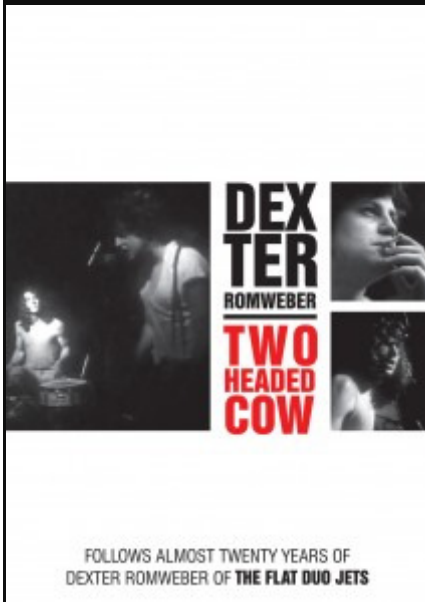




Posted on **February 6, 2012** by **Gary Pig Gold**



Very late one evening in the very late 1980s, my oldest pal Doug and I were dejectedly roaming the Canadian television airwaves when we suddenly chanced upon footage of these two guys playing music out on someone's porch.

Our collective jaws – to say nothing of the remote – immediately dropped.

It seems we'd stumbled upon a movie called *Athens, GA: Inside/Out*. The two guys playing the incredible music turned out to be Chris "Crow" Smith and, on starry Silvertone guitar and vocals, Dexter Romweber. When a graphic across the screen reading "Flat Duo Jets" eventually appeared both Doug and I realized, among several other things, that we had a New Favorite Band.

Now, at that particular time and place, the only context within we two could possibly place the Jets' exquisitely torn-down sound was Montreal's own Deja Voodoo (perhaps our *second* favorite band) and, of course, the almighty Cramps. Well, as it

turns out, 1990 actually brought the Flat Duo Jets all the way to our home and native Toronto to open for none other than Lux, Ivy and Co.! Naturally, Doug and I were there ...along with the one and only Martin E-Chord who, by the way, actually fronted Dexter dinner money for a post-set hot dog out on Yonge Street that momentous evening.

Dex still owes Martin \$5 (Canadian) for it, by the way, but nobody whomsoever should be counting at this point.

Shortly afterwards I found myself moved to New York City, tracked down a few actual FDJ cassettes of and for my very own, and even ran into Dexter one afternoon at some New Music Seminar showcase he and Crow would later be performing at. Soon the Duo would secure the dreaded Major Label Deal, appear on *Late Night with David Letterman*, and I certainly wasn't the only eager fan(atic) betting on these two to any minute forever banish the Smashing Pumpkins and hopefully even Green Day from *all* of our lives.

But then?

Nothing.

So, what in God's name happened to The Flat Duo Jets? Where did our heroes Crow and Dex go? And why did Celine Dion, and not them, sell over 20 million records worldwide during calendar year 1998?

The answers to these, and a multitude of other earthly injustices are vividly contained within the eighty-minute mélange of rock *and* roll which is Tony Gayton's *Dexter Romweber: Two Headed Cow*, newly available on DVD courtesy of the fine folk at MVD Visual.



FLAT DUO JETS



From its very opening Busch can-framed sequence of Dex pontificating upon JFK and the Three Stooges, clear through its concluding title-song sequence (which even hearing *and* seeing isn't quite believing), this "eighteen years in the making" as the disc box boasts – yes, director Gayton has been faithfully trailing his subject matters ever since shooting that historic *Inside/Out* footage – illustrates perhaps better than any film since *200 Motels* that, absolutely, touring can make you crazy.

For it seems that above-mentioned Cramps roadshow somewhat reluctantly launched the FD Jets upon several year of brutal, ultra-low-budget, terrestrial-only haul-assing which, as Dex recalls, set him off upon his own personal journey of "toying with madness.

"I can't say no to managers and I can't say no to the band and I'm sort of locked into this thing so, you know, I say ok, I'm gonna go do this tour." *Two Headed Cow's* cantankerously claustrophobic, monochrome, literally-in-their-faces footage perfectly captures Crow and Dex's nocturnal crawls across post-Reagan America, carrying guitars through all-night inconvenience stores, tumbling in and out of pizza-encrusted flea-pit motels, and in Dexter's case spending most every single semi-waking hour burning through a trough of back-seat literature that only serves to heighten the general mis-awareness of it all.

Errol Flynn, John Barrymore, Hermann Hesse, Knut Hamsun, Jerry Lee, Elvis, Rimbaud and eventually Baudelaire: such are the fabulous figures of infamy duly name-checked by Dex as his self-confessed "fucked-up role models that I'd come to be later. Real heavy-duty fuckers. Partiers and wreckage-makers. They became second, third, and fourth selves in me." Which leads one to think that there always was much, *much* more than just old Eddie Cochran and Coasters riffs spinning round this man's most remarkable mind, doesn't it?

Or, as he helpfully explains elsewhere, "Going out and hell-raising I think is really, and to a degree, a *positive* thing. Madness is merely the door open to the supernatural."

Nevertheless, despite mopping the floor with a d-u-m-b-struck Paul Shaffer on *Letterman*, being floated by none other than David Geffen for the Scott Litt/Chris Stamey-supervised *Lucky Eye*, and remaining just so damned *good* a band that, despite all attempts, subconscious or otherwise, to derail the star-making machinery, the Flat Duo Jets were poised to become, at the *very* least, the White Stripes and/or Black Keys they would later only spawn and – now this is putting it mildly – influence. Sure, rarely do the brave, crazed, pioneering innovators of any artistic signpost receive the credit, to say nothing of the cash, those who later water down and recast reap. But the 1999 dissolution of the (in Dex's perfect words) "relaxed brotherhood" between he and Crow not only left our New Favorite Band in splinters, but it turns out cast Dex "broken open," betrayed, and falling into a dark night "trek into some sort of semi-psychotic spiritual odyssey."

Most unexpectedly but quite perfectly, Gayton's film now becomes more colorful, yet more grainy, serving only to heighten the fitful play of *Two Headed Cow's* second half. We hear Dex label these since as "years of that bizarre desolation," but in his ol' pal Baudelaire's own words, perhaps this particular Angel of gaiety was simply tasting the grief, the shame and remorse and sobs and weary spite, to say nothing of the vague terrors of the fearful night that crush the heart up like a crumpled leaf.

Cut to today: Veteran expert on reversibility Exene Cervenka cites, and proudly salutes, the "extreme case of musicality" carried by Dexter Romweber, while far less poetically Neko Case refers to him as a "Winchester Mansion of sound or something."

Furthermore, I'm much much *more* than happy to report that the last time I caught the grand new Dex Romweber Duo (alongside his utterly brilliant drummer/sister Sara) in full action a couple of years ago, the man remains every single inch the towering, blistering, all-encroaching talent he ever was as a keen young Jet. Why, after the show he even offered to pay back Martin for that long-ago hot dog as well. Good guy.

So much so that he even just agreed to answer, for you and for me, each and every one of my

EIGHT QUESTIONS FOR DEXTER ROMWEBER

1. "*Munsters*" or "*Addams Family*": Which one's for you, and Why?

Addams Family. But I always loved the way Lily looked. But the Addams Family is just darker. Weirder.

2. Who in the world, living or dead, would you most like to play a game of "Twister" with?

Vanessa del Rio – 80s Latin porn star.

3. How many Sid King & The Five Strings records do you own?

None.

4. If you had been working the front gate at Graceland that night back in '76 when Jerry Lee Lewis showed up, shotgun in hand, to "put that damn Elvis outta his mis'ry," what would you have done?

Tell Jerry Lee to "Go for it!"

5. "Ginger" or "Mary-Ann": Which one's for you, and for How Long?

Ginger – because she's such a red headed bitch. For as long as it takes.

6. What single song, living or dead, do you most wish you'd written, and Why Didn't You?

"Nowhere" by Benny Joy. I'm good, but not *that* good.

7. Whose Silvertone 1448 would you most like to be reincarnated as?

Big John Taylor's. Hottest guitarist in the 50s South.

8. In 2000 words or less, Your Hopes, Aspirations and Goals, musical and otherwise, for your life and your country?

To practice as much as Jimmy Page. To have as much money as Led Zeppelin. To have perfect health. To cruise down a sunny highway, with my beautiful girlfriend. To sit with Johnny Cash in the afterlife – and talk about the best ways to not become a total wretched fuck up.

<http://mvdb2b.com/s/DexterRomweberTwoHeadedCow/MVD5259D>

<http://ruraltone.com/dex/>

www.GaryPigGold.com

<http://rockandrollreport.com/pigshit-dexter-romwebers-freedom-of-night/>