

DUANE DENISON of THE JESUS LIZARD & DENISON KIMBALL TRIO

Duane Denison is the guitar player for both the Jesus Lizard and The Denison Kimball Trio. I recommend anything either band has done. The Trio just released a soundtrack for the movie "Walls in the City". Duane used to play with the band Cargo Cult... Interview and layout by Frank FOE

FOE How does it feel to be a guitar god?

DD Um, it's all relative, I suppose. A few years ago I was doing the same thing. The last few years have been pretty good. It's nice I guess to have some recognition and it's nice to have what you do appreciated. As far as the "god" thing, I don't know about that! I meet a lot of people who seem to be into what I do with the Jesus Lizard, as well as the Trio, so I guess that's nice, and if it can turn some kids on, and inspire some along the way I guess that's nice too.

FOE I really enjoy watching you and listening to you play. It's hard sometimes to keep an eye on you with David Yow jumping overhead, but I do my best.

DD Well, it's an occupational hazard (playing with Yow).

FOE How do you feel being more like the center of attraction in Denison Kimball Trio as opposed to the Jesus Lizard?

DD There is a big difference with playing in the Denison Kimball Trio. I can play more atmospherically, more melodically and improvise more. It's also a lot quieter, and I can play sitting on a stool if I want. The sonic events occur across a more broad spacial plain! Basically more spread out with more quiet spaces! With the Jesus Lizard, because of the kind of music we do, the kind of audience we draw, and type of venues we play, I tend to think people would become impatient with that sort of thing.

FOE How did the Trio come about?

DD I had some time off for the first time in years. We had finished touring at the end of December 1993. And with the exception of some studio work and a few weekend gigs here and there, I had a good 5 or 6 months basically to myself. I found that I had time and money and I didn't have to worry about going out and getting a job or anything. So I just concentrated on music. I knew Jim (Kimball) was living in Chicago and he wasn't doing anything and I always liked the way he played and he always seemed like an intense musician. So I contacted him. At about the same time I was contacted by this Secora guy regarding the movie. So one thing led to another.

FOE What's the movie about?

DD It's kinda vague and there's no real unfolding plot to it. It's in three sections and it's regarding transient type figures, not transient as in homeless or bums, but in transit.

FOE Is the movie the kind of thing where you can only see it if you live in Chicago.

DD Actually it's gonna be released on video for a company called Provisional, so I imagine you'll be able to get it at stores.

FOE Go back to your guitar playing, how old were you when you first started playing guitar.

DD I think about 12 or so that was over 20 years ago! I played piano and had taken lessons for 3 years but piano always seemed kinda sissy to me. My older sister gotta guitar and

brought it into the house I just basically took it over. And one thing led to another!

FOE Sister still play guitar?

DD No.

FOE Who was one of the first guitar players who influenced you?

DD I would say one of the first would be BB King, for a lot of reasons, but mainly because I saw him on TV and I bought a live at Cook County Jail album and it really knocked me out. It was easy to learn when he played a solo. He didn't overwhelm you with a million different notes, just a few well placed, well played notes. I'd say after that it was Hendrix and Jimmy Page. Then the whole punk rock thing started and I also played a little classical guitar. I have a degree in music too. But when the punk rock and the new wave stuff started coming out I really liked the way guitars were used in Killing Joke and Gang of Four, or Birthday Party and Magazine. It wasn't really lead guitar and it wasn't really rhythm guitar, it was kinda both. The guitar was a textural instrument, and that kinda pushed me in another direction. In the Jesus Lizard a lot of times I'm either playing against or in contrary motion to what the bass is doing or I'm playing off of drums and I try to be basically just rhythmic. I think in Jesus Lizard, I'm just a glorified rhythm guitarist.

FOE What made you go get a degree in music or guitar?

DD I started out as a performance major in guitar. But I adjusted it to a bachelor of science. By the time I was down to my last year or two I really hated classical guitar and I didn't even want to touch it. I was playing in bands and I didn't want to do a recital and all that, so I just changed it to a bachelor of science to get out of there faster. I figured, if you got a degree it helps you. First off it makes you a well rounded musician. I also figured it would be easier to just get a job, you know when you get any kind of degree, you can get a job and when I got out of school I was in Southeastern Michigan, which was just economically blighted. So when I graduated, I hightailed it down to Austin and got a decent job right away.

FOE What kind of a job did you get with a guitar degree?

DD I was testing and aligning video monitors for a small company that did sub contract work for IBM.

FOE What's this stuff about Richard Marx?

DD Oh, I took a few lessons from a guy named Paul Warren. He played on the song "Papa Was a Rolling Stone" by the Temptations. I was quite young and just started playing guitar. He lived in Plymouth Michigan which is a suburb of Detroit and he just happened to be giving lessons at the local guitar shop for one summer, and I managed to get a few lessons in with him. That's how that whole connection happened. Later he went on to Richard Marx, I haven't spoken to him, since I was 13 or something. I'm sure he wouldn't remember me.

FOE Maybe you'll be mentioned in an interview, "Yeah I was in a band and I got taught by a guy from the Jesus Lizard.

DD Last winter, and the winter before, I gave a lot of lessons to a lot of guys who are in bands.

FOE When you mentioned that Jesus Lizard had about 5 months off, why did you guys take 5 months off in the first place?

DD Our drummer Mac, was having a family and his wife just had their 2nd child, in June. And we had burned ourselves out. We played our 500th show the other day. It was getting to the point when we didn't have time to work on new material. And we really wanted to record a new album. Then that live thing came out and we made some decent money on that. So we didn't have to tour. We've always made money from touring except maybe the first one. But if you know how to keep your overhead down you can make money off it. The album "Down", came out at the end of August, and we already have most of our new album written. So it was very productive to have that time off.

FOE Anybody else planning on having any families?

DD NO!

FOE Does that have any other kind of influence on the band, I guess you are going on tour to Japan in a couple of days..

DD We're going there. Then we come back and then go to Europe, then we come back and take a week off and do the west Coast and Canada.

FOE So he'll miss his two little kids then?

DD It means that we'll do things in smaller chunks of time, which is fine with me.

FOE I guess it gives you some assemblance of a life then, outside of the band.

DD Barely.

FOE The live disc, did you make any mistakes on it?

DD Sure I did! It was recorded on a 24 track so I was able to go back into the studio and fix it. The guitar I was using, because of temperature changes, was going out of tune and it was just excruciating for me to listen to, so I went back and fixed that. Though that's basically it. There's a couple of mistakes, mostly in the vocals. It's a pretty rough sounding thing. Most live albums by the time they get released, they're not live anymore. Live in the studio maybe. They go back and fix everything. We had no intention of doing that.

FOE Where was that gig done at?

DD CBGBs

FOE Who released it?

DD Collision, its a division of Warners.

FOE Why is the Trio in the name (Denison Kimball Trio)?

DD All the jazz groups call themselves this quintet or quartet or whatever and I didn't like the sound of duo. I liked the thought of it being misleading to people and just for fun too. The second album, the one that will be coming out, will actually be trios, where there will be third persons sitting in on various cuts. A fuller sounding, wider variety of sonic mayhem will result, and who knows, when we tour again we might actually be a three piece. I like the idea. Jim and I will always be the nucleus. There will always be revolving characters coming and going and we might even have 4 or 5 people but we'll still call it the Trio.

FOE Why did you originally start it as a duo? As far as that style of music that's the only disc I have with that kind of music.

Typically would you have more instruments than just guitar and drums?

DD Ya, but it was just so easy. It was Jim and I getting together at his house, quietly. Plus we liked the sparseness and at the same time we found out we could play a lot and it still sounded sparse and that was fine. The minute you start adding more people the logistics become heavier, you have to arrange rehearsals etc...

FOE What were your impressions of Cargo Cult?

DD Oh it was good at the time. It only lasted about 2 years. We were a pretty good live band. The album doesn't really reflect that.

FOE After I got it, I never listened to it again, and I got in to the Jesus Lizard and I was like, I can't believe this guy is the guitar player for both of these bands.

DD When you're with certain people you tend to make compromises with what everybody wants to do.

FOE What was your most memorable show you ever played and why?

DD We played in Reading (Not the Pennsylvania Reading) twice now, at the main stage in front of about 30,000 people. We've played some shows in Chicago that were pretty packed. We also played some shows that were so bad. In Edmonton, Canada they turned off the PA and threw bottles and ash trays at us because they liked the opening local metal band better than us. We haven't been back since.

FOE When's the next time you're going out on tour with the Trio?

DD Maybe in the spring. I can't do anything between now and then, we might play some local shows in the new year.

FOE That about wraps up my questions, Good luck on your tours and everything, not that you need good luck.

DD Actually Just last night, I went out to my car and right next to my car, on the street, just laying there was a big horse shoe! There's no horses in this gang infested neighborhood. People don't play horse shoes around here. I think thats a good luck sign.

FOE So you didn't make enough money off of the live album to move out of the crime infested city?

DD I could easily move out. We're not even here half the time so what's the point. Paying high rent somewhere....

