



Bio information: **THE ED PALERMO BIG BAND**

Title: **OH NO! NOT JAZZ!!** (Cuneiform Rune 380/381) Format: 2xCD / DIGITAL

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FILE UNDER: JAZZ

Long revered and celebrated for his insistently inventive jazz arrangements of **Frank Zappa** compositions, New Jersey saxophonist/composer/arranger **Ed Palermo** returns with his fourth album featuring his big band playing his jaw-dropping, brain-busting, and wildly antic charts. *Oh No! Not Jazz!!*, is the band's third project for Cuneiform, but this time Palermo is offering his own jazz vision along side Zappa's music. It's a fascinating juxtaposition, with Palermo's talent-laden 18-piece orchestra digging into his originals, which stand up effectively next to Zappa's ingenious songbook.

With titles like "Let's Reproduce," "Nostalgia Revisited," and "Prelude To An Insult," Palermo's compositions seem to be muscling in on Zappa's wry, absurdist sensibility. But it's more that Zappa shaped his sense of humor (i.e. bent his young mind) than his compositional vision, as Palermo's charts swing fiercely and owe far more to **Thad Jones** and **Mel Lewis** than the **Mothers of Invention**.

"There is a lot of humor, and I probably got a lot of that from Zappa," Palermo notes, while also claiming his deep jazz roots. "When you hear me play saxophone my heroes are Phil Woods and Cannonball Adderley."

Palermo's big band has been dedicated to Zappa's music for more than two decades, and no ensemble has done more to focus attention on his tremendous body of work as a composer. Stocked with top-shelf New York players, the orchestra features incisive improvisers such as trombonist **Joe Fielder**, violinist **Katie Jacoby**, baritone saxophonist **Barbara Cifelli**, and the supremely versatile drummer **Ray Marchica**. Palermo's latest contribution to Zappaology opens with the epic "Inca Roads," featuring **Bruce McDaniel**'s searing guitar work and special guest **Napoleon Murphy Brock** on callisthenic vocals. Navigating the quickly shifting time signatures with its usual aplomb, the band sounds as sharp as ever.

Palermo gleaned "The Uncle Meat Variations" and "The Dog Breath Variations" from The Mothers of Invention's 1969 experimental masterwork *Uncle Meat*, gracefully rendering the cinematic breadth, vivid tonal palette, and unapologetic beauty of Zappa's vision. He's equally masterly when it comes to capturing Zappa's sheer swaggering joie de vivre, as on the rampaging arrangement of "Lumpy Gravy," which fades up in the midst of the action just as trumpeter **Ronnie Buttacavoli** launches into a growling, smearing, plunger mute solo. The first disc closes, appropriately enough, with "America Drinks And Goes Home," a tune that features the impressive vocals and hilarious commentary by **Mike James**, who sounds uncannily like **Frank Sinatra** crossed with **Mark Murphy**.

James briefly reappears on the opening track of the second disc to advise listeners "Hold on to your skirt there sweetheart, this ought to be one swinging affair." However you're attired, he speaks the truth, as Palermo's original compositions and arrangements swing with authority. The opener, "Moosh," moves through several distinct phases, culminating in an insouciant alto solo by Palermo and a sizzling violin statement by Katie Jacoby. Despite its pugnacious title, "Prelude to An Insult" sounds more jaunty than peeved, with the dark rumbling tone of Barbara Cifelli's bari providing a lovely contrast to Palermo's liquid alto.

John Palermo's elegant, folksy mandolin sounds decidedly unthreatening on the brief "Prelude to a Catastrophe," which ushers in the jittery, anxiously swelling "A Catastrophe (Is Just Around the Corner)," and **Ben Kono**'s superbly inquisitive tenor solo. Palermo is at his most inventive on "Let's Reproduce," a wily tune that oozes suggestively rather than bumping and grinding. He shows off his sensitive side with the lithe melody "Nostalgia Revisited," a lovely piece that avoids sentimentality. The longest Palermo original, "The Insult," feels like a forgotten page from the Mingus songbook, with all the roiling emotion, lush romanticism and surfeit of musical ideas one would expect.

While Zappa doesn't cast much of a shadow over Palermo's writing, his influence is unmistakable on the antic "Why Is the Doctor Barking?" a tune that begs for a Warner Bros. cartoon, and that features some space age keyboard work by **Ted Kooshian**. The album closes with an extended goodbye "Good Night, Everybody! God Loves Ya!," starting with another hilarious turn by the put-upon vocalist Mike James, who tries to get a word in edgewise amidst the horn solos. A brief Ellingtonian take on the **Beatles**' "She's So Heavy" closes out the session (or does it?).

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Palermo's passion for Frank Zappa music predates his interest in jazz. Indeed, he credits Zappa with opening his mind up to the harmonic vistas of **John Coltrane**. Born in Ocean City, New Jersey on June 14, 1954, Palermo grew up in the cultural orbit of Philadelphia, which was about an hour drive away. He started playing clarinet in elementary school, and soon turned to the alto saxophone. He also took up the guitar, and followed his growing interest in Zappa straight to modern jazz.

"I was particularly interested in Zappa on a compositional level," Palermo says. "'King Kong' was one of my favorite songs from the 9th grade on and that helped me get into John Coltrane's modal period."

Not exactly obsessed with practicing, he caught the jazz bug while attending DePaul University, and took to the alto sax with renewed diligence inspired by **Edgar Winter, Woods and Adderley**. Before he graduated he was leading his own band and making a good living as a studio player recording commercial jingles. But like so many jazz musicians he answered New York's siren call, moving to Manhattan in 1977. After a year of playing jam sessions and scuffling Palermo landed a coveted gig with **Tito Puente**, a four-year stint that immersed him in Afro-Cuban music.

An encounter with trumpeter **Woody Shaw's** septet at the Village Vanguard in the late 1970s stoked his interest in writing and arranging for multiple horns, and by the end of the decade he had launched a nine-piece rehearsal band with five horns. Between **Don Sebesky's** well-regarded book *The Contemporary Arranger* and advice from **Dave Lalama** and **Tim Ouimette**. "I got a lot of my questions answered," Palermo says, and I'll love them forever. Then the real education was trial and error. I lived in a little apartment with no TV or furniture. All I had was a card table, and once a week I'd rehearse my nonet, then listen to the cassette of the rehearsal and make all the changes."

Palermo made his recording debut in 1982, an impressive session featuring heavyweights such as **David Sanborn**, Edgar Winter and **Randy Brecker**. As a consummate studio cat and sideman, he toured and recorded with an array of stars, including **Aretha Franklin, Eddie Palmieri, Celia Cruz, Lena Horne, Tony Bennett, Mel Tormé, Lou Rawls, Melba Moore, The Spinners** and many others. As an arranger, he's written charts for the **Tonight Show Band, Maurice Hines, Eddy Fischer, Melissa Walker**, and a concert by **James Brown** at the Hollywood Bowl.

Palermo had been leading his big band for more than a decade before the Zappa concept started coming together. Inspired by electric guitar master **Mike Keneally**, who performed with Zappa on some of his final concerts before his death in 1993, Palermo decided to arrange a program of 12 Zappa tunes. When the time came to debut the material at one of the band's regular gigs at the Bitter End in early 1994, a sold-out crowd greeted the band.

"The Internet was just becoming powerful, and word really got around," Palermo says. "We were used to paying small audiences, and the place was packed. There were people who had driven down from Canada, and up from West Virginia who didn't have a clue who I was, but they wanted to hear Zappa's music. It was an amazing night."

The Ed Palermo Big Band earned international attention with its 1997 debut *The Ed Palermo Big Band Plays Frank Zappa* on Astor Place Records. With Palermo's brilliant arrangements and soloists such as **Bob Mintzer, Chris Potter, Dave Samuels, Mike Stern**, and **Mike Keneally**, the album made an undisputable case for Zappa jazz concept.

He followed up in 2006 with *Take Your Clothes Off When You Dance*, the band's Cuneiform debut. Once again, the band received enviable reviews, with Paradoxone.uk declaring the album "Wonderful, breathtaking, fantastic, exhilarating, great sound, great production, great musicianship...I run out of superlatives."

With 2009's *Eddy Love Frank*, the project continued to bear luscious fruit. Exploring Palermo's ever evolving and expanding book of Zappa compositions, the band continues to play with verve and consummate musicianship, a testament to the music's stimulating allure. As JazzTimes noted, "Palermo's arrangements and these performances are precise, dedicated, raucous and incisive—just like Zappa himself."

At this point, the Palermo Big Band has honed some 300 Zappa arrangements, including six separate and distinct charts for "King Kong." With a steady cast of dedicated players, many of whom have been in the band for more than a decade, Palermo has created a singular institution that seems to effortlessly bridge the worlds of jazz, art rock and classical music. As *Oh No! Not Jazz!!* makes perfectly clear, there's no danger that the deep well of Zappa's music is going to run out of creative juice any time soon.

For more information on The Ed Palermo Big Band, see:
www.palermobigband.com - www.cuneiformrecords.com