



B I O G R A P H Y

BLIND MELON

Glen Graham -- drums
Shannon Hoon -- vocals
Brad Smith -- bass, vocals
Rogers Stevens -- guitar
Christopher Thorn -- guitar

Just when it looked like rock 'n' roll was set to succumb to trend-mongers and bandwagon-jumpers, along came a band of genuine, downhome musicians, bent on striking a blow for the regular guy. For those unmoved by techno-grunge and ambient thrash, Blind Melon had a powerful impact: when the smoke had cleared, the quintet had scored a decisive victory for heartfelt simplicity, emotional openness and good old-fashioned rock 'n' roll with their multi-platinum selling self-titled debut.

"We've never had any pre-conceived notion of what we should and shouldn't do," says the band's kinetic lead singer Shannon Hoon. "I think we work best when we're in the midst of total chaos, when things are flying around the room, both figuratively and literally. Tension can be a very exhilarating thing."

That tension is just one of the myriad ingredients that went into the creation of Blind Melon's highly-anticipated sophomore set, Soup. Recorded in New Orleans (with producer Andy Wallace at the board), the far-reaching 14-track album reflects the spirit of the Crescent City, both in its dark, dangerous corners (as evidenced by the harshly careening "2 x 4") and its unabashed reverie. "It's definitely an evil place," says bassist Brad Smith. "But it's also the kind of place that can touch your spirit in a positive way; there's nothing quite like it if you're a musician."

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Blind Melon took full advantage of the city's musical heritage, recruiting the renowned Kermit Ruffin with the Little Rascals Brass Band to add a second-line flavor to a pair of Soup's tracks. Even the album's insistently pulsing first single, "Galaxie," owes some of its insistent nature to the streets of the Big Easy. "I bought a 1964 Ford Galaxie from a friend of Rogers' while we were making the record, and it became my comfort zone whenever it got too stressful," says Hoon. "The song is about that in a lot of ways -- about finding a therapeutic way of dealing with things. For me, therapy was as simple as taking a drive."

Since forming just over five years ago in Los Angeles, Blind Melon has confounded pigeonholers with their stellar blend of roots, rhythm and rebellion. The foundation was laid when Mississippi natives Rogers Stevens and Brad Smith migrated west in 1989, to be joined a year later by Hoon, Christopher Thorn and Glen Graham.

"What we discovered immediately is that there's no leader of this band and there never will be," says Hoon. "That's the key. You can't control how the public perceives you -- people see rock 'n' roll bands as the guitar player and the singer -- but that's not Blind Melon. We're fortunate that every person in this band can write a great song."

It took just a week to make that discovery and work up a demo tape that became an exceedingly hot property on the industry circuit, eventually landing Blind Melon a deal with Capitol. Before even entering the studio to record their first proper album, however, the quintet proved its mettle by hitting the road with Soundgarden (on the first of a dauntingly diverse string of tours that included dates with the Rolling Stones, Neil Young, Ozzy Osbourne, Lenny Kravitz and Smashing Pumpkins).

Thus steeled, the ever-mobile band packed up and moved to North Carolina to write the songs that would come to comprise their debut, then trekked to Seattle to record. When Blind Melon was released, it became an instant critical success -- *Rolling Stone* dubbed it "refreshingly genuine...an astounding debut" -- but the album took a decidedly more circuitous route to the top of the charts. Sticking to its tireless touring schedule, the band played more than 300 dates in its first year.

With the releases of singles like "Tones of Home" -- which helped garner fans in the few areas they didn't manage to hit live -- the band clawed its way up from the bottom of club bills one rung at a time. Blind Melon made its mark as a live band -- a band able to put on as powerful a show in a large hall (as evidenced by the literally hundreds of shows it opened for some of rock's biggest acts, including a plum spot at Woodstock '94) as well as the smaller clubs it began packing on its own.

Aided by the breakthrough success of "No Rain" (a single that hit #1 on both *Billboard*'s Modern and Album Rock charts) as well as word of mouth from its more rabid fans, Blind Melon became a fixture in the Top Ten more than a year after its initial release. The outspoken Hoon insists, however, that Blind Melon did its best to treat Soup as a new venture, ignoring the pitfalls of following what's falsely perceived as an "overnight success."

"You feel a subliminal pressure, because you want to move forward, but since seriousness can dilute the enjoyment after awhile, we've managed to keep an arm's length away from all that," says the singer. "I just feel like I was standing in the right place when the right car pulled up; if you don't get your priorities right, it can make all your hair fall out."

With that experience behind them, the band's members took a vacation from each other, reassembling refreshed to begin cooking up Soup, an album that gives off a new flavor with every passing song, from the introspective "Mouthful of Cavities" (which exhibits Hoon's considerable growth as a songwriter) to the brooding "Walk." The breadth of mood exhibited here is startling, particularly for a band releasing only its second effort.

"On this album, we didn't really sit in a room and write the way we did last time, when we were all literally living under the same roof," says guitarist Christopher Thorn. "We went our separate ways for awhile and then got together to try and put it all together. That's part of the reason we used the title; we each brought in all these really weird things that we just put together and hoped for the best."

The resultant mixture has a flavor markedly different from that of Blind Melon's debut. While some of Soup retains those spare, acoustic grooves, the band waxes heavier, jazzier and more free this time around. Hoon, whose abstract lyrics are always compelling, turns his sights on human nature's darker side on the deceptively jaunty, bluegrass-tinged "Skinned" (an attempt to dissect the mentality of serial killer Ed Gein) and the moody "St. Andrew's Fall" (written after he witnessed a young woman fall to her death from a Detroit building). One of the album's most provocative tracks may be the dusky-hued "Car Seat (God's Presents)," which was sparked by Hoon's horror at the South Carolina incident where a mother drowned her two children in their car seats.

"I believe children are the purest thing on the face of the earth, and hurting them is so far beyond my conception," says Hoon. "There's a poem at the end that reflects that: it comes from my great-grandmother's journal, which she wrote in 1884."

Although there is considerable darkness within Soup, the album brims with celebratory moments as well. The bucolic "Vernie" is dedicated to Hoon's grandmother, who he describes as "a beautiful, simple woman who loves God, her family and her garden," while "New Life" fetes the birth of his child.

"Those are the things that really matter to all of us as people," says Hoon. "Even though we all got from point A to point B in really different ways, we've become a lot stronger as people and as a band as we've gone along."

Whether you consider it the product of genius or just another stroke of good luck, Soup is sure to be good for whatever ails you.

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