

Ween's New CD is Anything But 'Shinola'

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Music fans that can name five Ween songs deserve Ph.D.s in pop culture studies. The New Hope, Penn.-based duo (stage named Gene and Dean Ween) has been recording experimental, multi-genre, anarchist/satirical-themed tracks in a home studio since the mid-80s and has gained MTV and film exposure along the way.

In the early '90s, while at the height of their artistic salad days and signed to Elektra Records, the video for their single "Push th' Little Daisies" (from the album *Pure Guava*) was victimized by MTV slackers Beavis and Butthead.

The broad exposure led to soundtrack work (*The X-Files*, *Road Trip*, et al.) and to Spike Jonze, who directed their "Freedom of '76" video (from 1994's *Chocolate and Cheese*). Even *South Park* creators Matt Stone and Trey Parker have helmed a clip for them ("Even if You Don't" from 2000's *White Pepper*).

However, they never quite became the token mainstream wild card their meta-accolades foreshadowed.



hear. An attempt at poetry comes off fairly well on "I Fell in Love Today," where they sing about looking beyond their own noses when they found love: "I saw the break of dawn / I saw a child in play / I saw the spring in the winter time / I fell in love today."

The catchy and Weezer-esque "Gabrielle" is a typical ode to an ex-girlfriend but catchy enough to appeal to the masses, with a hooky chorus and skilled, Frampton-inspired electric guitar work.

The most disturbing track, "Israel," has an eerily contemporary effect. Set against a brooding saxophone, minor chords and a slowed

This seems like a shame after listening to *Shinola Vol. 1*, a collection of 12 rarities spanning Ween's career but previously unreleased on any of their 15 albums. The result is exotic candy (as shinola could only be) for elastic palettes.

The songs blend acoustic guitar with industrial beats and samples, punkish power chords with mellow-bluesy rhythms, contentious themes (chauvinism, drug use) with plain silliness. As demonstrated by their earlier releases, their instrumentation is to be taken more seriously than their subject matter.

The opening track, "Tastes Good on th' Bun," is tailor-made for your Party Shuffle, mid-bash, when the room is not yet spinning but is definitely in prep mode.

Those five words are repeated in varied fashions throughout the song, with the only lyrical diversion being, "yes it does." Distorted electric guitars, crashing cymbals and an overall dissonant rhythm are there to make you easily forget the lack of substance.

The music mellows when Gene and Dean have something to say and want you to listen, rather than just

rhythm, the duo sarcastically speaks of the country as "blessed" and "peaceful" in a tempered but venomous sermon.

Despite being a compilation of leftovers, *Shinola's* sequence is cohesive and the songs are undated — literally. There is no chronology in the CD insert and the tracks have likely been spruced up in the duo's Bucks County farmhouse studio to not sound aged. Therefore, only their biggest fans (and they do have a large cult following) would be able to place the songs in the correct Weenera order.

The compilation has been available on the Web since last summer, but is being released to retailers this week by MVD Audio, suggesting resurgence in popularity. A new album is apparently in the works, and more B-sides are expected.

Not everyone will appreciate Ween's style, which short-of-innovative but fascinating nonetheless. More will be offended by some of their lyrical themes. But it is important not to take them too seriously. After all, how seriously can you take a group that names its album *Shinola*?



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Ween (Dean and Jean) are a satirical, eclectic duo who have been releasing albums since the mid 1980s, working on a comeback with *Shinola*, a rarities set.