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Music on DVD: Ween, At Cat's Cradle, 1992

January 19, 2009 10:53 AM



Those crazy Ween brother bastards. *Are they the best band in America?* They certainly *used* to be, for at least a minute, and now you can hear all of the glory... and, heck, even see a bit of it, too, thanks to the release of double-disc early '90s indie music exemplar *Ween, At the Cat's Cradle, 1992*, including a DVD of various early '90s Ween concerts from back in the day; you know, when the boys were still 22 and running amok on stage with nothing more than spastic energy, an addiction to opium (or so they claim over and over again on these discs), and a drum machine that somehow cues up perfectly with their outrageous psychobilly music *and* antics. *Sheesh!*

The music is amazing. That goes without saying. Early Ween is a lot like early... well, *anything*. Let's face facts here, folks: before musicians get old and have families, mortgages, and expensive cars, they just play better. I forget who it was who said it, but my favorite musician quote (not to be confused with my *favorite musician's* quote) on this adage can be encapsulated by his answer to the inquiry of why his second album wasn't nearly as good as his first: "I spent 23 years on my first album, and about seven months on my second." So, there you go. We can't all be George Burns, can we? Most of us get far worse as we age.

Moving on to the 45-minute "documentary" montage of various live shows and recording sessions with Ween: "It's 1991, and it's Halloween, and... it's October 31st," says Gene Ween, the so-called "Year that Punk Broke." The rest of the DVD goes from there, and David Markey, eat your heart out. Whereas this early, "bygone era," lo-fi Ween music reminds us of similar primal day Flaming Lips, Butthole Surfers (with whom the Ween brothers originally played when they were first getting started), and even Beck, the DVD itself reminds one of some of these great, equally lo-fi concert compilations coming out all over the place now. Everything from Galaxie 500's *Don't Let Our Youth Go To Waste* to Nirvana's *Live! Tonight! Sold Out!* to Fugazi's *Instrument* (which helped to pave the way for these kinds of projects) gives the inquisitive fans something that simply might not be "appropriate" for ignorant professional types.

Watching these paeans to VHS, one feels as though he's watching something he was never supposed to see. It's almost as though you sense that you've in essence *stolen* something, a piece of memorabilia from the stage, a lock of the singer's greasy hair (or maybe a snip of Dean Ween's vampire-esque eyebrows?). What you view with this Ween is a scene in which this kind of music was not yet relegated to the brand of novelty act we see today or maybe it gives us a glimpse of when these bands were *still* only novelty acts. Oh, what I would have given to be at a Ween/Butthole Surfers show? Are you kidding? Was there enough Scotchguard in the world? But, now we have a chance to at least take a little time warp, back to a simpler era, back to the early '90s, in that magical and strange season after "Liquid Television" but before TRL, when kids could still afford the gas money needed to grab a few buddies, their dad's old guitar from the basement, and tool around the country playing clubs in weird towns where no one showed up except for the drunken weirdos themselves.

And, again, it's all there, all here on the Ween music DVD lovingly shipped along with this double-disc set. Incorporated into the fray are a few choice scenes of the brothers (in name only, duh) as they crack jokes in the studio and sing along to their engineer playing the Doobie Brothers. Yes, you get that great bootleg feeling of muted colors, lens flare, shaky camera work from all one side angle. You *are* a drunken 19-year-old shambling about the crowd and zooming in and out with your dad's new "video camcorder" that he told you never, ever to take out of the house, and you're just watching a show that will never happen again.

It's Dean and Gene up there, sweating and gyrating, spitting and spouting, making fun of the audience, and defending themselves from the onslaught of heckles and jeckles. "We are not fucked up," they tell us. "We are on the tip, and we are with you." We get their feedback wars, their teeth strumming, and their sticking their amp wires in places where they were never meant to go (at least not a human body).

In the end, what we're *really* granted with this beatific time capsule to a beatific era in American history, is a pixilated medley in which everything is perfectly off. It may not have all made sense, but it definitely made nonsense. It's projects such as this that allow us to capture and experience that singular millisecond in our cultural heritage in which things were kind of all right.

I'm glad we have so many of these sloppily made VHS-transferred-to-DVD compilations coming out now, looking like your family's Christmas morning 1988. It gets rid of all the glossy, prefabricated bullshit that just obfuscates the action and really becomes more about the filmmaker than the film subject. Projects such as *At the Cat's Cradle* are indeed a stolen piece of memorabilia from a very special time, and now it's mine... and yours, too.

by **Mathew Klickstein**



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