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Bio information: **ED PALERMO BIG BAND**

Title: **EDDY LOVES FRANK** (Cuneiform Rune 285)

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**FILE UNDER: JAZZ / BIG BAND JAZZ**

*"Wonderful, breathtaking, fantastic, exhilarating, great sound, great production, great musicianship...I run out of superlatives... It's an album not just for Frank Zappa fans, it's an album for everyone." – paradoxone.uk*

**"This is masterful arrangement: the ability to see beyond the idiom and find instead the fundamental building blocks that give a piece of music its essential character. ..."**

*Clearly, this is a labour of love for Palermo, born of his genuine admiration and passion for Zappa's music...*

*Zappa once famously said "Jazz isn't dead, it just smells funny." Ed Palermo is making one hell of a wonderful stink. [Rating: 8 out of 10]"*  
– Pop Matters

*"Like Zappa, and Duke Ellington before, Palermo's main instrument is his band. And with him at the helm it manages to capture perfectly the spirit of Zappa's music whilst stamping its own authority on the adventurous arrangements with its exuberant, joyous ensemble playing and in the quality of the solos." – All About Jazz*

As a jazz arranger, composer, bandleader and saxophonist, **Ed Palermo** works magic with **Frank Zappa's** music. Since 1994, he has devoted the bulk of the performance by his NY-based, 18-piece **Ed Palermo Big Band** to his arrangements of Zappa's compositions. These big-band jazz arrangements are no mere transcriptions; they are "revelations", as one critic best said. Palermo belongs to a tradition of visionary composers and arrangers who recognize hidden beauty and genius in an avant garde composer's radical work, and create genius arrangements that serve to reveal that beauty to the public eye. Palermo has arranged almost 200 Zappa tunes. Performed by his inspired and tremendously skilled band, Palermo's all-instrumental, jazz arrangements of Zappa's rock compositions bring Zappa's music wider recognition, beyond the rock world, and elevate rock music's status as 'serious' composition, proving that serious and satirical can indeed coexist.

Born in New Jersey, **Ed Palermo** first became interested in music as a child, taking clarinet lessons at age 10. He taught himself guitar, sax, piano and other instruments throughout high school, and was drawn to rock music, especially '60s rock bands known for their song craftsmanship: the **Beatles**, **Rolling Stones**, **Beach Boys**. But he recalls that his first experience of seeing **Frank Zappa** perform live, in 1969, "permanently altered my entire scope on music," imploding his conceptions of what rock – and music in general – could or should be.

The eclecticism of Zappa's music inspired the young Palermo to explore classical (**Dmitri Shostakovich**, **Sergei Prokofiev**) and jazz music (from **Edgar Winter's** jazzy, swinging sax, to the jazz saxophonists **Cannonball Adderly**, **Phil Woods** and **Charlie Parker**). In college at Chicago's DePaul University, where he majored in music performance, he shifted his focus to jazz and his instrument to saxophone. Palermo moved to New York in 1977 and immersed himself in performing, touring and/or recording with **Aretha Franklin**, **Tito Puente**, **Eddy Palmieri**, **Celia Cruz**, **Lena Horne**, **Tony Bennett**, **Mel Torme**, **Lou Rawls**, **Melba Moore**, **Debbie Gibson**, **The Spinners**, and others. He began composing music and also began arranging, an interest sparked by **Charles Tolliver's** album **Impact**. Palermo has written and/or arranged for the **Tonight Show**, **Maurice Hines**, **Eddy Fischer**, and **Dave Stryker**.

In 1979, during his 3-year stint in **Tito Puente's** band, Palermo put together his own big band: a 9-piece group that quickly expanded to 16. Palermo's group played regularly at **Seventh Avenue South** and other NYC clubs, attracting the attention and friendship of **Gil Evans**, who wrote liner notes for Palermo's first big-band recording, the self-titled **Ed Palermo** (**Vile Heifer Records**: 1982), which featured original compositions and guests (**David Sandborn**, **Randy Brecker**, **Edgar Winter**). Palermo's 2nd big band CD, called **Ping Pong**, came out 5 years later on **Pro Jazz/Pro Arte** and featured original compositions, as well as a **Wayne Shorter** piece, and covers of **The Police**, **The Beatles**, **Donald Fagan** and **Horace Silver**. While Zappa remained a strong influence on Palermo's own music, he did not arrange his first Zappa tune for big band until 1988.

Deeply affected by Zappa's death on Dec. 4, 1993, Palermo began arranging enough Zappa tunes for a concert in Zappa's memory. Held June 13, 1994 at NY's **Bitter End**, the concert thrilled Zappa fans yearning to hear live music and jazz fans bored with tradition. Another NY club, the **Bottom Line**, gave Palermo's Big Band a long-term residency, and from Aug. 19, 1994 to July 25, 2003 they played countless Zappa tunes, reinterpreted and arranged by Palermo. The now-17 piece Ed Palermo Big Band has played about 100 all-Zappa shows, no two of them duplicating sets. The band plays regularly in the NY/NJ area; the band moved to the **Iridium** after the **Bottom Line**, and in 2004 it played with **Project/Object** at **B.B. King's**. In demand internationally for Zappa, jazz, and new music festivals, the Ed Palermo Big Band has played at Zappa festivals in Germany (**Zappanale #13**, 2002; **Biennale Bonn** 2004) and Sweden (2003 **International Chamber Music Festival**), and performed as a headliner at the 2006 **Detroit Jazz Festival**. Besides these Big Band concerts, Palermo is in-demand as a player for Zappa tributes, and as a conductor and arranger. Palermo played with tribute band **Bogus Pomp** at St. Petersburg, FL's 1999 **A Tribute to Frank Zappa's Music**, and with the **Ed Palermo Jazz from Hell Band** and **Zappa Corner Band** at the 2003 Sweden festival. In addition, he has conducted the **U.S. Army Blues Band** numerous times, for concerts of his Zappa arrangements at military bases in the Washington DC area.

No two of Palermo's Big Band concerts are alike; Palermo ensures that every show he plays is a unique event, featuring new set lists, new arrangements of Zappa tunes interspersed with new arrangements of other covers, and often, surprise guests. Past guest artists have included **Napoleon Murphy Brock**, **Mike Kenneally**, **Gary Lucas** (ex-Captain Beefheart **Magic Band**, **Fast'N' Bulbous**), **David Tronzo**, **Ike Willis**, But

*(This press release is continued on the next page...)*

what separates the Ed Palermo Big Band most from tribute bands is the fact that Palermo specifically avoids duplicating Zappa tunes. Palermo asserts: "...it would be a waste of my time to try to replicate something that's been done before. ...My project has to be my personality or it would be false." As Palermo explained to Jordan Hoffman in an interview:

*"...my interpretations are inspired by my absolute love for FZ's melodies and chord changes, and my desire to put them in a framework that best showcases those elements. It was Frank's personality to arrange in a way that almost obscured the beauty of his melodies. That's what made Frank such an original. He never sentimentalized his work. When I was a kid, I also loved the music of **Todd Rundgren**, who always sentimentalized his work. So, I think what I do is try to bring out the pathos in Frank's music the way Todd did in his. ...Zappa obscured a lot of his gorgeous melodies with weird sound effects that sound like belches and flatulence. He loved the fact that one had to see beyond the "ugliness" to get to the beauty."*

Palermo maintains that his approach was influenced by **Todd Rundgren**, **Cannonball Adderley**, **Neil Young**, **Edgar Winter**, **Nelson Riddle**, **Charles Tolliver**, **Gene Ammons** and "heavy-duty" **Brian Wilson**, as well as such classical composers as **Prokofiev** and **Shostakovich**. Works of art in their own right, his arrangements reinterpret Zappa's tunes in an original and refreshing manner that makes Zappa's music accessible to a wider public, without degrading its complexity or genius. *The Washington Post* recognized this when it reviewed the **Ed Palermo Big Band's** 1<sup>st</sup> CD of Zappa's music, called ***Plays the Music of Frank Zappa*** (Astor Place: 1997). In the *Washington Post* review, critic Mike Joyce maintained that:

*"... 'Plays the Music of Frank Zappa' will come as a revelation to listeners who considered Frank Zappa nothing more than a rock-and-roll oddity – part maverick, part instigator, part farceur. But even fans familiar with the breadth and depth of his music and his even more wide-ranging musical interests are likely to view this album as an ear-opening experience. This is truly a work of imagination, after all. In arranging Zappa's tunes for big band, ...Ed Palermo has thrown new light on his legacy while retaining the composer's original melodic and harmonic designs.... Palermo...chose to leave out Zappa's lyrics...a wise decision. The music stands - and frequently swings - on its own."*

In May, 2006, Cuneiform Records released ***Take Your Clothes Off When You Dance***, the Ed Palermo Big Band's 2nd CD of "Frank Zappa's astonishingly beautiful and original music" [Palermo], and Palermo's 1st release on Cuneiform. The album received rave notice from the critics and the public, almost instantly becoming one of Cuneiform's best-selling releases. Critics in both the jazz and rock worlds praised it for both making Zappa's music more accessible and bringing it wider recognition outside the rock world, while simultaneously bringing big band jazz to new audiences. Summarizing its appeal with 4 stars, *Sea of Tranquility* noted: "*Take Your Clothes Off When You Dance* is a blast, whether you are a Frank Zappa fan or not." In the *All Music Guide*, rock critic **Richie Unterberger** noted:

*"the Ed Palermo Big Band achieve the difficult task of making Zappa's music more accessible,...and certainly give it more of a jazzy big-band swing, without selling out. These versions...have a listenable breeziness that could work as an entry to the music for listeners who might be put off by the more jagged ugliness that Zappa was often wont to insert into his own renditions."*

*All About Jazz* told its readers that:

*"Ed Palermo...has done both big band jazz and Zappa's music a huge service. If you didn't like big band jazz before, then the riotous, swinging celebration that is *Take Your Clothes Off*... may well be the record that converts you. If you didn't get Frank Zappa's music, then this record might make you consider his vast musical legacy in a whole new light."*

Palermo's interpretations of Zappa's work soon received further recognition when **Ned Wharton** of NPR's ***Weekend Edition*** invited the Ed Palermo Big Band into NPR's studio to tape a session with host **Andrea Seabrook**. Aired on *Weekend Edition Sunday* on October 8, 2006 to an audience of hundreds of thousands of NPR listeners, the feature, titled "Ed Palermo, Making New Arrangements for Zappa," included the Big Band performing 4 of Palermo's Zappa arrangements and a conversation with Palermo.

The Ed Palermo Big Band played a number of shows following its Cuneiform release, including dates at NYC's **Iridium** and, in 2006, at Baltimore's **Sonar**, and festival appearances at the **Detroit Jazz Festival** (2006), **The Clifford Brown Festival** in Wilmington, DE (2007), the **Syracuse Jazz Festival** (2007), NYC's **South Street Seaport** (Summer 2008), and a yearly August spot as part of the **Union County Arts Festival @ Echo Lake Park**, Mountainside, NJ. While most of these concerts featured Palermo's arrangements of Zappa, some focused instead on Palermo's big band jazz arrangements of blues and rock music (**Paul Butterfield Blues Band**, **Mike Bloomfield**).

Besides working with his own band, Palermo conducts and arranges for other bands. One of the most adventurous, inspired, and brilliantly humorous arrangers for jazz big band working in America today, Palermo arranged music by **James Brown**, the "**Godfather of Soul**", for **Christian McBride's Big Band**. The music was presented in a Sept. 6, 2006 concert at the Hollywood Bowl, which featured Brown on stage, singing with the band — only a few months before his death. Palermo conducts the **U.S. Army Blues** [also known as the **U.S. Army Blues Jazz Ensemble**, and part of the **U.S. Army Band**] in special concerts of his Zappa arrangements held annually — most recently in April 2009 — at a military base outside Washington DC.

Which brings us to the release of ***Eddy Loves Frank***, the third album to feature the music of Frank Zappa as arranged by Ed Palermo and performed by the Ed Palermo Big Band. Speaking about ***Eddy Loves Frank***, Ed says,

*"I'm prouder and happier than ever about this CD because I felt less constrained to follow Zappa's structural formats. It has never been my intention to replicate Zappa's recordings (what would be the point?) and with this new CD (my 3rd of Zappa music) I felt freer to manipulate the structures more than I ever have. I suppose it's a natural evolution."*

*Eddy Loves Frank* features Palermo's stunning, jazz-oriented arrangements of 7 Zappa tunes and a radical-yet-lovely (and very heartfelt) arrangement of "*America The Beautiful*," which is the only song on the CD to feature vocals. Like his other recordings of Zappa arrangements, the CD is primarily instrumental; Palermo believes that without lyrics, "the songs are more spacious and have more of a jazz feel...the humor of Frank's lyrics remain with the different instrumentations..." Despite the music's complexity, Palermo's incredibly skilled 17 piece band and three guest musicians play it with inspiration and apparent ease. A brilliantly original and entertaining big band jazz CD, ***Eddy Loves Frank*** shows that Zappa's music has become assimilated into the American songbook. It also reveals that Zappa, as an American rock composer, deserves to be recognized

with as much respect as America's other revered popular music composers, including jazz composers such as **Duke Ellington, Charles Mingus, Thelonius Monk, Oliver Nelson**, and popular song composers such as **George Gershwin** and **Cole Porter**.

*Eddy Loves Frank* is part of Cuneiform's "Contemporary Masters" series, featuring groups whose repertory includes the works of such groundbreaking composers/artists/bands as **Albert Ayler, Miles Davis, Captain Beefheart, John McLaughlin / Mahavishnu Orchestra**, and **Frank Zappa**. These groups, many of them jazz, serve as repertory ensembles that cover, arrange, interpret and/or create new music inspired by master composers who originally worked in rock, jazz, or jazz-rock/fusion contexts.

Besides releasing the two titles celebrating Zappa's music by the Ed Palermo Big Band, Cuneiform has released two CDs by **Fast 'N' Bulbous, Waxed Oop** (2009) and **Pork Chop Blue Around the Rind** (2005), which celebrate and explore **Captain Beefheart's** compositions as reinterpreted by jazz and rock musicians; *Healing Force: The Songs of Albert Ayler* (2007), by **Vinny Golia**, vocalist **Aurora Josephson, Henry Kaiser, Mike Keneally, Joe Morris, Damon Smith** and **Weasel Walter**, a CD that casts new light on (and has provoked a reassessment of) the songs that **Albert Ayler** wrote, with lyrics by **Mary Parks**, late in his life, **The Mahavishnu Project's Return to the Emerald Beyond** (2007), featuring the first-ever live performances of McLaughlin's *Visions of the Emerald Beyond*, endorsed by McLaughlin and performed by **Gregg Bendian's** 11 piece band; and 2 double-disc SACD/CDs – *Upriver* (2005) and *Sky Garden* (2004) – by **Yo Miles!**, a band focused on **Miles Davis' 1970s** work, led by **Henry Kaiser** and **Wadada Leo Smith**. None of these groups are tribute bands attempting to replicate the original material; all treat the Masters' original music in new, highly original and often enlightening ways. These bands have succeeded in raising public recognition of some little-considered great composers – and that great, enduring compositions exist not only in the classical world, but in such popular genres of jazz, rock, and various fusions thereof.

[press release / bio text by Joyce Nalewajk]

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The Ed Palermo Big Band consists of:

*Leader, arranger, alto sax:*

**Ed Palermo**

*Trumpets:*

**Ronnie Buttacavoli**

**John Hines**

**Steve Jankowski**

*Trombones:*

**Charles Gordon** (trombone)

**Joe Fiedler** (trombone)

**Matt Ingman** (bass trombone)

*Saxophones, Flutes, Clarinets:*

**Cliff Lyons** (alto sax, clarinet)

**Phil Chester** (alto & soprano sax, flute, piccolo)

**Ben Kono** (tenor sax, flute, oboe)

**Bill Straub** (tenor sax, clarinet)

**Barbara Cifelli**

(baritone sax, Eb mutant & bass clarinet)

*Rhythm Section:*

**Bob Quaranta** (acoustic piano)

**Ted Kooshian** (synth / Kurzweil)

**Bruce McDaniel** (guitar, vocals)

**Paul Adamy** (electric bass)

**Ray Marchica** (drums)

*For more information, see*

**www.palermobigband.com**

**Guests on Eddy Loves Frank:** **John Palermo** (mandolin, guitar), **Rob Paparozzi** (bass harmonica), **Veronica Martell** (vocals)

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*"If I may say one last thing here about the Zappa project: I truly hope to do this for a very long time because I believe that Frank's music is just as great as the music of Gershwin, Charles Ives, Samuel Barber, Cole Porter, Aaron Copland, and many other American composers. Because of his affiliation with the world of rock and roll, he might not be taken as seriously as those composers for some years to come. Regardless, I feel it's important to keep the legacy alive."*

*What Edgar Varese was to Frank Zappa, Frank Zappa is to me. "*

*– Ed Palermo in an interview with Jordan Hoffman, Leisuresuit.net, 3/15/99*

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*For more information, please see:*

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## PROMOTIONAL PHOTOS:



(credit: John Palermo)



(middle & right images credit: Bernard Ente)



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