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Ween - The Friends EP (Chocodog)

While there's nothing new here for serious Ween fans, this five-song EP contains material recorded post 2007's "La Cucaracha." And, as usual, each song offers up another glimpse into the band's vast storehouse of musical ideas. Following an edgy remix of "Friends" (from "La Cucaracha") comes "I Got to Put the Hammer Down," a synth-driven rocker (and live staple) that manages to turn a simple riff and drum loop into a tough, clever anthem. "King Billy" offers another change-up, with Ween morphing into more than a convincing reggae band and, in the vein of Santana's overplayed "Smooth," "Light Me Up" effectively one-ups him, copping the guitarists' style and trumping his melody - but adding some sly humor. "Slow Down Boy" closes with a schmaltzy, pleading ballad that's straight out of '80s Brit pop. As if there was any doubt, this reaffirms that Ween is one of the America's slyest and most inventive groups. Not just for completists.

www.chocodogrecords.com

- Michael Lipton