



FRANK ZAPPA & ENSEMBLE MODERN

The Yellow Shark

BARKING, PLIPKIN R2 71600 • 1993, 72-02

Performance ★ ★ ★ ★

Sound Quality ★ ★ ★ ★

With an output as vast as his, it will be years before we even begin to appreciate the scope and influence of Frank Zappa's work. But *The Yellow Shark*—a collection of orchestral pieces performed by Ensemble Modern—is as good a place to begin as any.

The sheer variety of sources he could draw upon is staggering: Selections included here are derived from a 25-year-old rock album ("Uncle Meat"), the theme music for a documentary ("Outrage at Valdez"), a work commissioned by the Kronos Quartet ("None of the Above"), and a string quartet Zappa wrote when he graduated from high school (*A Pound for a Brown on the Bus*).

A few of the tracks self-consciously combine music with performance art to tweak conventionality ("Pentagon Afternoon") or provide pat social commentary ("Food Gathering in Post-Industrial America"). But the majority are fresh, exciting compositions performed with brio. "Dog Breath Variations/Uncle Meat" has a furious energy reminiscent of Stravinsky; "Ruth Is Sleeping" is a striking, two-piano duet; and "Outrage at Valdez" sounds like Copland in a fit of melancholia. All

first prize in the 1990 Concert Artists Guild New York Competition) stirring up a lot of ear-enticing sounds (along with drummer/percussionist Mo Roberts), and you decide this

mercial nature of some of the works, which include John Halle's *Softshoe* and Norman Yamada's difficult *Mundane Dissatisfactions*.

I didn't like everything here. The listen-

