

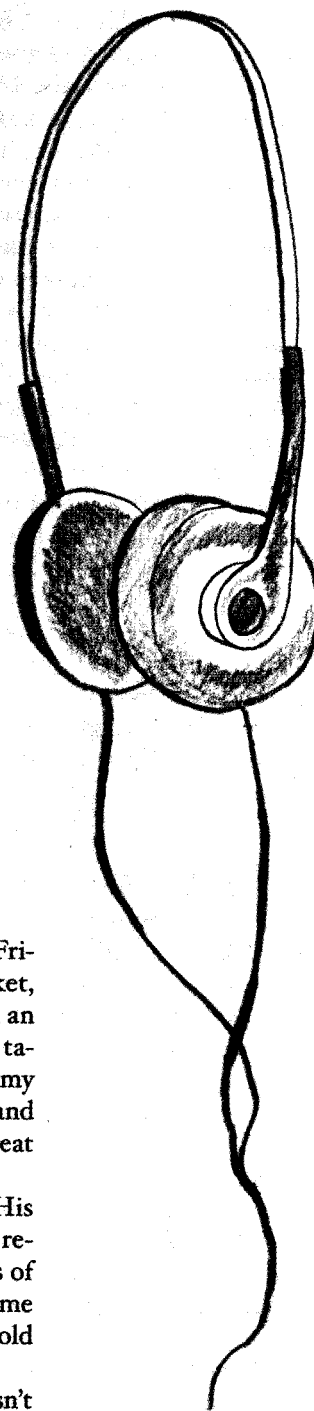
FRANK ZAPPA

BY REVA MANN

I always wished my father were a rock star. When he blessed me on Friday nights, I fantasized that his rabbinic gown was a sequined jacket, his velvet hexagonal hat a long, shaggy hairdo, and his prayer book an electric guitar. While my father was singing *zemirot* at the Sabbath table, Frank Zappa's "Zoot Allures" was thumping in my head. While my father cried out for the final redemption, for the third temple to be built and for the Messiah to come, I tapped my foot under the dining table to the beat of "Wind Up Working in a Gas Station."

I was in awe of Frank. He was my idol. He made me laugh out loud. His outrageous lyrics were my liberation; they lifted me out of the day-to-day reality of my teens where I was expected to live according to the strict rules of Jewish law and set an example for my father's congregation. Frank showed me the way to something anarchic and free, exactly what every sixteen-year-old longs for.

My love of Frank was strictly a private affair. Playing music out loud wasn't allowed at home, lest it disturb the constant stream of callers seeking my father's advice. I had to make do, lying quietly on my bed with my headphones on. My parents welcomed the temporary relief from my hormonally overactive teenage behavior. What they didn't realize was that I was listening to Frank's "Dinah Moe Humm" and, like Dinah, applying rotation to my sugar plum.



My bosom pal was Cindy, a Playboy bunny whose claim to fame was her success as a groupie. She came into contact with scads of celebrities on her shifts at the Mayfair Bunny Club, and she kept a list of them all in a little black book. One day I was given the honor of perusing her inventory — Roger Daltry, Robert Plant, Keith Richards — quite impressive! With a pang of jealousy, I noticed that at the top of the list was the name Frank Zappa.

“You wanna meet him?” she drawled, shaking her thick blonde hair over her bare shoulders.

As if there were any question. I went into my routine, throwing back my head, waving my hands in the air, and belting out the lyrics to “Jewish Princess,” my current favorite from Frank’s repertoire. “I want a hairy little Jewish princess, with a brand new nose, who knows where it goes.” “Great,” Cindy cooed. “We’ll go to his show at the Odeon. I’ve rented a bird costume for when Frank does his ‘Penguin in Bondage’ number.”

I’ll never forget that rainy February night I followed Cindy backstage. Once she showed a bouncer her pass, we were led into Frank’s dressing room. Frank was small and short, not the hunk I imagined. His face was drawn into a serious grimace, hands expertly strumming chords, warming up before the performance. I was concerned about how cool I really was and wondering if I had what it took to make a lasting impression. Apparently not. He barely looked up when we walked in and maybe grunted a hello. *Where are all the drugs?* I wondered. *What about Fillmore East and the Mothers of Invention? Where the hell was the party?*

Later, while Cindy was in the loo getting changed into her costume, I sat alone in the auditorium, fiddling with my earrings and desperately trying to look like I belonged (which was no easy task, considering the other fans were a heavy metal, heavily tattooed bunch). The smoky special effects onstage made me feel dizzy, and I was disappointed because Frank wasn’t playing any of my favorites. He’d moved away from the dental floss and slime of his *Over-Nite Sensation* album and was into a lengthy guitar solo that went on for far too long.

“Penguin in bondage!” Frank sang out loud — Cindy’s cue. She made her entrance, her

voluptuous body encased in white feathers and her long, slender Spandex legs strutting across the stage. Zappa shooed her away with a flick of his wrist. He must have preferred the way she’d looked in her bunny costume when he’d visited the club.

Back home later that night, I was relieved to find my father too busy practicing a cantorial hymn for Yom Kippur services to notice my low mood. As I lay on my bed and, for once, didn’t reach for my headphones, my father’s operatic voice rang out through the apartment. I’d heard him sing these notes countless times, but now I could really hear the melody. How had I not paid attention before? This music was beautiful beyond belief. Submitting to the sound of it, I felt as if I were levitating to a higher spiritual realm, exactly the realm my father had been celebrating all along, though, like always, I had had to find my own way there. &

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