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BLIND MELON'S SHANNON HOON

JANUARY 31, 1994 $3.95 (CANADA $4.50)

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A WARM SLICE OF BLIND MELON

by Corey Levitan

"As I sit here in this misery, don't think I'll ever see the sun from here."
—"Change" from Blind Melon

Six of the 13 songs on Blind Melon's self-titled debut album refer to the sun. In "Time" the bright yellow globe soothes the body of a cloud gazer; in "Paper Scratcher" it's a round scoundrel to be screamed at. The references work subconsciously with Blind Melon's gentle strains to leave a warm image in listener's minds.

"I think we kind of retained that warm mood the south has with its music," says bassist Brad Smith, who hails from West Point, Mississippi (population 8,000). "In our eyes the good music was Lynyrd Skynyrd, the Allman Brothers and shit that had that warm feeling to it."

These were the songs that warmed a small rehearsal space in March 1990. The setting is L.A.'s tony Westwood district, paradoxically plastic environs for the inception of a band that will come to personify the grass roots resurgence in rock. Brad Smith and guitarist Thomas Rogers Stevens (the Thomas is silent) have thick and thinned it together since belonging to the same cub scout troupe back home. They've just parted with a female singer and the future is a disappointing shade of blank.

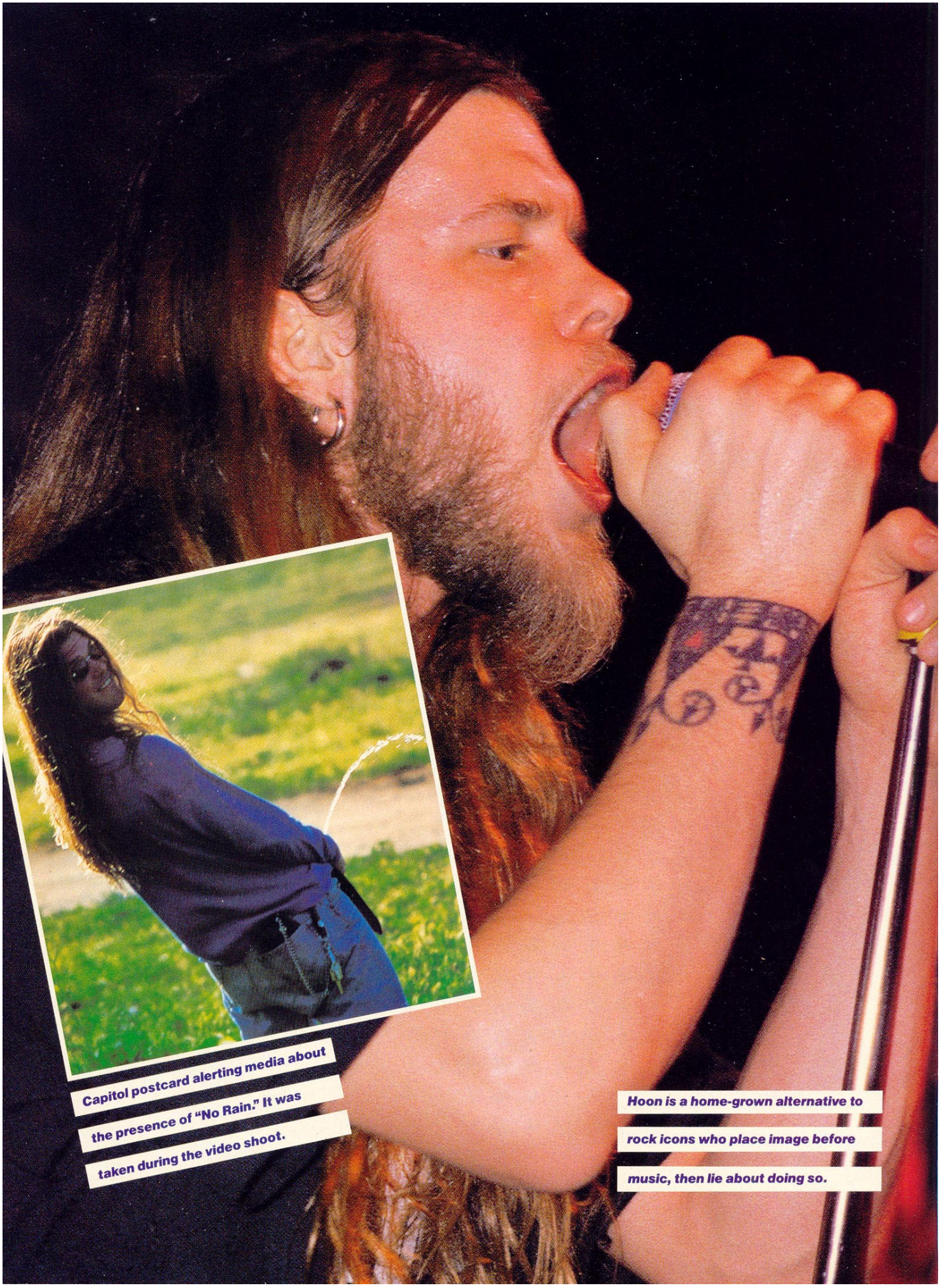
Enter Shannon Hoon—fresh from Lafayette, Indiana—who strides up to the La Grange Avenue practice hall at the invitation of mutual friends. Hoon, a former jock turned pub pugilist, was so hyperactive as a child his parents plopped his ass in karate class to avoid

JEFF TISMAN

Melon-choly lineup: Brad Smith, Glen Graham, Rogers Stevens, Shannon Hoon, Christopher Thorn.

SURVIVE

Melon-choly lineup: Brad Smith, Glen Graham, Rogers Stevens, Shannon Hoon, Christopher Thorn.



Capitol postcard alerting media about the presence of "No Rain." It was taken during the video shoot.

Hoon is a home-grown alternative to rock icons who place image before music, then lie about doing so.

treating him with drugs. Like Brad and Rogers, Shannon fled a small town that wouldn't accept him and, like Brad and Rogers, he still isn't fitting in. To make it as a musician in L.A., he's told, you have to be more hard rock. The space-case singer bonds faster than Krazy Glue to his future band mates; they begin writing together almost immediately.

Smith has a lead guitarist in mind. Several months earlier the bassist answered an ad in *Music Connection* magazine. Brad never landed with the group, Animal Farm, but kept in touch with the guy who auditioned him, Christopher Thorn. Thorn shares not only Smith's passion for folk music but —hailing from Dover, Pennsylvania— the rustic perspective of Smith's new band. Glen Graham, the final puzzle piece, arrives a week later. An early drummer had split and auditions failed to produce a respectable replacement. Rogers remembered the Kiss-crazed Graham from their days together on the high-school swim team. A band is born.

"When we got the record deal we told them how premature we felt it was."— Christopher Thorn

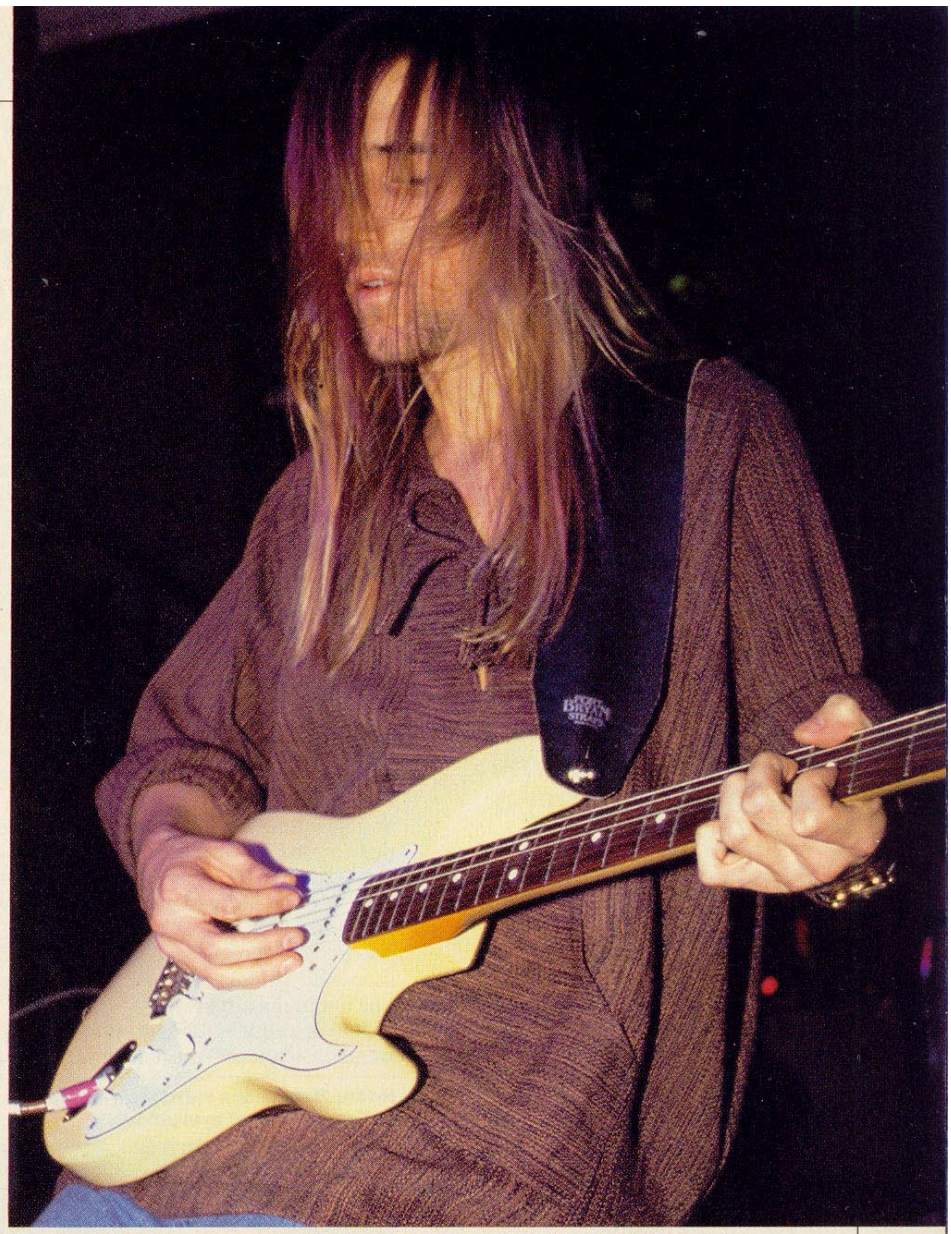
Naked Pilgrims, Head Train, Mud Bird and Brown Cow were among the suggested monikers flying around. One day Brad asked, "What's happening, blind melons?" It was how his father used to greet some hippie neighbors back home. There were about ten of them renting the house next door to the Smith's, none with any discernible source of income. The image fit.

With only blind ambition and six songs to its credit, the band tracked a demo tape, *The Goodfoot Workshop*. It was sufficiently cashable to woo Capitol Records, but no record company wants a band with only six songs. "So we lied," Christopher says. "We told them we had 20 or 30."

The scam sufficed to get them signed, but their unripeness backfired in the studio. They waxed an EP, *Sippin' Time Sessions*, with producer David Briggs (Neil Young, Buffalo Springfield) then ended up blocking its 1991 release. "It was too slick and studio done," Brad poo-poos.

"When we got the record deal we told them how premature we felt it was," Christopher picks it up. "We said we wanted a year to be together, write songs and tour before making the

JOHN RICARD/PHOTOFEATURES



JOHN RICARD/PHOTOFEATURES

You can tell the guitar work of Rogers Stevens (above) from Christopher Thorn's because Rogers plays almost exclusively in the right channel.

HOON KNEW?

Top 10 things you didn't know about Shannon Hoon

1. Shannon Hoon is not his real name. It's *Richard* Shannon Hoon.
2. By age 9 Shannon had a black belt in karate.
3. In high school Shannon lettered in football, wrestling, and track (pole-vaulting).
4. Shannon has an awesome three-point jumper but he's no threat under the boards, according to a member of our staff who played hoops with him.
5. Shannon did *not* attend Lafayette Jefferson High with Axl Rose. Shannon went to McCutcheon, a school on the outskirts of Lafayette named after a Depression-era cartoonist.
6. High school sweetheart and still close friend: Lisa.
7. Shannon sang "Don't Cry" years before his duet with Axl. He heard an early GN'R demo tape and performed the song in his first band, Styff Kytten.
8. Shannon also sang behind GN'R on "November Rain," "The Garden," "Live And Let Die" and "You Ain't The First."
9. Shannon's mom works in a restaurant, his dad is a bricklayer.
10. Nude Shannon appearances: a) in Vancouver, Canada on Halloween (*Hello-weenie?)*—he was arrested; b) the cover of *Rolling Stone* (he *should* have been arrested); c) opening a GN'R concert in Switzerland (he wore only a Viking helmet); d) dancing in front of a billboard of the bee girl outside Capitol Records in L.A. (Christopher videotaped it.)

record. When the EP didn't work out, we were really convinced." Capitol agreed.

With downtime to burn, Shannon hung with his transplanted Lafayette buds, including one Axl Rose. Back when he was William Bailey the Guns N' Roses singer attended junior high with Shannon's older sister. Paying an innocent social call on the sessions for *Use Your Illusion I* and *II*, Shannon found himself singing backup on several songs. Axl asked Shannon to reprise his role in the "Don't Cry" video and on select GN'R concert dates.

Suddenly Hoon couldn't grab a slice of pizza in L.A. without shellbursts of questions: *"How do you know Guns N' Roses?" "What's Axl like?" "Where's Izzy?"* Backstage after a New York GN'R show someone tapped Shannon on the shoulder to praise his duet with Rose. It was Donald Trump.

The fruits of fortune are sweet, but Blind Melon has been too preoccupied for a taste.

Clutching coattails is no dignified way to succeed, so Blind Melon focused like a laser on its own album. The band was still not ripe however. They decided to hit the road. "We weren't in any hurry to do anything," Shannon said. "We were willing to wait 'til everybody felt comfortable." The band played a club tour and then opened six shows for Soundgarden.

To resume writing Blind Melon invaded a five-bedroom home in the college town of Durham, North Carolina. L.A. was too distracting, they decided. The "Sleepy House" routinely hosted all-night jam sessions and alcohol marathons. Here the sun was abhorred rather than worshipped; Shannon lined the blinds in his room with tin foil to help maintain his dusk-to-dawn regimen.

"Those days were great," Christopher recalls. "It was inspiring to all of us, becoming brothers—eating, shitting and playing together." Occasionally their hazy merriment crossed the line, as when Blind Melon's sound man, Lyle, passed out drunk on the couch with a cigarette. "A flame was burning about two inches from his head," Christopher says. "We were shaking him and pulling on him, screaming, but he wouldn't wake up." Tragedy was averted thanks to several heaping wok-fuls of tap water.

In February 1992 Blind Melon jetted to Seattle's London Bridge Studios to record what they'd written with Pearl Jam producer Rick Parashar, but work again took a back seat to the road; the band accepted the opening slot on MTV's *120 Minutes* package with PiL and Big Audio Dynamite II.

"That tour helped us make a better record." Christopher claims. "We recorded half the record before *120 Minutes*, the other half after, and the other half sounds so much better. We learned how to play together, basically."

Still, going out on a major tour with no album to sell wasted a healthy promotional buzz. By the time *Blind Melon* was released in September, excitement was waning and album sales crested at a lean 90,000. MTV aired the videos for "Dear Ol' Dad," "Tones Of Home" and "I Wonder" about ten times each and the band's audience consisted mostly of fans with good memories.

Then came the reign of "No Rain," a lilting ditty Smith composed before arriving in L.A. This self-described "lame song about co-dependency" featured a frolicsome Hoon vocal and a cutesy video concept: a pudgy tap-dancer in bee drag—based on the old picture of Glen Graham's sister adorning *Blind Melon*'s cover—searches for others who can accept her as is. The story parallels that of the Melons who, scorned at home for their long hair and stoner attitudes, ran to L.A. and into one another's arms.

MTV's request lines wouldn't stop ringing. "No Rain" pushed *Blind Melon* past gold and up to #3 on the charts. The bee girl, 10-year-old Heather DeLoach, got to tap over the credits closing the MTV Awards and inked a movie deal with MGM.

The fruits of fortune are sweet, but Blind Melon has been too preoccupied for a taste. Capitol Records involuntarily lengthened and intensified the band's touring itinerary to capitalize on the success of "No Rain" and the follow-up single, "Tones Of Home." The band hasn't slept anywhere but hotels or buses since recording *Blind Melon*; their stuff is still locked up in Seattle.

"We're begging for time off to record," Brad says. "We've got so much shit we have to wade through. Now that things are getting better they're all interested in slave driving us, jumping on the boat." After a brief swing through Canada, Blind Melon is scheduled for 20 days in Japan and Australia. A 25-city headlining tour of the States should be underway mid-February.

"A lot of people have had this record in their hands for a year already," Brad says. "We want to get something new out for them. We've been on a constant tour, doing at least four dates a week for a long time." Smith draws a breath then reconsiders his negativity. "Ah, I don't care," he says. "We're lucky to be touring. I'm traveling around on a tour bus for free, doing exactly what I want to be doing."

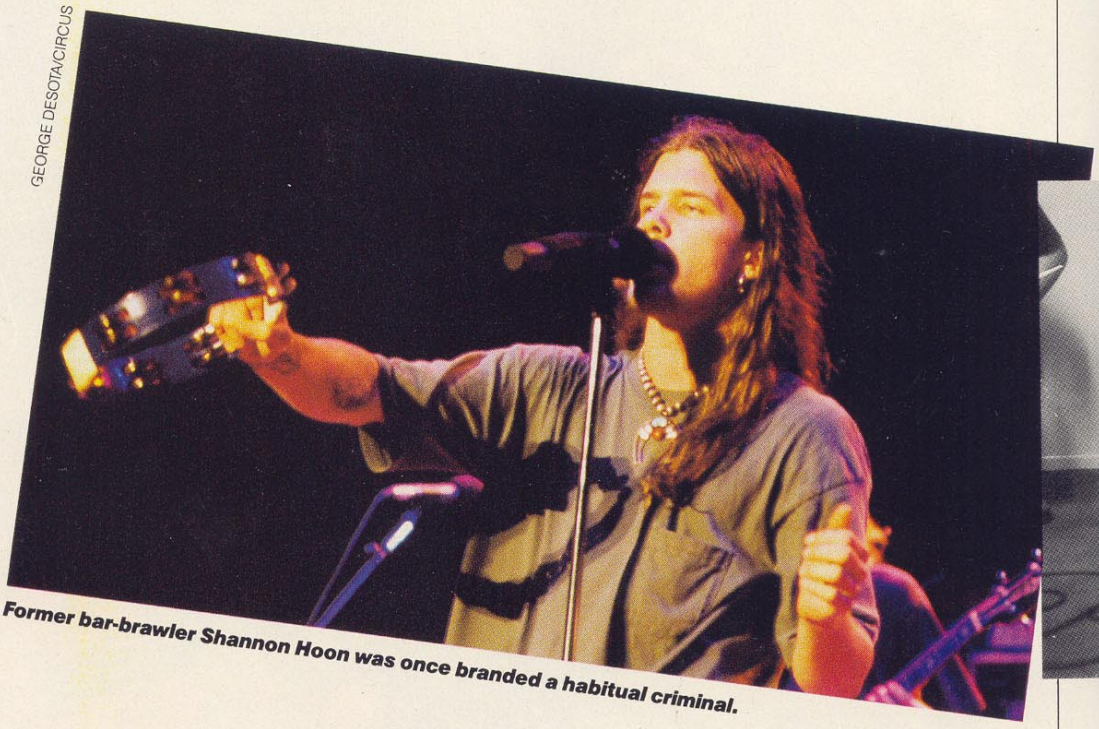
Hoon: "I think the word alternative has been sadly abused. Man, they've called us a bit of everything."

GEORGE DESOTA/CIRCUS

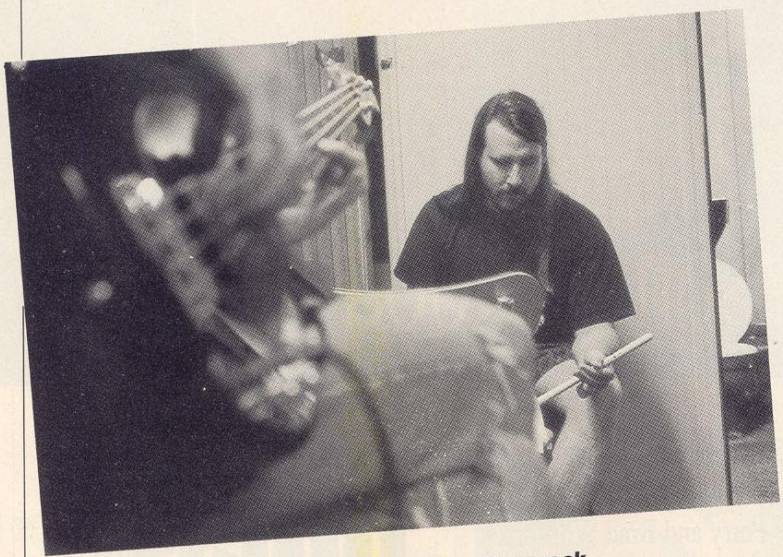
BLIND DATES

A gallery of on and off-road Blind Melon moments

GEORGE DESOTA/CIRCUS



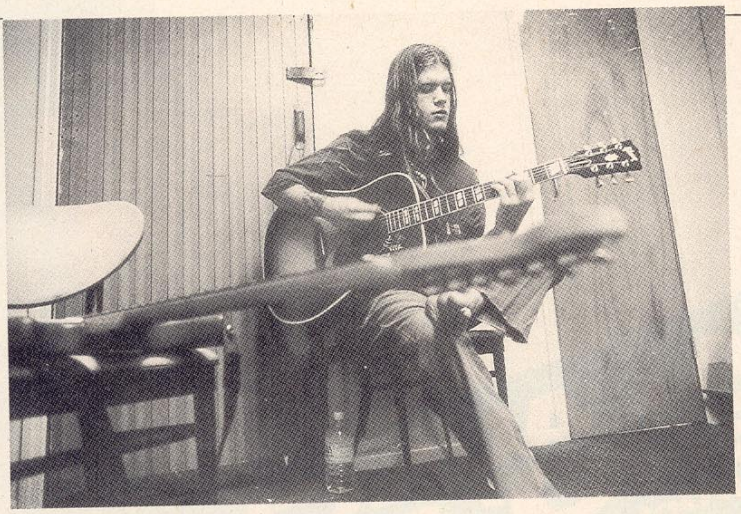
Former bar-brawler Shannon Hoon was once branded a habitual criminal.



JEFFREY TISMAN

Glen Graham (r., next to Brad's bass) left a college rock band in Mississippi called Cafe Desmoine. He came to L.A. with only $25 cash.

Thorn bailed from R.O.T., a thrash band.



Shannon. "He's completely nuts," says Christopher Thorn.

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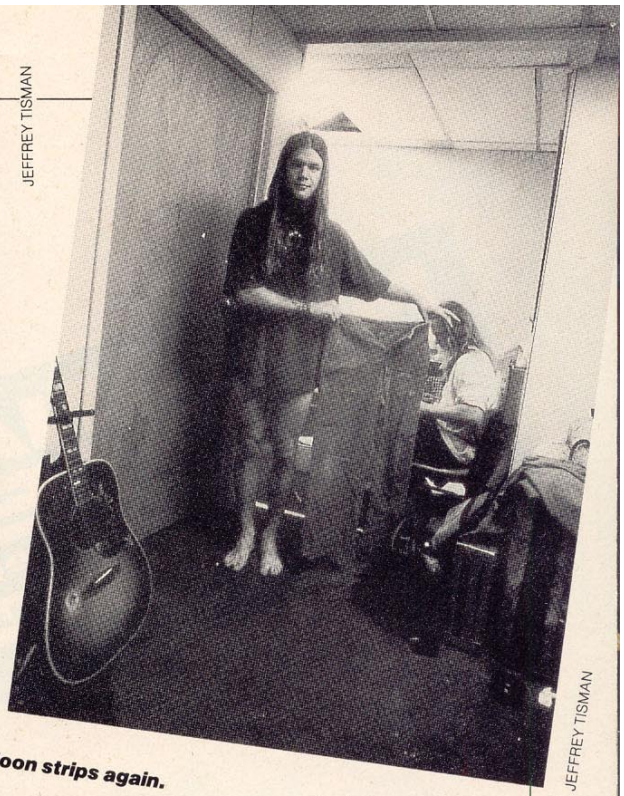

Hoon strips again.

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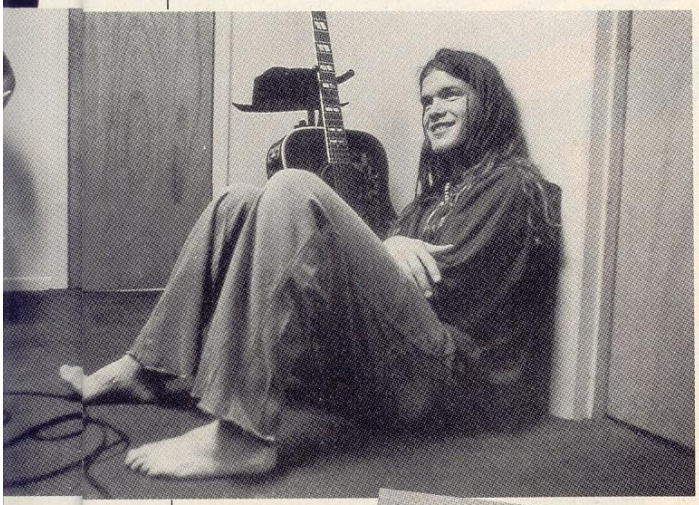

Hoon in a Blind fold.

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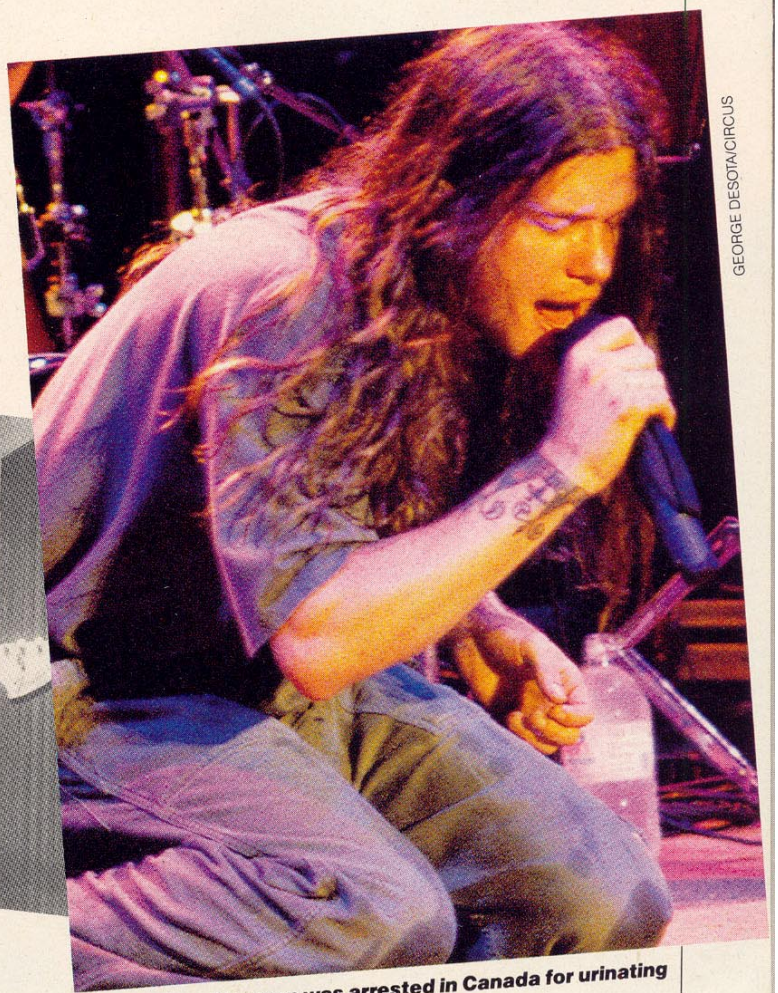
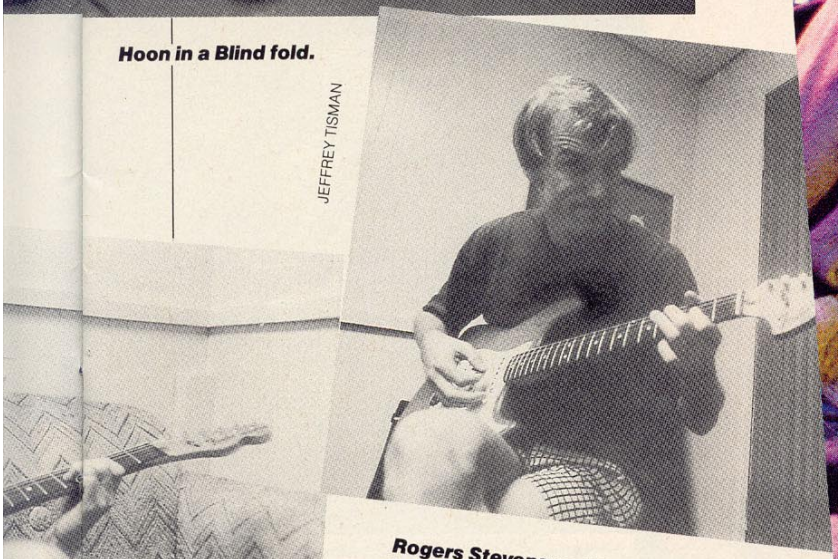


At press time Shannon was arrested in Canada for urinating on stage.

GEORGE DESOTA/CIRCUS



Rogers Stevens and Co. are handled by GN'R's management, B.F.D.

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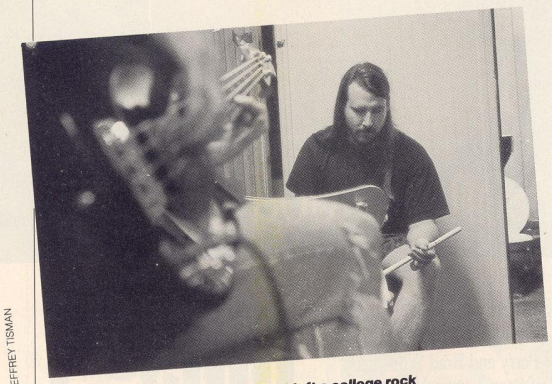

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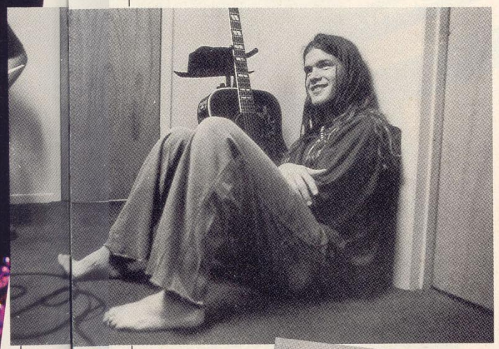

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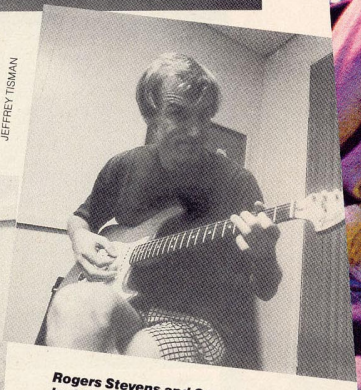

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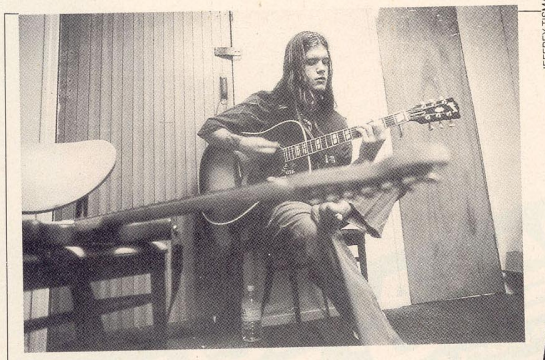

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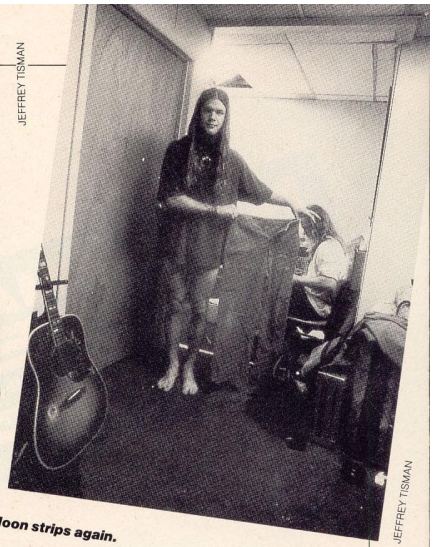

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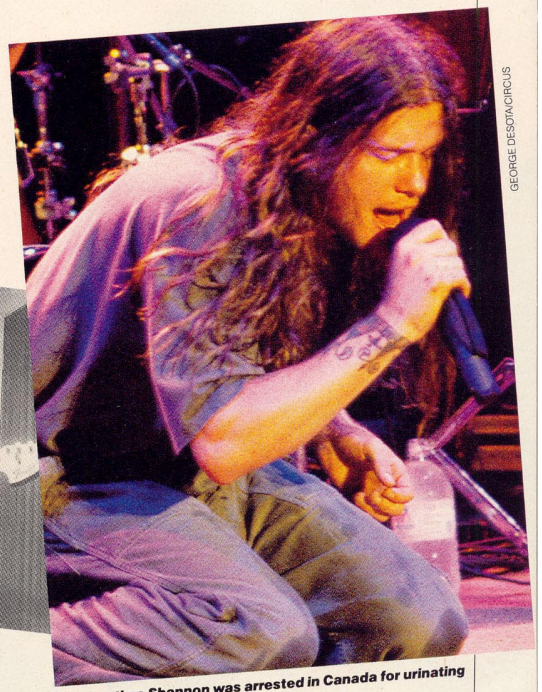

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BLIND MELON

Formed—1990, Los Angeles, CA. **Personnel**—Shannon Hoon: vocals; Thomas Rogers Stevens: guitar; Christopher Thorn: guitar; Brad Smith: bass; Glen Graham: drums. **Recent CD**—*Blind Melon* (Capitol), October 1992