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#### REVIEWS: WEEN - [CD & DVD]



**ARTIST:** Ween - [CD & DVD]

**DATE:** 12-12-08

**REVIEW BY:** Bill Adams

**ALBUM:** At Cat's Cradle, 1992

**LABEL:** Chocodog/MVDAudio

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Now Playing: 'Buckingham Green' from At Cat's Cradle, 1992



If all you've seen of Ween from a live performance standpoint is the fantastic DVD released in 2004 that presents an inspired set by the current line-up of Mickey Melchiondo (aka Dean Ween) on guitar, Aaron Freeman (aka Gene Ween) on vocals and guitar, drummer Claude Coleman (also known as very possibly the most gifted percussionist on Earth today), bassist Dave Dreiwitz and keyboardist Glenn McClelland, you've seen a pretty incredible show, but you don't know the whole story. Without going into a spectacular amount of detail, Ween did not come out readymade as the dynamic outfit that took the stage in Chicago early in the millennium – it took a lot of work to get to that point. In the embryonic years (from their first show in 1987 until the release of *Chocolate And Cheese* in 1994), Ween had a line-up of just Gene and Dean who, along with a Yamaha tape deck stocked with pre-recorded drums and bass parts that they'd play to fill out the mixes on stage, were determined to win converts to the band's banner by presenting a performance piece of playful and infectious perversion. In a word, particularly in the early years, Ween was weird; in 1992, when Ween took the stage at Cat's Cradle, they'd already been together long enough to be incredibly tight on stage (a state also necessitated by a virtue of a rhythm section supplied by playback) but that doesn't mean that the audience in attendance wasn't trying to figure out what they were looking at (a fact evidenced by tentative applause and bemused crowd noise between tracks) for the duration of this performance.

Listening to this show sixteen years after the fact reveals that there was far more at work in the set than anyone could have realized at the time. Playing songs that, in some cases, wouldn't be recorded or released for another five years ("Buckingham Green" would eventually appear on *The Mollusk* in 1997) what will make fans get all gooey in the pants here is the promise of hearing early, rough versions of classic Ween songs performed incredibly raw and unadorned, but still shining with a surprisingly well-produced and polished presentation.

As good natured as it is though, it's easy to understand why audiences might have been a little worried if they walked into the venue just as the band was getting started with "Big Jilm." There's something sinister lurking in the undercurrents of Freeman and Melchiondo's elasticized harmonies and walking-pace tempo that isn't quite scary or ominous so much as plainly disconcerting. Even so, listeners familiar with Ween's brand of mania still find themselves drawn to the lean arrangements; long-time fans might even say that it sounds a bit like a rehearsal.

As soon as that vibe takes hold and the swaggering "Never Squeal On Th' Pimp" kicks over, the hooks are in and anyone listening is up for the ride. There are no dramatic pauses or drawn-out stretches of audience interaction anywhere in the set (according to Melchiondo's memoirs in the liner notes, Ween sets circa '92 were an hour long at most – presumably because that's how much playtime their backing cassette held) and absolutely no jamming which makes for a decidedly clean and straightforward set, and whether that works for listeners depends entirely upon where they feel the magic lies in the band's music: is it in the sly and cartoony machinations that Ween fabricates in the studio or in the epic presentations they'd give live later with a full band? No matter what a listener's answer to that question might be, it's difficult for a long-time fan (there's little chance that the uninitiated in the crowd that night didn't have an eyebrow cocked and this isn't where those that have never listened to the band before should start either) to find fault with the versions of "Pork Roll For And Cheese" "The Goin' Gets Tough From The Getgo" "Buckingham

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