

Jazz Profiles

Focused Profiles on Jazz and its Creators while also Featuring the Work of Guest Writers and Critics on the Subject of Jazz.

Saturday, May 11, 2019

Marco Pacassoni - Frank and Ruth

© -Steven Cerra, copyright protected; all rights reserved.



Although I've never met him because of the geographical distance between California and Fano [near Urbino], in the northeast Tuscan-Romagnolo Apennines region of Italy where he lives, percussionist, composer and teacher, Marco Pacassoni and I have become social networking friends.

It's a friendship that I value not only because of some obvious points - I'm Italian-American and he's Italian; I play drums as does he and other percussion instruments as well; our shared interest in Jazz - but because my "friendship" with Marco helps keep me in touch with what's going on in Jazz today.

Keeping current is a challenge for me; to be honest, I don't like much of what I hear that passes for Jazz today. It just doesn't speak to me. On the other hand, I don't want to isolate myself from contemporary Jazz while relegating myself solely to the music, which I do favor, as it existed in previous periods of its development.

Jazz has always been ecumenical and eclectic - it's a music open to influences from a wide variety of socio-cultural sources - so it's probably healthy for me to have associations with young musicians who hear and play the music differently and who help keep my ears moving in different directions.

But if that wasn't enough, there's another "connection" between Marco and me brought about by the concept of his most recent CD and that is, its theme

is based on the music of Frank Zappa.

In 1962, the actor Timothy Carey wrote directed and starred in ***The World's Greatest Sinner***, a horror movie. Frank Zappa wrote the film score and I played percussion on it.

Along with about 60 other musicians who all agreed to play the music for a flat fee and a boxed lunch as our way of helping Frank keep the costs down, it was recorded during the summer of 1961 in the newly appointed recording studio that was part of the Claremont Colleges. [Claremont is a city on the eastern edge of Los Angeles in the Pomona Valley, at the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains.]

At the time this film score was recorded, Frank Zappa was not the big Rock Star he would later become. To me, he was just another working musician who happened to have a gig that I played on.

And although I was aware of his later astronomical career rise - I especially liked the humor in Zappa's song and record titles - I didn't follow it closely because of the Rock 'n Rock orientation of the music.

Now, thanks to the MARCO PACASSONI GROUP - Marco Pacassoni: vibraphone and marimba Alberto Lombardi: electric, acoustic and classical guitars Enzo Bocciero: piano and keyboards Lorenzo De Angeli: bass Gregory Hutchinson: drums - I've had the opportunity to revisit some of Zappa's music through the Jazz-inflected ***Frank and Ruth***. Released on Esordisco, the CD is available via Amazon and other online retailers. You can also visit Marco at his [website](#).

Pierre Ruiz is the producer of ***Frank and Ruth*** and his notes to the recording will provide you with more information about its background and the musicians who created the music for it.



PRODUCER'S NOTES

"I cannot exactly remember when the idea of this album was born in my mind. What I am sure of is that I always wanted to complete such a project, which was to realize the dream of a vibraphone and marimba tribute to the music of my favorite musician composer, Frank Zappa.

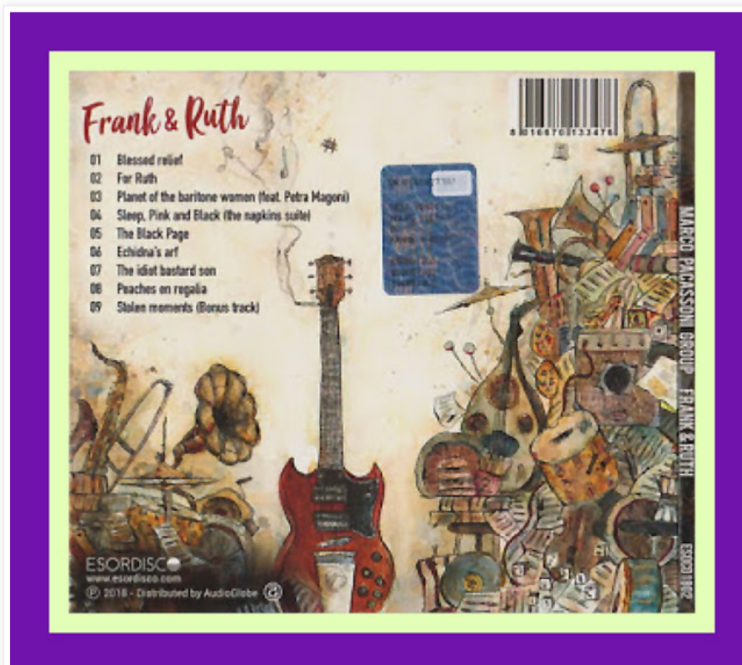
I met Marco Pacassoni about six years ago. I called him because we were looking for a vibraphonist for a tour with the artist Bungaro. We immediately developed a real friendship and when I told him about my idea and my fascination with [keyboardist] Ruth Underwood, explaining that for me the best Zappa albums were the ones on which she played, he admitted that he knew only a part of that music, but that he would love to learn more. So I began to feed him tunes to listen to, sharing with him an imaginary track list. When Marco decided to really go for it (about two years ago), his first statement was that it was impossible not to include *Peaches en Regalia* and *The Black Page* on the album. That made me very happy because those are two of my favorites, and there was no better way to acknowledge the technical challenges behind this adventure. Marco studied *Ionisation* by Edgard Varese when he was in Conservatorio Rossini of Pesaro, even before he graduated in percussion at the Berklee College of Music [Boston, MA]. It was strange for me that he could know more about Varese than about Zappa! I liked his idea of playing *The Black Page* alone at the marimba, just adding the beat, as if hearing the footsteps of an imaginary listener turning around. Who could it be?

My very first wish was to include *Pink Napkins* with Zappa's guitar solo played at the vibraphone. Marco worked on Steve Vai's score for guitar to create this incredible adaptation. Linking this to *Black Napkins* was the plan, as they are actually the same tune – but then Alberto Lombardi came on board. His unique guitar fingerstyle offered us the opportunity to add *Sleep Dirt* (which has often been also called *Sleep Napkins*). I thought it would be nice to call this arrangement *Sleep, Pink and Black (the Napkins Suite)*.

From the beginning, when we first spoke of possible musicians, it was very clear to Marco that he needed to invite Lorenzo De Angeli [classical, acoustic, electric guitars] and Enzo Bocciero [piano and keyboards] to this project. Both talented musicians, and members of his quartet, I agreed that they would perfectly fit. Marco and I both wanted a guitarist – and since is a very courageous decision for a tribute to Zappa – I was convinced that Alberto Lombardi, with whom I had worked on another album, was equally technically and artistically perfect for such a project.



I discovered Gregory Hutchinson when he was playing drums with Joshua Redman in 2000. Since then, he'd been for me one of my top-of-mind drummers. He is so incredibly inspired, rich with nuance and musicality. When I called him, I felt like I was excusing myself. "I have to tell you that this will be a tribute to Frank Zappa's music." His answer was akin to, "hey man, what's the problem?" I felt blessed that he accepted the project.



The first arrangements that Marco made was for *Blessed Relief*, and soon after, *Echidna's Arf*. Both are completely revisited, which was the entire purpose of our project; there is no copy and paste here. No doubt that if Zappa was still alive, he too would be permanently rearranging his music – he always did.

Marco also wanted to pay tribute to Ruth. That's why he wrote *For Ruth*. I love it, and hope one day she can listen to it.

The Zappa Songbook represents more than half of the music that he published. It would have been illogical not to include at least a couple of songs. Alberto is actually an accomplished singer, having recorded two albums. *The Idiot Bastard Son* is one of his favorites, and this selection was met with much enthusiasm by Marco because we'd had this particular tune on our shortlist.

I also had in mind to feature Petra Magoni on this album. She is one of my favorite Italian voices, and in my opinion, Petra's tone is perfect for Zappa music. She is not merely rock, pop, jazz or classic, but rather so versatile that she can perform all genres. It is for this reason that she is an inimitable talent. She and I met and talked about the meaning of the lyrics of *Planet of the Baritone Women*. Then I proposed this absolutely free improvisation with Marco's marimba in the middle of the tune, and the result has made me exquisitely happy. It all happened here.

We had three days to record the album. At the end of the second day, we were ahead of schedule, so we decided to record one more tune – *Stolen Moments* – the day after. We all adored the cover that Zappa did on *Broadway the Hard Way*. Well, that third and last day did not run as smoothly as we had hoped, and had little time left. However, we still recorded the tune, even with only minimal rehearsal of a few bars. The version you'll hear is take one, with no edit.

There are no words to thank Marco, Alberto, Enzo, Lorenzo, Greg and Petra. What they have given to the album is awesome.

Music is the best. Pierre Ruiz"

Baltimore, 19 April 2018