

= Joe 's Garage =

Joe 's Garage is a 1979 rock opera by Frank Zappa . Zappa self @-@ deprecatingly described the album as a " stupid little story about how the government is going to do away with music . " Originally released as two separate studio albums on Zappa Records , the project was later remastered and reissued as a triple album box set , Joe 's Garage , Acts I , II & III , in 1987 . The story is told by a character identified as the " Central Scrutinizer " narrating the story of Joe , an average adolescent male , who forms a garage rock band , has unsatisfying relationships with women , gives all of his money to a government assisted and insincere religion , explores sexual activities with appliances , and is imprisoned . After being released from prison into a dystopian society in which music itself has been criminalized , he lapses into insanity .

The album encompasses a large spectrum of musical styles , while its lyrics often feature satirical or humorous commentary on American society and politics . It addresses themes of individualism , free will , censorship , the music industry and human sexuality , while criticizing government and religion , and satirizing Catholicism and Scientology . Joe 's Garage is noted for its use of xenochrony , a recording technique that takes guitar solos from older live recordings and overdubs them onto new studio recordings . All of the guitar solos on the album are xenochronous except for " Crew Slut " and " Watermelon in Easter Hay " , a signature song that Zappa has described as the best song on the album , and according to his son Dweezil , the best guitar solo his father ever played .

The album initially received mixed to positive reviews , with critics praising its innovative and original music , but criticizing the scatological , sexual and profane nature of the lyrics . Since its original release , Joe 's Garage has been reappraised as one of Zappa 's best works . This is Official Release # 28 and # 29 .

= = Background = =

After being released from his contractual obligations with Warner Bros. Records , Frank Zappa formed Zappa Records , a label distributed at that time by Phonogram Inc .. He released the successful double album Sheik Yerbouti (1979 , recorded 8 / 1977 @-@ 2 / 1978) , and began working on a series of songs for a follow @-@ up album . The songs " Joe 's Garage " and " Catholic Girls " were recorded with the intention that Zappa would release them as a single . Throughout the development of Joe 's Garage , Zappa 's band recorded lengthy jams which Zappa later formed into the album . The album also continued the development of xenochrony , a technique Zappa also featured on One Size Fits All (1975) , in which aspects of older live recordings were utilized to create new compositions by overdubbing them onto studio recordings , or alternatively , selecting a previously recorded solo and allowing drummer Vinnie Colaiuta to improvise a new drum performance , interacting with the previously recorded piece .

Midway through recording the new album , Zappa decided that the songs connected coherently and wrote a story , changing the new album into a rock opera . Joe 's Garage was the final album Zappa recorded at a commercial studio . Zappa 's own studio , the Utility Muffin Research Kitchen , built as an addition to Zappa 's home , and completed in late 1979 , was used to record and mix all of his subsequent releases .

= = Style and influences = =

= = = Lyrics and story themes = = =

The lyrical themes of Joe 's Garage involve individualism , sexuality , the danger of large government , and " the foolishness of white males " , according to Kelly Fisher Lowe in The Words and Music of Frank Zappa . The album is narrated by a government employee identifying himself as The Central Scrutinizer , who delivers a cautionary tale about Joe , a typical adolescent male who

forms a band as the government prepares to criminalize music . The Central Scrutinizer explains that music leads to a " slippery slope " of drug use , disease , unusual sexual practices , prison , and eventually , insanity . According to Scott Schinder and Andy Schwartz , Zappa 's narrative of censorship reflected the censorship of music during the Iranian Revolution of 1979 , where rock music was made illegal .

The title track is noted as having an autobiographical aspect , as the character of Larry (as performed by Zappa himself) sings that the band plays the same song repeatedly because " it sounded good to me " . In real life , Zappa said he wrote and played music for himself , his sole intended audience . The song also takes lyrical inspiration from bands playing in bars like The Mothers of Invention once had , and shady record deals Zappa had experienced in the past . In " Joe 's Garage " , Joe finds that the music industry is " not everything it is cracked up to be " . The song refers to a number of music fads , including new wave , heavy metal , disco and glitter rock , and is critical of the music industry of the late 1970s .

" Catholic Girls " is critical of the Catholic Church , and satirizes " the hypocrisy of the myth of the good Catholic girl . " While Zappa was in favor of the sexual revolution , he regarded himself as a pioneer in publicly discussing honesty about sexual intercourse , stating

" American sexual attitudes are controlled as a necessary tool of business and government in order to perpetuate themselves . Unless people begin to see through that , to see past it to , what sex is really all about , they 're always going to have the same neurotic attitudes . It 's very neatly packaged . It all works hand @-@ in @-@ hand with the churches and political leaders at the point , where elections are coming up . "

This view inspired the lyrical content of " Crew Slut " , in which Mary , Joe 's girlfriend , falls into the groupie lifestyle , going on to participate in a wet T @-@ shirt contest in the following track , " Wet T @-@ Shirt Nite . "

" Why Does It Hurt When I Pee ? " was written in the summer of 1978 . Zappa 's road manager , Phil Kaufman , alleged , that the song was written after Kaufman had asked that very question ; within the context of the album 's storyline , it is sung by Joe after he receives a sexually transmitted disease from Lucille , " a girl , who works at the Jack in the Box " . The Central Scrutinizer continues to express the hypothesis that " girls , music , disease , heartbreak [...] all go together . " Halfway through the album 's libretto , Zappa expressed the belief , that governments believe , that people are inherently criminals , and continue to invent laws , which gives states the legal grounds to arrest people , leading to the fictional criminalization of music , which occurs towards the end of the album 's storyline .

" A Token of My Extreme " satirizes Scientology and L. Ron Hubbard , as well as new age beliefs and the sexual revolution . It describes an insincere religion , which co @-@ operates with a " malevolent totalitarian regime . " " Stick It Out " contains lyrical references to Zappa 's songs " What Kind Of Girl " , " Bwana Dik " , " Sofa No. 2 " , and " Dancin ' Fool " . " Dong Work For Yuda " was written as a tribute to Zappa 's bodyguard , John Smothers , and features Terry Bozzio imitating Smothers ' dialect and speech . " Keep It Greasy " is a lyrical tribute to anal sex . Following Joe 's imprisonment and release , the libretto describes a dystopian future , accompanied musically by long guitar solos , which Joe imagines in his head . The penultimate song , " Packard Goose " , criticizes rock journalism , and features a philosophical monologue delivered by the character Mary , who had been absent since the first act . In the epilogue song " A Little Green Rosetta , " Joe gives up music , returns to sanity , hocks his imaginary guitar and gets " a good job " at the Utility Muffin Research Kitchen Facility (a self @-@ reference to Zappa 's own personal studio) , and the Central Scrutinizer turns off the plastic megaphone that he has been whispering into , sings the last song on the album in his regular voice , and joins in a long musical number with most of the other people that worked with Zappa around 1979 . The lyrics also lampoon Steve Gadd 's status as one of the highest @-@ paid session drummers in popular music .

= = = Music and performance = = =

The music of Joe 's Garage encompassed a variety of styles , including blues , jazz , doo wop ,

lounge , orchestral , rock , pop and reggae . " Catholic Girls " makes musical reference to Zappa 's controversial song " Jewish Princess " , as a sitar plays the melody of the earlier song during the fadeout of " Catholic Girls " . " Crew Slut " is performed as a slow blues song , with slide guitar riffs and a harmonica solo . According to Kelly Fisher Lowe , the song is " more Rolling Stones or Aerosmith than it is Gatemouth Brown or Guitar Watson " . The extended three and a half minute , two @-@ part guitar solo in " Toad @-@ O @-@ Line " is taken from Zappa 's earlier song , " Inca Roads . "

" A Token Of My Extreme " originated as an instrumental song played during improvised conversations by saxophonist Napoleon Murphy Brock and George Duke on keyboards . It typically opened Zappa 's concerts in 1974 ; a recording of this version of the piece was released under the title " Tush Tush Tush (A Token of My Extreme) " on You Can 't Do That on Stage Anymore , Vol . 2 .

" Lucille Has Messed My Mind Up " first appeared on Jeff Simmons ' album of the same name , on which its writing is credited to " La Marr Bruister " , one of Zappa 's pseudonyms . The Joe 's Garage arrangement is radically different , and is played in a reggae style . " Stick It Out " originated as part of the Mothers of Invention 's " Sofa " routine in the early 1970s . The Joe 's Garage version is musically influenced by funk and disco , with its lyrics performed first in German , and then in English . " Sy Borg " derives from funk , reggae and R & B.

" Keep It Greasy " had been performed by Zappa since 1975 ; the Joe 's Garage album version features a guitar solo from a March 1979 live performance of the song " City of Tiny Lights " . Another March 1979 guitar solo from " City of Tiny Lights " is incorporated into the song " Outside Now " using the same recording technique . " Packard Goose " also uses xenochrony , with its guitar solo taken from a March 1979 performance of " Easy Meat " .

The album concludes with a long guitar instrumental , " Watermelon in Easter Hay " , the only guitar solo recorded for the album , in 9 / 4 time ; every other guitar solo on the album was xenochronous ? overdubbed from older live recordings . In their review of the album , Down Beat magazine criticized the song , but subsequent reviewers have championed the song as Zappa 's masterpiece . Lowe called it the " crowning achievement of the album " and " one of the most gorgeous pieces of music ever produced " . Zappa told Neil Slaven that he thought it was " the best song on the album " . The songs ' title is thought to have come from a saying used by Zappa while recording the album : " Playing a guitar solo with this band is like trying to grow watermelon in Easter hay " . After Zappa died , " Watermelon in Easter Hay " became known as one of his signature songs , and his son , Dweezil Zappa , later referred to it as " the best solo Zappa ever played " .

The song is followed by " A Little Green Rosetta " , a song that was originally intended to appear on Zappa 's shelved Läther album , but rerecorded with different lyrics for Joe 's Garage .

= = Release = =

Joe 's Garage was initially released in separate units , beginning with the single LP Act I in September 1979 . For the album artwork , Zappa was photographed in blackface , holding a mop . The gatefold sleeve of Act I was designed by John Williams , and featured a collage , which included a naked Maya , vague technical drawings , pyramids and fingers on the fret of a guitar . The lyric insert featured similar illustrations , which related to the content of the songs and storyline . The title track was released as a single , with " The Central Scrutinizer " as its B @-@ side . It did not chart .

Act I peaked at # 27 on the Billboard Pop Albums chart . It was followed by the double album Acts II & III in November . The gatefold of Acts II & III featured collages taken from a medical journal , while the cover for Acts II & III featured a makeup artist applying blackface makeup to Zappa 's face . Acts II & III peaked at # 53 on the Pop Albums chart .

Joe 's Garage was reissued in 1987 as a triple album , combining Acts I , II & III into a single box set , and as a double album on compact disc . The song " Wet T @-@ Shirt Nite " received two alternate titles , when the album was released on CD : the libretto referred to the song as " The Wet T @-@ Shirt Contest " , while the back cover referred to the song as " Fembot in a Wet T @-@ Shirt

" . In an interview , Zappa explained that the " fembot " was the name given to a female robot in an episode of the TV series The Six Million Dollar Man . The instrumental " Toad @-@ O Line " was renamed " On the Bus " . The Central Scrutinizer monologue at the end of " Lucille Has Messed My Mind Up " , which concludes the story 's first act , was indexed as its own track on the CD reissue , under the title " Scrutinizer Postlude " .

= = Reception and legacy = =

Joe 's Garage received mixed to positive reviews upon release , with criticisms aimed at its profane lyrical content , but has since been reappraised as a landmark album . AllMusic writer William Ruhlmann gave 3 out of 5 stars for the individual releases Act I and Acts II & III . Ruhlmann wrote of Act I , " although his concern with government censorship would see a later flowering in his battles with the Parents Music Resource Center (PMRC) , here he wasn 't able to use it to fulfill a satisfying dramatic function . " Ruhlmann also felt that Acts II & III " seems so thin and thrown together , musically and dramatically " .

Don Shewey of Rolling Stone magazine wrote , " If the surface of this opera is cluttered with cheap gags and musical mishmash , its soul is located in profound existential sorrow . The guitar solos that Zappa plays in Joe 's imagination burn with a desolate , devastating beauty . Flaws and all , Joe 's Garage is Frank Zappa 's Apocalypse Now . " The collected Acts I , II & III release received 4 @.@ 5 out of 5 stars from Allmusic 's Steve Huey , who wrote " in spite of its flaws , Joe 's Garage has enough substance to make it one of Zappa 's most important ' 70s works and overall political statements , even if it 's not focused enough to rank with his earliest Mothers of Invention masterpieces . "

For his performance on Joe 's Garage , Vinnie Colaiuta was named " the most technically advanced drummer ever " by Modern Drummer , which ranked the album as one of the top 25 greatest drumming performances of all time . On September 26 , 2008 , Joe 's Garage was staged by the Open Fist Theatre Company in Los Angeles , in a production authorized by the Zappa Family Trust .

= = Track listing = =

All songs written and composed by Frank Zappa .

= = Personnel = =

= = = The Musicians = = =

Frank Zappa ? lead guitar , vocals
Warren Cuccurullo ? rhythm guitar , vocals
Denny Walley ? slide guitar , vocals
Ike Willis ? lead vocals
Peter Wolf ? keyboards
Tommy Mars ? keyboards
Arthur Barrow ? bass , guitar (on " Joe 's Garage ") , vocals
Patrick O 'Hearn ? bass on " Outside Now " and " He Used to Cut the Grass "
Ed Mann ? percussion , vocals
Vinnie Colaiuta ? drums , combustible vapors , optometric abandon
Jeff (Jeff Hollie) ? tenor sax
Marginal Chagrin (Earle Dumler) ? baritone sax
Stumuk (Bill Nugent) ? bass sax
Dale Bozzio ? vocals
Al Malkin ? vocals

Craig Steward ? harmonica

= = = The Cast = = =

Frank Zappa ? Central Scrutinizer , Larry , L. Ron Hoover , Father Riley & Buddy Jones

Ike Willis ? Joe

Dale Bozzio ? Mary

Denny Walley ? Mrs. Borg

Al Malkin ? Officer Butzis

Warren Cuccurullo & Ed Mann ? Sy Borg

Terry Bozzio ? Bald @-@ Headed John

The Utility Muffin Research Kitchen Chorus ? Al Malkin , Warren Cucurullo , Dale Bozzio , Geordie Hormel , Barbara Issak & most of the people who work at Village Records

= = = Production staff = = =

Ferenc Dobronyi ? Cover Design

Steve Alsberg ? Project Coordinator

Joe Chiccarelli ? Engineer , Mixing , Recording

Norman Seeff ? Photography , Cover Photo

John Williams ? Artwork

Steve Nye ? Remixing

Mick Glossop ? Remixing

Stan Ricker ? Mastering

Jack Hunt ? Mastering

Thomas Nordegg ? Assistant

Tom Cummings ? Assistant

= = Charts = =

Album - Billboard (North America)

Joe 's Garage Act I

Joe 's Garage Acts II & III