

An Open Letter to My Brother

[Ahmet Zappa · 2016. május 5.](#)

Dweezil,

Strange to be writing this in public, but I don't know how else to respond.

After reading the article in The New York Times, I'm not sure how else to reach you. If we talk through our lawyers, it's not because I want that. It's because you've refused to talk any other way. I've been reaching out to you for months. I even tried to set up a family meeting so we could discuss all of our family issues, but you repeatedly said you couldn't fit it into your schedule, and that you weren't available to attend without your lawyers present.

Instead, you've given this incomplete, misleading story to the NYT and the media, and invited the whole world to take sides about our family business. Now, we're becoming "that family" – the spoiled brats arguing in public about who deserves what.

I understand you're hurting and angry. We all are. But the more we fight about this in the press, the worse it gets for all of us. We're not gaining anything by doing this in public.

If you're not willing to talk to me, though, I don't know what else to do. The New York Times has a story about a version of me that isn't based on facts or reality, and I don't know how else to set the record straight – or get you to talk to me – except to write this here, where people can form opinions by reading what I said for themselves.

If you want to share private facts and legal documents, we can do that too, because honestly, we both know what'll happen: it will give everyone a complete picture of what's happening. Not the distorted one that's out there now, which makes it look like this is about business crushing art, or me being a greedy asshole who wants to take away your rights.

I don't know how else to start, so I'll just respond to a few things I've read:

1. The article claims that you're no longer allowed to perform under the name Zappa Plays Zappa.

Not true, and we both know it. I have never asked you to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars to use the ZPZ name. You've only been told that you can't keep using the name without agreeing to a fee of \$1 per year, which you're fully aware of, but never mentioned in your interviews. I'll come back to that in a second. But just so everyone is clear:

Fact: You can absolutely keep touring under the name Zappa Plays Zappa.

You could do it tomorrow, and honestly, I hope you will. You're a fucking guitar god and in my opinion one of the best guitar players in the world. You do an amazing job playing our father's music with total integrity. Your tours help keep Frank's name alive, just like the work Gail and I have done through the ZFT.

This isn't about your tours, or art, or even about you. This is about the way the Trust was set up ages ago: if any of us use the "Zappa Plays Zappa" name for commercial purposes, a share

of the profit goes back to the ZFT, to cover the high costs involved in maintaining the business and releasing more of Frank's content for the fans. Period.

The point is: No one is stopping you from using the name, as long as you follow the exact same rules as the rest of us.

And before anyone starts thinking that we're trying to screw you, let's talk about fees again.

2. The article claims that if you perform without paying the ZFT an "exorbitant fee," you'll be charged up to \$150,000 for each song you play.

Again, not even close to true.

Honestly, this was the part that really hurt, because now a lot of Frank's fans think I'm some greedy dude who's just in this for the money. Can't blame them. It sounds like blackmail. Like I don't want you to be able to play Frank's music. If I read that article without knowing the rest of the facts, I'd think I was a greedy asshole too.

It's just not true.

Personally, I don't think the fee Gail asked for was exorbitant. If you want, we can share the exact terms with the public, instead of just asking them to take our word for it. But even if the price was too high, it doesn't matter anymore, because I didn't want it to be an issue for you. That's why I suggested a workaround. So, if you're going to share family business with the whole world, I wish you'd tell them the *whole* story:

Fact: The "exorbitant fee" you're now being asked to pay the ZFT, to keep using Frank's name and performing his songs, is \$1 per year.

That's not because the ZFT needs that money. I think we can live without an extra buck every year. It's because that token payment handles the legal requirement. Even though I thought the original fee was reasonable, I wanted to find a way to get us past this.

And again, it's not just you: it's all four of us. If I want to perform Frank's music, I'll pay \$1. So will Diva and Moon. That's just the deal, and I think it's a pretty reasonable solution.

One dollar, man. It doesn't seem like The New York Times knew that part.

And that's what hurts. If I was the greedy, deceitful asshole I'm reading about, I wouldn't be working this hard to find a way to make everyone happy.

3. The article suggests that this is all happening suddenly, that I'm changing the terms of your deal with the ZFT, and that you're being singled out.

Again, none of this is true.

First, this isn't sudden or new. That was always the deal Gail put in place – not just for you, but all of us. Gail's decision was always that any of us who want to use the name – you, me, Moon, Diva – can perform under that name.

But be honest: Frank Zappa's legacy isn't something we built, and "Zappa Plays Zappa" isn't a name that any one of us "owns" or has special claim to. We all got the same name at birth, and as the four beneficiaries of the ZFT, we all have an equal right to benefit from that name.

That's why Gail decided that any Zappa using the name "Zappa Plays Zappa" would pay a percentage of profits to the ZFT, where it could keep the family business going.

That rule doesn't just apply to you. It's for all four of us.

A lot of people don't seem to realize this, but when you pay that fee – not even up front, but with a share of the profits you made performing our dad's music, and selling merchandise with his picture and name – it's not like it goes into my pocket. Most of it goes to the ZFT, so we can afford to keep remastering and releasing more of Frank's music to the fans, and building the business.

I know the business side of Frank's legacy is less romantic than going out and touring with the music, but it's pretty damn important to me, and to the fans. It's also pretty damn expensive – and takes a ton of work. That's why Gail told us we have to sell the house: because she knew how much it would cost to maintain the catalog, work out deals with distributors, and get more content out to fans. Gail spent most of what we had just fighting to make sure we'd keep the rights to Frank's catalog.

And when the ZFT does have profits, we split them between the four of us. I'm getting enough heat on social media that I'm betting a lot of people don't realize that you also receive funds from the ZFT. Even when you do pay fees to use the Zappa name, and sell Zappa merchandise, you receive a portion of the profits from it.

I could say more, but it still feels weird to be saying all of this in public, especially when it feels like everyone is hoping for more drama. But, if I keep seeing inaccurate and misleading articles about what's happening, I don't know what you want me to do. Pretend it's true? Can't do that.

Again, if you won't talk to me about this, and want to work things out in public, we can. Privacy has always been important in our family, but that doesn't mean I have anything to hide. I just don't see how it helps anything to get the media and the public to take sides, especially when they don't have all the facts.

If you're willing to talk – and not just through a lawyer – I hope you'll call me.

Your Brother,
Ahmet