

Blind Melon: Keeping an Eye on the Serious

By Katherine Turman

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Before a note of his band's music hit the airwaves, Blind Melon's singer, Shannon Hoon, was a bona-fide MTV star.

An Indiana childhood pal of Axl Rose, he became an instant celebrity when Rose recruited him for Guns N' Roses' "Don't Cry" video.

"He just called and I wasn't doing anything," says Hoon, 25, of his September '91 video bow.

But Hoon's plaid-shirted appearance in the clip put an added onus on his own band, a fledgling outfit whose music--a personal, edgy, folk-influenced, alternative-rock blend--bore little resemblance to GNR's street metal.

"There was definitely pressure," acknowledges Hoon about Blind Melon's premature notoriety. "I got tired of people wanting to talk to the band because they wanted to know about Guns N' Roses."

Press attention as a result of the GNR clip, tours with Soundgarden and an opening slot on the MTV 120 Minutes Tour last summer put Blind Melon squarely in the public eye, and heightened the anticipation for the September '92 release of its debut album, "Blind Melon."

To concentrate on the album, which was still in the writing stages when the band began getting showered with attention in late '91, the quintet--which plays at Club 860 in San Diego tonight and the Troubadour on Monday--moved from Los Angeles to Durham, N.C., an environment more in keeping with the members' small-town backgrounds and personalities.

Hoon hails from Lafayette, Ind., guitarist Rogers Stevens, bassist Brad Smith and drummer Glen Graham are from Mississippi, and guitarist Christopher Thorn is from Dover, Pa. The cross-country move allowed the musicians to get reacquainted with their roots, both musically and personally.

Hoon had followed Rose's footsteps to L.A., like countless would-be rock stars before him, in early 1990. The singer realized it was a different scene when he signed up with a construction union to land a day job. "At home, you get on a list and you're like No. 30 in line for a job," Hoon explains. "In L.A. I was like No. 2,700. I was like, 'This is going to be rough.'"

Getting a band together, however, didn't prove as difficult. Hoon met friends Smith and Stevens, newly arrived from Columbus, Miss., then hooked up with Thorn. A well-placed call to Mississippi convinced Graham, another friend, to drive cross-country to complete the lineup. Soon the band had inked with Capitol Records, which was attracted to Blind Melon's passion and diversity of styles.

Songs like "Tones of Home" and the introspective new single "I Wonder" are passionate, earthy, sometimes rollicking internal explorations, and the band looks to the serious side of life for lyrical inspiration. It doesn't get more serious than a recent incident the band encountered on its current "crammed-in-a-van tour."

Hoon's normally ebullient demeanor sobers when he relates the tale, which, he notes, is the sort of thing that might someday inspire a song lyric: After a show in Detroit, Blind Melon witnessed a suicide.

"We saw a girl 20 floors up on a ledge. All these people on the street were going, 'Go ahead, jump.' So heartless," Hoon says.

"She jumped 20 floors. We all saw it. We left immediately, and it was quiet in our van for like two hours. I called to find out what happened and was told, 'She took her secret with her.' And we were pissed because we had a bad monitor mix. You realize how irrelevant it is to the big picture."