

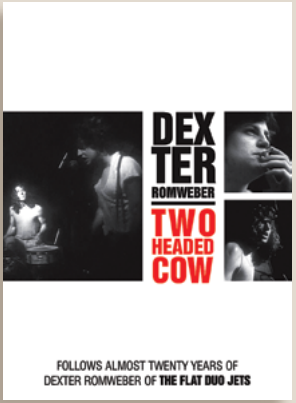


Dexter Romweber

A Duo Jet, Then & Now

This isn't just a great documentary about a musician; it's one of the best portraits of any artist in recent memory. Part of this, of course, is because the subject is such a fascinating character. As Jack White of the White Stripes says of Romweber's former band, the Flat Duo Jets, "They were showing people what was possible in a live performance and on record. It was really refreshing to see a band like that, where it was obvious

when you watched Dexter perform, he didn't care what people thought about him. He just wanted to express these songs that were kind of coming out of him. It was about energy and attitude and that soulfulness. There's nothing fake about it." Exene Cervenka of X calls the "primitive vibe" Romweber refers to as "hardcore Americana." Stylistically, the Duo Jets (for most of their run just Romweber on guitar and Chris "Crow" Smith



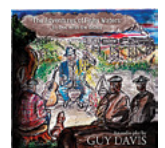
Dexter Romweber
Two-Headed Cow
MVD Visual

on drums) culled from rockabilly, surf, punk, hardcore country, and '50s rhythm and blues. But the main element was Romweber's unbridled energy. One of many revelations in the film is, to quote Romweber, "When I was younger, the dark side had free rein." Though the filmmakers didn't set out to employ the resultant format, the film alternates between grainy black-and-white footage shot of the Duo Jets on tour and color footage of Romweber, now a solo act, 17 years later – between an enthusiastic kid in his mid twenties with boyish good looks to a 40-ish, overweight chain-smoker whose cocktail of meds for "out of control thoughts," manic depression, and mood swings is as much of his pre-gig regimen as combing his hair. That's not the reality for every touring musician, but the film offers an unflinching glimpse into how unglamorous life on the road can be. Still, Romweber says, "The only thing that has not let me down through all of this time was my guitar. That was the only thing that was consistently there." That guitar is still his Masonite Silvertone amp-in-case model. His playing is typically primitive and raw in the best sense of those words, but a bonus-feature clip of him on BET shows him playing a great solo acoustic version of "Dark Eyes," the Russian folk song turned jazz standard. "I still think there's a way to do the old music that's new," he says hopefully. For some, the Flat Duo Jets and its leader will always be viewed as legends; for others, they were roots-rock pioneers who almost achieved mass appeal. Either way, Romweber says of his "semi-psychotic spiritual odyssey" that everything that happens – including playing a bar in New Orleans to 60 people – "is a gift." So is his music, and so is this fly-on-the-wall documentary. – **Dan Forte**



Paul Brown
The Funky Joint

Woodward Avenue Records
A lot of people paint the smooth jazz world with a broad brush that sometimes ignores the players who play with soul, intensity, and smartness. Paul Brown would be one such player. While his playing is firmly rooted in jazz, his R&B grit and amazing ability to write a memorable melody make his records, including *Funky Joint*, interesting. Elegant would be a good word to describe "As Clear As Day," with its minor-key soloing from Brown and guest saxophonist Boney James. Like most of the songs, the groove is a major part of the equation. Many times it's simple, like "Say It Like It Is"; other times it resides in that nebulous land between jazz, soul, and funk, as in "Backstage Pass" – a perfect example of Brown's soulful single notes and octaves, with a middle section that zips through a jazzy set of changes before heading back to the funk. Brown proves to have a growly, soulful voice on two vocal outings here: "I Get A Feeling," with its gospel-tinged funky and bluesy playing, and "Love Don't Come EZ", a radio-friendly soul tune. Melody is the key word for "From The Ground Up," a pop tune featuring Brown's octave soloing, Euge Groove's saxophone, and the drumming of Ricky Lawson. Brown's not exactly breaking any new ground here, but his Benson- and Carlton-influenced chops, both as a player and a writer, are worth a listen for their soulfulness. – **John Heidt**



Guy Davis
The Adventures Of Fishy Waters:
In Bed With The Blues

Smokeydokey Records
Actor and guitarist Guy Davis is all about the blues. His new two-CD set combines his talents to create an audio play, blending storytelling with music. The result is a musical odyssey of a make-believe bluesman packed with all the stellar deep blues fingerpicking and slide work of which Davis is so capable. Davis grew up in a middle-class New York suburb and jokes that the only cotton he's ever picked is his underwear up off the floor. But he was also raised on stories from his grandparents and

Photo: Carrie Waite.