stuff I want to ask.

FZ: Well, you can go
on until somebody says,

"Frank you gotta get out of here."

I do have another appointment
that I have to go to,

but they haven't buzzed me yet.

Q: Okay, let me ask you
about some songs, projects

and lyrics and you can tell me whatever...

FZ: By the way, I'm glad

to hear that about Black Napkins.
I always liked that song too,
want an anecdote about that?

Q: Yeah, sure.

FZ: We were playing in New Jersey

and this is I guess in the late 70s.

We were in this small theater and a woman,

I guess she was in her 40s,
asked to come backstage

and talk with me.

So the guard let her in and
she was really very nice

and she showed me a picture of her son.

He had just died he wanted
to be buried in my T-shirt

and he wanted to have Black
Napkins played at his funeral.

Q: Wow!

FZ: And so she wanted to meet me.

That'll shake you up before
you go back on stage.

Q: Yeah. Did you accommodate her?

FZ: Well, yeah.

Q: I mean give her a T-shirt.
I mean basically is...

FZ: No, he had the T-shirt.

Q: Oh, he had the T-shirt, I see.

Oh okay.

FZ: She wanted to tell me that you know,
the impact that that
song had had on her son.

Okay, so listen I've
just been given a notice

and this is the last question.

Q: Oh, boy, okay. Well
then, my last question is,

is music better or worse
than when you started?

And I don't mean your music;
I mean music in general.

FZ: Well, if you're talking about
the known musical universe, in other words
what you can hear on the radio and what
they show you on MTV, it is way worse.

But that doesn't mean that

there aren't good things out
there that we don't know about.
It's just that the broadcasters

are not letting us find out about it.

Because it's hard for me to
believe that all the sudden

with the advent of MTV all good
songs ceased to be written,

all good bands ceased to be formed.

I just don't think that
nature works that way.

In some place there's good
musicians and good composers

and good tunes all over this
country and other countries,

we just don't know about
them because the people

who determine what you get to
see and hear have no taste.

Q: Let me squeeze one other one
if I can. You've been a great
facilitator on a critical number

of amazing players that have been
in your bands over the years.

Are they people that you generally
find? Do you hold open auditions?
How do you get the people who

have come through your band?

FZ: Well, I'm not doing it anymore that's for sure.

Q: Yeah.

FZ: But yeah, we used to hold open auditions.

Q: Yeah, how did you ... Lowell George, how did he come to you?

FZ: Well, I knew him when he had a band called The Factory and I produced two tunes

for him in 1965 or 1966

and he was a musician

on the LA scene so I knew him before he got into the band.

Q: I interviewed him just before he died

and he said that he had come

to you at one point and said,

"I've written some songs,"

and you basically said to him,

"Great, you want to write your own songs,

start your own band."

Is that true?

Q: No, that's not true, actually.

I helped him get his
contract at Warner Brothers.

What kind of drugs he was using
at the end there you know,

I think that a lot of people
who are in that early band

took it as a positive career move

to say negative things about me

in whatever interviews
they can do, but I think

it could be researched and
discovered that Little Feat

wouldn't have had a
contract at Warner Brothers

if it hadn't been for
me helping him get it

and I knew that he wrote songs,

and everybody who writes
should have a chance to record

their own songs, why
should he do it as a member

of another band. He
had his own band before

he was in my band. Why
shouldn't he form another one

and go do his own thing?

Because at that time the

original Mothers Of Invention

had broken up. That was around '69,

so what was he gonna do?

Q: Yeah, so, anyway I
really appreciate your time

and I'm glad that,

I never thought that I'd
have a chance to talk to you

so I'm really glad that I did

and I hope I get a chance
another time because

there are a bunch more
things I wanted to ask you.

FZ: Okay, well the future lies ahead.

(Inaudible) said that.

Q: Okay. Thanks a lot,
Frank. Take care, bye-bye.