

A labour of love for Zappa tribute



WHEN Roddie Gilliard decided to put a band together for a one-off gig to celebrate the birthday of Frank Zappa, he could not have dreamed that his fun project would eventually take him to 10 countries, performing 500 gigs – even playing alongside members of his hero's original line-up.

Tomorrow will see the end of an exhausting four-nations, 37-gig tour at Liverpool's famous Cavern Club for the group, the Muffin Men.

Joining Roddie and the Muffin Men on stage in Mathew Street will be Jimmy Carl Black, original drummer and vocalist with the Mothers of Invention, Zappa's backing group. Earlier in the day, Jimmy will lay a brick in Mathew Street's wall of fame.

Playing Zappa music in a whirlwind tour of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales is a labour of love for Roddie. During the day he shows students how to carve a career in the music industry through his work at the Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts.

So the tour has allowed Roddie to engage in a spell of field work in a tour organised to mark the 13th anniversary of the Muffin Men.

Away from Lipa, Roddie is lost in the magic of the legendary Frank Zappa, whom he describes as one of the 20th century's great composers.

Roddie helped form the group in 1990 to play a one-off show. The Muffin Men are not a tribute band – instead they

By Neil Lawrence
Daily Post Correspondent

offer Zappa music with their own interpretations.

The tour has coincided with the release of the Muffin Men's 12th CD, *Live at the Cavern*, featuring a gig performed last year at the world-famous venue.

Attracting the renowned Jimmy Carl Black as a special tour guest has been a coup for the Muffin Men. He appeared on 15 of the original Zappa/Mothers albums. Next month, The Muffin Men will be appearing at the biggest Zappa festival in Europe, Zappanale, held in the old East Germany. In 1991 they were the first western band to play there.

"There will be many other ex Zappa players there, and no doubt we will end up playing numerous jam sessions with many of them," said Roddie.

Leading a double life as a tutor/mentor at Lipa and being out on the road comes easy to Roddie and he believes that students reap the benefit of his enthusiasm.

He said: "At Lipa we are helping young people who have a wide variety of tastes in music. It comes as a surprise to many when they learn that Frank Zappa was as comfortable with classical music as he was with rock.

"People may think of Zappa as a drug-taking rock icon. He was, in fact, highly opposed to drugs. He smoked heavily – and drank black coffee heavily."

Roddie added: "In 1970, he performed with the Los Angeles Philharmonic and a decade later with the London Symphony Orchestra. He was a contemporary classicist who was not afraid to work with wind machines and sirens."