

Moistboyz

BY JESSE JARNOW

“I WASN'T EVEN raging last night,” says Mickey Melchiondo, shaking himself awake and getting some coffee into his system. He's got a day off from work, doesn't have to be up early, and the weather had just turned so nice and fall-like that he slept through the morning and into the early afternoon. Most nights, he's not raging anymore. *Most.*

But now it's back to his other job, and the 43-year-old Melchiondo slips into amiable character as half of a legendary New Hope, Pennsylvania duo. He turns his brain on to rap articulately about how he and his hometown party buddy evolved from noise-obsessed drum-machine weirdos with fake names into a fully realized group, how they scored an improbable record contract with a hip label back in the alt-'90s and how—against all odds, through divorces and meltdowns

and what-have-yous—they're still a band. And how their new album is their most mature yet, and how great it is to be back together.

All of which is true. Ween, Mickey Melchiondo's best-known band, may've broken up, but that's not the only legendary New Hope duo that he shreds for.

“I would go over every day and night,” Melchiondo remembers of his time at the Brookridge Farm, the commune/crash pad depicted on the back cover of Ween's *Pure Guava*. In the early '90s, the house was home to a rotating squadron of hippies, bohos and metalheads, many of whom were members of the proto-grunge-scuzzers False Front, and another of whom was Melchiondo's Ween brother, Aaron Freeman. “Aaron and I would four-track, making demos for *Chocolate & Cheese*. And sometimes, Aaron wasn't around.” So Melchiondo fired up the drum machine with another one of his friends who lived over there.

A few years older, False

Front frontman Guy Heller was a legendary figure in a town of legendary figures. Once chased across the high school soccer field by police officers—and outrunning them—only to be caught by an assistant principal hidden behind a tree, Heller and Melchiondo met when the Ween guitarist was 14.

So it was that the two transformed into the Moistboyz—Mickey and Dickie Moist—releasing a debut EP in 1993.

“Guy is one of the more compelling lead singers there is out there,” Melchiondo says. “He's up there with Jim Morrison and Iggy. He hates these comparisons. He's what a million guys pretend to be. He's an outlaw. He lives an outlaw lifestyle. Rock and roll is a religion to him. It's very, very serious.”

Moistboyz shows have ended in disaster, triumph and often both. “You get an hour of sweating

and a lot of Guy jumping into the audience and crawling all over and us trashing our gear,” Melchiondo says, as the group prepares to tour for the first time in years. One 1994 gig at the Court Tavern in New Brunswick concluded with Heller howling at the next band as the Moists' new label boss—Beastie Boys' Mike D, co-owner of Grand Royal—hung his head in his hands.

“I hate politics,” Heller once said. “I like freedom, and freedom is like an anti-politics. You don't mess with it, it stays the same; it remains constant.”

Moistboyz V really is the band's most expansive album to date. Though there's typically crushing moist-metal like “One Cut at a Time” and “Medusa,” there's also moody, twang-tinged laments about getting older that sound—dare one utter it—a bit like Ween themselves. Though Heller lives in Texas now, probably the most accurate explanation is simply that it's hard to take the New Hope out of a New Hoper. There's still plenty of obscurity.

“I'm so proud of the fact that we have five albums out,” Mickey Moist says. “A lot of bands don't even have five albums out.”

Eventually, Melchiondo will get back to the solo project that he put aside when *Moistboyz V* took over, but for now, he's got to get back to work as a charter fishing boat captain. Recently, he taped a pilot for a new television series co-starring fellow fishing outsider Les Claypool. Like music, fishing went from an all-consuming passion to an occupation. But it's not too bad.

“It's not work every day,” he says. “I don't hate it; it's not a drag. But tomorrow, I have to be at the boat at five in the morning. Say it's pissy rain and it's 46 degrees and the seas are rough and we shouldn't go out, but we can, 'cause it's not too dangerous, and it's eight hours, and the fishing is slow...” he trails off. “When the fishing is great, that forgives everything. But that's not fishing.”

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MICKEY MELCHIONDO

Mickey Melchiondo and Guy Heller (l-r)

