

BLIND MELON

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Guitarist Roger Stevens and bassist Brad Smith moved to Los Angeles from their native West Point, Mississippi, in early 1989. They hooked up with singer Shannon Hoon in March of 1990, shortly after he arrived from his hometown of Lafayette, Indiana. They began writing immediately and were soon joined by guitarist Christopher Thorn, originally from Dover, Pennsylvania. When local auditions failed to turn up the right drummer, Rogers and Brad phoned home to Mississippi and invited Glen Graham to join the fold. He arrived three days later. Blind Melon was born. Here, the band members talk about their personal experiences with music and about their self-titled debut on Capitol Records.

AS BOTH MUSICIANS AND MUSIC LOVERS, WHAT DO YOU LOOK FOR IN A SONG OR ON A RECORD?

SHANNON: I listen for some kind of mental recess. Something that takes your head away. Like Syd Barrett. Mind-tripping things.

CHRISTOPHER: For me, it's not even a conscious thing. I'm not listening specifically for something. It's totally subconscious. You just put it on and it's that mood, that feeling that you get that you can't even explain.

CAN YOU REMEMBER ONE OF YOUR EARLIEST EXCITING MUSICAL EXPERIENCES?

SHANNON: Pink Floyd. I got the whole catalogue after I started listening to them. And Carole King's Tapestry brings back a lot of memories. I remember my Mom cleaning house to that.

ROGERS: I remember hearing "Band On The Run" and it was one of my earliest memories of really getting into music when I was really young.

CHRISTOPHER: Oh God! Zeppelin III with all the acoustic songs. "Gallows Pole" and all that stuff. I was just so incredibly turned on. Then one or two years later, one night, I got stoned and listened to the White Album. It was on vinyl and it was all scratchy and had all the pops on it and everything. I put that on and I couldn't even speak for a week afterwards. It just blew my mind.

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BRAD: When I listened to James Brown for the first time. Or Led Zeppelin. And Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young. The music and styles might be different, but I'm talking about their uninhibitedness. James Brown would just totally let loose! People thought he was bizarre, but he was just uninhibited. That's how he expresses himself. So anything where I feel somebody is being totally uninhibited and letting loose and not worrying about the commercial aspect of things, is what really turns me on. Where they're following what they really know how to express the best, which is themselves. The first listening experiences I had were like that. I was like, "God, man! Those guys are just going off!"

GLEN: Maybe Elton John and "Benny & The Jets." Then I was hit heavily by Kiss. Kiss just overwhelmed me. It wasn't really so much that they blew me away musically, but it was the whole concept of the thing. I was into monster movies and horror films. Then to see these guys playing rock music! It was great. I thought, "I want to do this!" so that went on for way too long. But I really started pinpointing things and figuring out exactly what it was about things that I liked when I got into Jimi Hendrix, Led Zeppelin, Cream, Traffic, CSNY, and all that. I was moved by a lot of that kind of music. A lot of it was just good songs, but there was something special about the production. It sounded like it would have sounded if you were right there listening to them. They used effects, but interesting ones.

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY IS THE POWER OF A GOOD SONG OR GOOD MUSIC?

GLEN: Well, I would hope that people listening to us are going to go away feeling good or in a good mood. For me, that's what it's all about. It's not whether the message in the lyrics is positive or negative. It's the vibe of the thing. It has to get you really going and feeling good.

THE TONES HAVE A VERY LATE '60S AND, EARLY '70S SOUND, BUT THERE ARE DEFINITELY CONTEMPORARY INFLUENCES AND SOUNDS AT PLAY.

ROGERS: Yeah, well, we have the 20 years of music that came after those earlier periods to back it all up. We have all of the influences from the music that we listened to from the '60s and the '70s, plus you have the whole advent of heavy metal and hard rock, which we listened to when we were young...

SHANNON: Whether you wanted it or not.

ROGERS: Yeah, I mean, you listened to hard rock bands when you were a kid because that's how you learned to play guitar. Those guys played guitar physically well, so you get all that. Then you have all the alternative music that came in the '80s or whatever and you hear all that stuff. That totally influences you, as well. But as far as the sounds and stuff, all of us play through the same gear that was used back then, anyway. The amps and the drums and everything are old simply because we think the tones sound better.

SHANNON: They're a lot meatier.

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ROGERS: We play contemporary songs, but it's produced, and the tones of things are done in a way that sounds almost vintage. But it still has some weird things on it that make it sound contemporary. It's definitely a blend of the two things.

CHRISTOPHER: Personally, it's only due to the fact that everything that I grew up on was a very pure and natural sound. So the only progression for me is to want to have that same sort of sound. Everybody's done that. I mean, everyone is influenced by who they listen to. I just love those pure, dry tones. To me, you can hear everything as well. That's the reason for my guitar tone.

OVERALL, IT GIVES RECORD A VERY INTIMATE FEELING.

CHRISTOPHER: I think so, too, when it doesn't sound like you're playing in a stadium. Especially vocally and when you're wearing headphones; instead of hearing the voice sound like he's away from you, it sounds like he's right there, right in your ear, singing to you direct. I love that sound. The Beatles had a lot of that.

BRAD: Nothing sounds forced. Nothing sounds way, way out front. You're able to sit down and get into it because the production is so dry and you can hear everything. Nothing's pushed way out front and everything else is just a support. It's that kind of production, really dry, so reverb doesn't get in the way. Things aren't just awash in the background. You can actually hear everything for a change.

DESCRIBE THE FEELING YOU GET WHEN YOU'RE PLAYING.

SHANNON: I feel I'm tip-toeing a line between sanity and insanity. It's just such a rush that you don't know how to control it. Every time you play, the rush is different, but the fine line between everything is still there. You never know what you're going to be feeling, one minute to the next.

BRAD: What gets me off more than anything is the improv thing when we're playing live, when we're just totally moving with the mood. 'Cause after the songs are written, you can recite them over and over, but each time we play them we try to add something different or better. It moves me more when everything's clicking at the same time and I feel that everybody's on the same wavelength.

CHRISTOPHER: That happens to certain degrees when we're writing. As weird as this sounds, sometimes you have an incredible experience writing a song -- and it doesn't happen every time -- where it just works so easily. Those are the nights when, as corny as this sounds, I just want to walk over and hug and kiss everybody. That's the only way you feel. You just want to do a big, group hug.

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BRAD: It's totally inexplicable sometimes and we don't even really know how it happens, which is funny, because we're constantly searching to get that consistent wavelength happening again. Everybody's trying to get on that same level again, because things happen so fast when we are on the same wavelength. Some days you go in there and it just doesn't come together, but whenever it does, something really good comes out of it. Christopher's right, it makes you want to just jump up and hug everybody.

ARE THERE ANY PARTICULAR THEMES RUNNING THROUGH THE SONGS?

SHANNON: I think a lot about what the stories are written about. I'm not going to sing something that one of us hasn't been through.

ROGERS: There are a lot of things, like personal experiences, that we look back on in a sentimental way, like our hometowns and childhood and stuff like that. Then we have a lot of present day experiences about which Shannon seems to write songs right off the cuff. These are about things that happened to him in that time like that day or something, and they seem to come from a more spontaneous source.

SHANNON: The writing is kind of ambiguous. Anybody can read it and find something that they need in one line and then find something else in the next line.

LYRICALLY AND MUSICALLY, THE SONGS OFFER A LOT OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE LISTENER TO ACTUALLY ENTER THE EXPERIENCE.

SHANNON: To enter the game and play it as they will.

ROGERS: It's definitely like that. I think that just about everybody will find something that they can relate to on it. It's not like it's just Shannon's experiences or just any one person in the band's experiences and no one else has had similar things happen to them. We're pretty much normal people. We go through the same shit that everybody else does.

CHRISTOPHER: I think what we're talking about is that music is creating a mood around the lyrics, what's being said. I always think that there's so much going on that you can't hear everything with one listen.

BRAD: It's not like there's this main hook line and then everything else supports it. Everybody's playing something that hooky. But everything's turned down so nothing's pushed too far out.

CHRISTOPHER: I still hear things on the record that I've never heard before. Like stuff that Brad plays. I'll just be sitting listening to it and then I'll think, "Holy shit! I never heard *that* before." But that's because everybody's doing something all the time and playing around each other. So it creates this huge sound of everything going on.

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GLEN: Our arrangements are a little bit different. They don't just repeat verse/chorus/verse/chorus/bridge. Or if they do, there is something interesting within each of those parts. Everybody is interpreting differently. When you repeat a part, everybody is not necessarily playing the same thing each time the part comes around in the song. Songs are supposed to build and go forward from beginning to end, not just repeat each section.

DO YOU GET THE FEELING WHEN YOU'RE PLAYING TOGETHER THAT YOU'RE CREATING A SEPARATE UNIVERSE OF SOME SORT?

BRAD: Personally, I feel that anybody who comes up with a riff or a chorus for a song or anything like that, and then brings it to the band, it has to be in a way "Melonized" before I consider it a Blind Melon song. Everybody has to put their two cents in, and everybody ends up putting 10 cents in. For that reason, if even one person left the band, whether it would be the guitar player, the drummer, the singer, whoever, it just would not be the same at all. We're lucky enough that everybody knows how to work together and get that thing across.

CHRISTOPHER: It always seems to me that we have five people and each person is trying to pull it *their* way, but it a together way. You're pulling it your way because that's your influence, so you're adding into it, but in a way you're trying to pull it toward your influence. When you have five of you doing that, I think that's what creates Blind Melon. It's not always being pulled in just one direction. You always have these four other people that are pulling, or putting into it. You're putting in, but in a way you're trying to pull it a certain way as well.

GLEN: I love it when you put on a record or go to hear a band live and time freezes. You're listening to that, being absorbed in it, and when it's over you have this catharsis. I'm not saying that everyone who listens to our record will experience some sort of catharsis, but I like being refreshed by music, by people creatively reinterpreting things that are familiar.

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