

## "Goodnight Austin, Texas, wherever you are"

Frank Zappa and Captain Beefheart record "Bongo Fury" live at the Armadillo in 1975

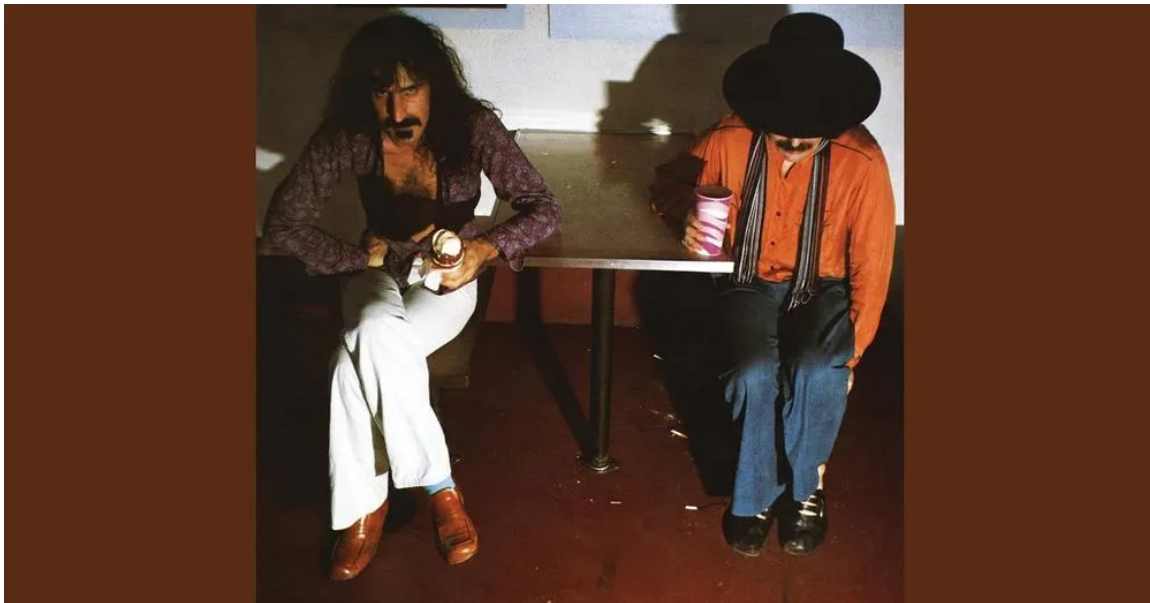
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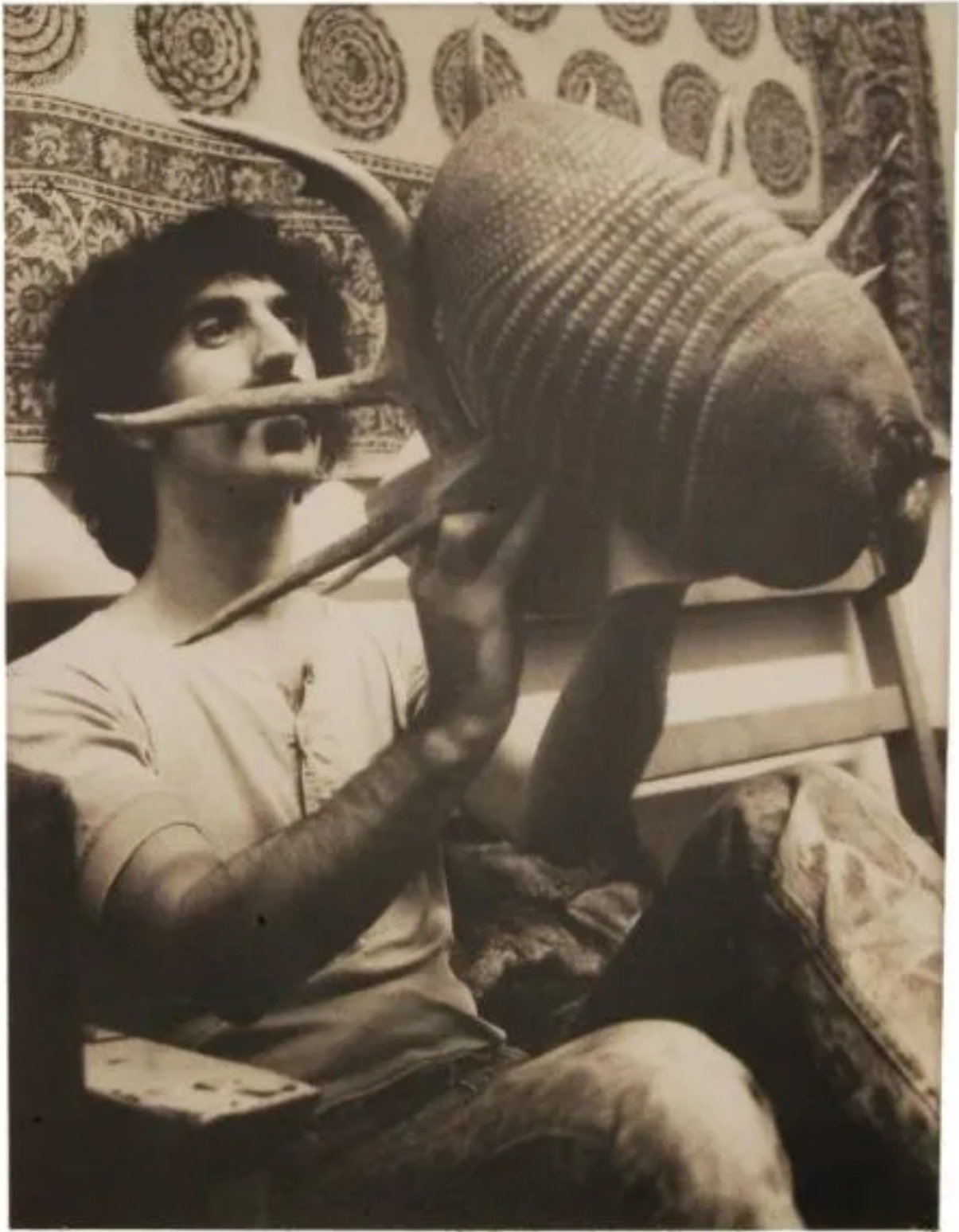
The most legendary of all Austin music venues was adopted by many acts during its run from 1970-1980: Freddie King, Willie Nelson, Commander Cody, Bruce Springsteen,

Talking Heads and Van Morrison could all claim the Armadillo as their special oasis out on the road. But there was no stronger allegiance to the ugly building at 525½ Barton Springs Road than with Frank Zappa, whose lyrics often satirized the counterculture. And yet this anti-pot smoker had true affinity for the ‘Dillo tribe. He even wrote a verse about the Guacamole Queen and “her aura” for his song “Inca Roads,” from *One Size Fits All* in 1975. “He played so often that we had to rotate the artists who did the posters and they all seemed to get a crack at Zappa,” said former Armadillo owner Eddie Wilson. The second time rock’s weirdo composer (and great guitarist) played the 1,500-capacity groove hangar in ’74, there was a bomb scare in the middle of a song. After the evacuated fans were returned to the hall an hour later, Zappa struck up the band at the exact point in the song where the concert had stopped.



Zappa and Beefheart at Sandy’s Frozen Custard. Cover of *Bongo Fury*.

But none of Zappa's shows at the 'Dillo stand out this many years later like the two nights in May 1975 that were recorded for *Bongo Fury*, the last Zappa album with the Mothers as his band's name. That album, released just five months after the Armadillo shows, was notable because it reunited Zappa and his former Antelope Valley High School (Lancaster, Cal.) classmate Don Van Vliet, better known as Captain Beefheart. The two avant-guardians of the hippie era had huge influences on each other growing up, and Zappa produced the Beefheart masterpiece *Trout Mask Replica* (1969), but the *Bongo Fury* tour was the only time Beefheart went on the road with Zappa. The album also marks the first appearance of Terry Bozzio, as Zappa's drummer, who later moved to Austin, as original Mothers drummer Jimmy Carl Black had done.



Zappa ponders Jim Franklin's armadillo hat. Photo by Burton Wilson.

“Zappa was a compulsive perfectionist,” recalls Eddie Wilson. “Our crew worked their asses off for him. I think that’s one of the main reasons he liked the Armadillo.” But Zappa was also able to adapt on the fly. For one show his contract stipulated that he’d have four hours to rehearse and a full hour soundcheck before the doors opened at 7 p.m. Except that Zappa’s equipment trucks didn’t arrive until 5:30 p.m. and he had only 15 minutes to soundcheck. “Zappa was really pissed off and I said, ‘I know the last thing in the world you want to do right now is meet anybody, but you’ve got a blind, deaf and crippled guy opening for you and I’ll take you over to meet him if you’d like.’” Zappa and Blind George McLain hit it off and Zappa took the Split Rail regular out on the road with him.



Zappa meets his opening act Blind George McLain.  
Photo by Burton Wilson.

Of the nine tracks on *Bongo Fury*, six were recorded at the Armadillo, including the Van Vliet poem/songs “Sam with the Showing Scalp Flat Top” (the title *Bongo Fury* comes from the lyrics) and “Man With the Woman Head.” Three tracks were recorded in the studio. The concert ends with Zappa saying “Goodnight Austin, Texas, wherever you are,” a catchphrase that speaks to the moveable spirit of those shows. Beefheart passed away in 2010 after a long battle with multiple sclerosis. Zappa died in 1993 from prostate cancer.