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AMERICA'S ROCK MAGAZINE

BLIND MELON

SHANNON HOON BARES HIS
SOUL — "BEING REAL IS IN"

STONE TEMPLE PILOTS

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KILL THEM?

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COBAIN SPEAKS

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
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BIGGEST PUNK BAND

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Interview by
Cree McCree

Shannon Hoon is playing as the wind for all the world to see, his sunlit, perfect, carefree, pastoral setting of this recent promotional post card—sent from Capitol records to media outlets coast-to-coast—and Hoon's off-handed grin infuse a classic act of bad-boy defiance with playful exuberance. Hoon looks like a guy who "likes to wake up to Nine Inch Nails and go to sleep to Simon & Garfunkel." A guy equally at home wailing with fellow Hoosier Axl in Guns N' Roses' "Don't Cry" video, and playing groovy acid pipe to the pudgy little "hee girl" in Blind Melon's own MTV hit "No Rain." A guy whose jumpcut from a two-month

A candid one-on-one with Blind Melon's Shannon Hoon.

tour with the Neil Young/Soundgarden/Pearl Jam grungefest to the band's current European tour with retro-rockers Leary Kravitz was just a natural segue.

Such is the genre-busting spirit of Blind Melon (singer Hoon, guitarists Thomas Rogers Stevens and Christopher Thorn, bassist Brad Smith and drummer Glen Graham), a bunch of small-town boys whose Capitol debut disc was conceived in L.A.'s hard-rock scene, born in a North Carolina farmhouse, produced in Seattle by grunge-meister Rick Parashar of Pearl Jam fame, and heralded on MTV, who named Melon's "Dear Ol' Dad" on *Headbangers Ball* and *120 Minutes* months before the disc hit the scores last fall. Then the one-two punch of "No Rain," a MTV breakthrough and the buzz of born-again Melonheads sent the disc Top Ten this summer.

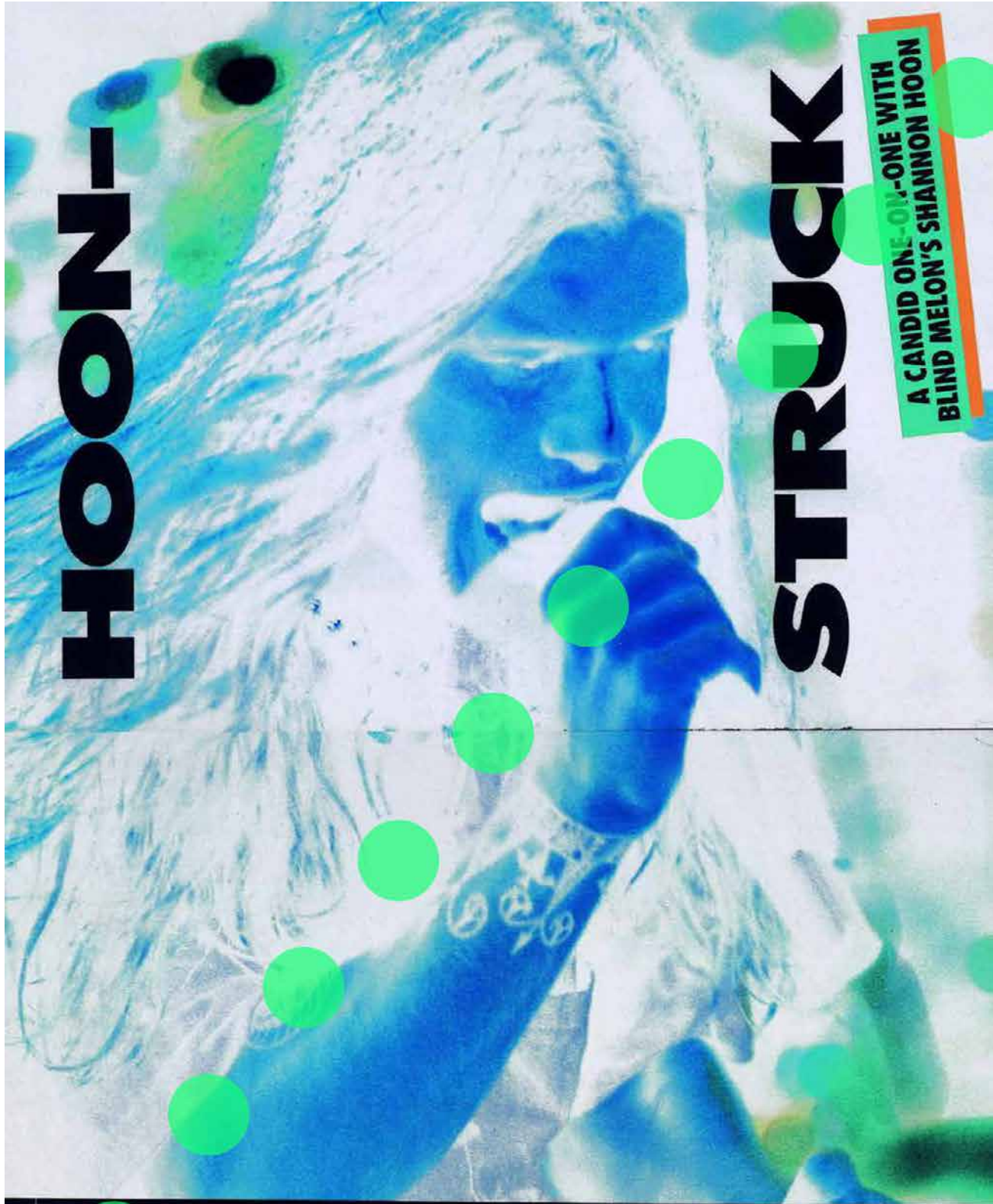
Critics have since stumbled over themselves trying to nail down the band's boopy mix of guitar-driven textures, backbiting beat and, soaring above it all, Hoon's keening vocals. But forget all the shotgun-wedding verbiage like "Jane's Addiction meets Allman Brothers." The Melonheads raising it up on the dance floor of the band's live shows know exactly why they're there. Like Hoon sings, in an almost unbearably plaintive voice in

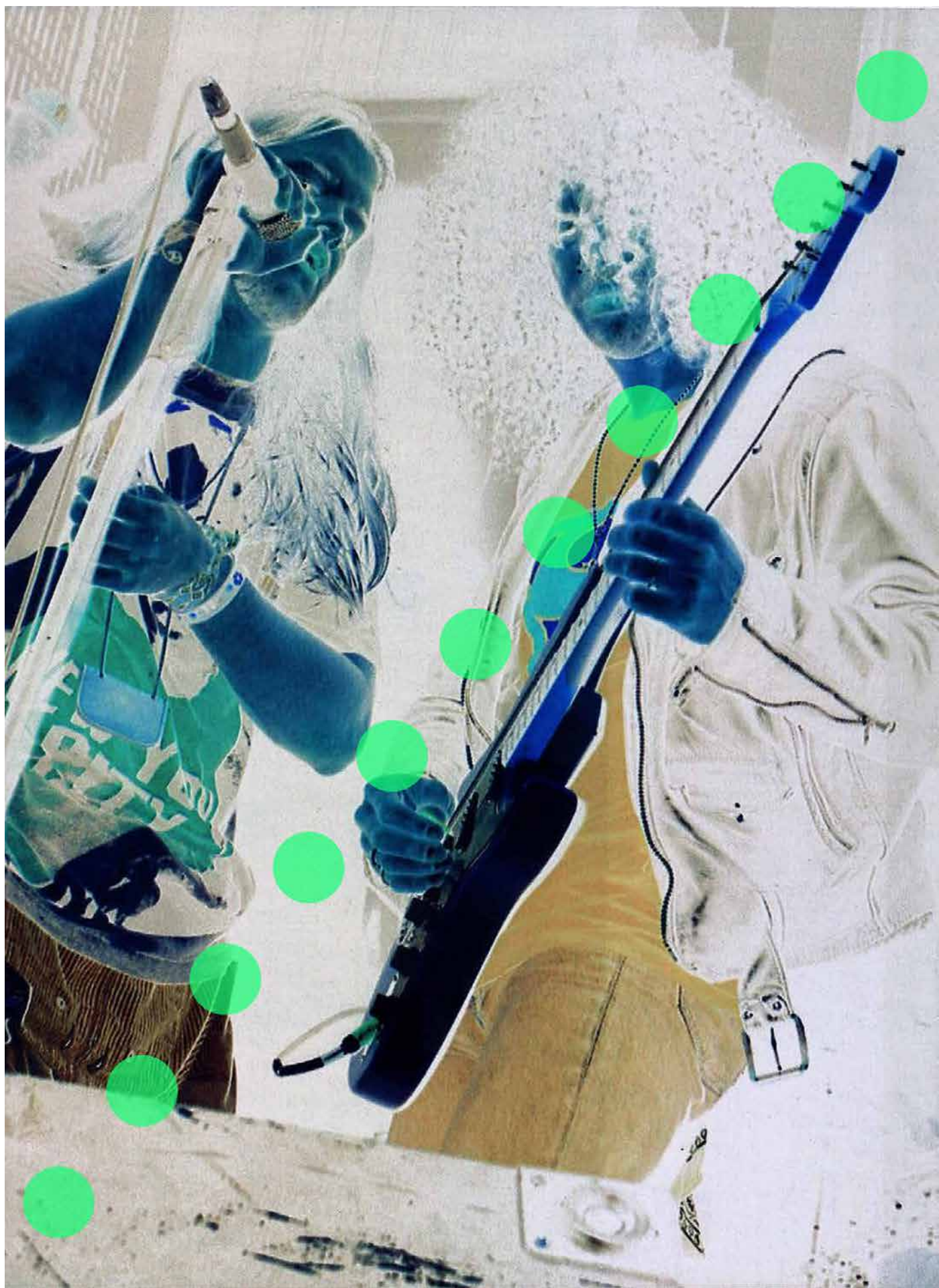
Shannon Hoon and Blind Melon wrote their debut album in North Carolina to escape the distractions of L.A.

HOON-

STRUCK

**A CANDID ONE-ON-ONE WITH
BLIND MELON'S SHANNON HOON**





"I Wonder": "I only wanted to be 16 ...and free."

Tonight, Hoon's sitting cross-legged and barefoot amidst a jumble of pillows in the inner sanctum of Wetlands, a New York City nightspot, where he'll soon be careening off the walls upstairs. An irrepressible talker whose words tumble out like his somersaulting stage antics, Hoon is eager to riff about anything and everything. He might still be talking if his road manager hadn't collared him for soundcheck, handing him a brown paper sack.

Hoon's face lights up when he pulls out a freshly re-soled pair of old black wingtips. "I got these in Utah, man, in a used clothing store," he says, slipping them on with a grin. "In big cities, everyone's already bought it all. Small places, man, they don't know what they got."

Lars Ulrich named *Blind Melon* as one of his top ten albums of 1992. Did that surprise you?

Shannon Hoon: Yeah. Because our music and their music is completely opposite. Metallica has a lot of aggression and anger, and they bleed them-

"I bled a lot of my aggression through Metallica and Jane's Addiction."

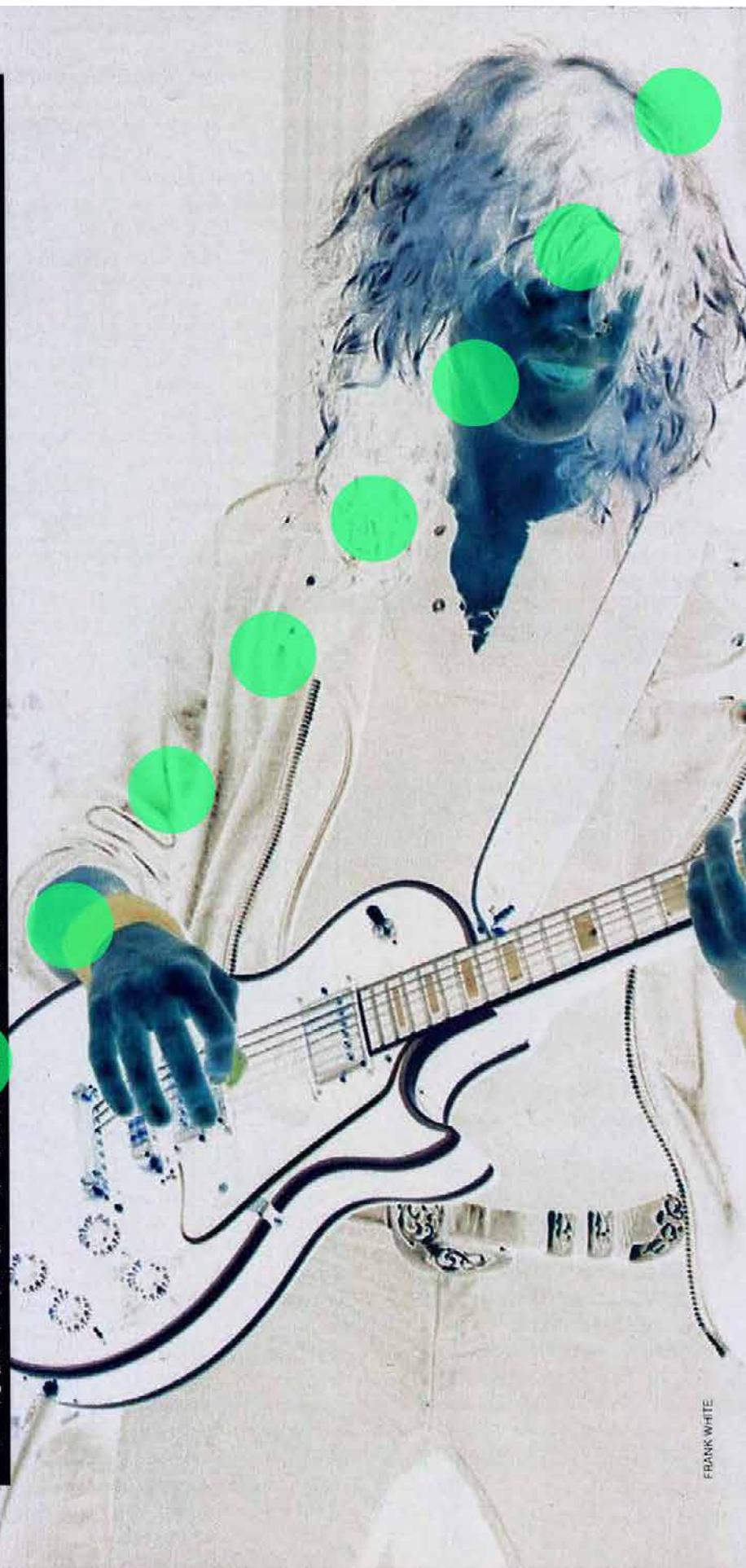
selves through that. Which is basically what we do. Except we try to create a very happy thing. It's just like opposite ends of the spectrum of the same thing. Hot and cold aren't opposites—they're just extremes of the same thing.

It was flattering cause I was a Metallica fan when I was growing up. I went through a lot of phases before I was ever into writing my own songs. I bled a lot of my aggression through Metallica, and Jane's Addiction. And I went through a long, long, long phase with Pink Floyd. I love Syd Barrett. I think he's a sad, mad genius.

What's the common denominator of all your "phases"?

My influences are people who create moods. People who give me this overwhelming feeling of conviction, man. Janis Joplin did. She like bared her naked soul for everyone to see, and if you didn't like it, it didn't matter. That's brilliant. And Syd Barrett, man—a lot of his songs don't even have any kind of key you can grasp

Hoon jams with Slash and Duff from Guns N' Roses at New York's Limelight club in 1991.





onto but you know he knows what's going on. And it's his song and he can do it any way he wants. There's no wrong way to do your own song.

The songs on your album do seem to follow a few themes. 'Home' and 'house'—and the feelings those words conjure up—recur several times.

Yeah, that's just reflecting. I think about home and I think a lot about how I ended up becoming an adult. I go back and look at old pictures and think, how did I get from there to here? Like Bono said, when someone asked him how he reacted to becoming so famous and big: "I wasn't really conscious of it." Because you're around yourself everyday and things are changing so fast you don't really notice what's happening.... I don't remember where I was going with that! Oh, reflecting. [laughs] Things like home.

You're from Indiana and the other guys in the band are from Mississippi and Pennsylvania. But are you really from small towns? I mean, as opposed to suburbs?

Yeah, we're all from small towns. I'm from Lafayette, an hour outside Indianapolis. We have nothing but cornfields. The kids in my area do tassle corn. Tassling corn is like, when you pull out that little tassle at the top of the corn stalk. I don't know why you pull it out. All I know is for a 15-year-old kid the amount of money I made pulling those tassles out was like heaven!

Is there any connection between Axl leaving Indiana and going to L.A., and you leaving Indiana and going to L.A., and then your being in the Guns 'N Roses video?

We're both from the same town; he went to high school with my sister. We ran around with the same crowd, but I never really hung out with him in Indiana because I'm a few years younger. Out in L.A. there's a handful of people who are from our community. I'd sometimes run into friends who were from Lafayette and it was such a breath of fresh air. It felt like you were going home without going back home.

What about your new home, Seattle? What's your take on the scene?

Seattle's gotten pretty commercial these days. But it's not the scene that appeals to me. It's the scen-e-ry. The mountains, the fresh air. And I like rain, and it definitely has rain. And the best pot in the nation.

True. But you have toured with a couple big Seattle bands. Is there a shared sensibility?

Soundgarden is one of my favorite

bands. I think they're the pioneers of the whole Seattle thing. A few of those bands got huge, but all these other Seattle bands are bouncing around the whole spectrum of music. They don't abide by any formula that makes every song sound the same.

Neither do you. You're one of the few bands who could tour with both Ozzy Osbourne and Lenny Kravitz. But when I listen to your music it makes perfect sense.

Yeah. That's the point I was making. And someone who tags our band as like a Jane's Addiction or puts us in the Seattle sound category has obviously just listened to one song. Or maybe part of a song. But if you listen to the record as a whole—we rip off everybody! And the unifying force may have nothing to do with music. Just points of view. We get everybody at our shows—the groovers, the stage divers and blah, blah, blah, all that stuff.

How do you feel about stage divers?

Nothing disappoints me more than when I see someone who's lost in the groove and feelin' good and then a Doc Marten smacks 'em in the bridge of the nose. Don't get me wrong, I'm

"Being real is in."

not preaching against moshing and stage-diving. Because I provoke it a lot and I love to see people have a good time. But there's a time for everything, and when people start moshing to, like, "No Rain," I have to wonder.

Because it has no relation to the music whatsoever.

Yeah, exactly. It's like an attention thing.

What you're saying reminds me of what Chris Barron tells the audience when the mosh pit becomes no longer a friendly force. You guys have a lot in common with the Spin Doctors, actually. Not so much musically, but the fact they grew pretty organically without any hype, and eventually became huge, just by doing what they've always done.

You know what it is? Being real is in. So a lot of major labels are letting the artists do the art now, rather than mass-producing bands like they did in the Eighties.

They're finding out it makes good business sense.

Yeah. But I don't really care about good business. I care about good communication. The only thing I care about the business is I wanna keep on doing this.

Graham (top), Thorn and Co. are so unpeggable they've opened for John Mellencamp, PIL and Danger Danger.

THE CHANCE RIPENING OF BLIND MELON

by Corey Levitan

Their story is pretty plain. Blind Melon, that hot new band who walks a string of love beads between grass-roots retro and college cool, are really just five long-haired joes whose formula for success reads like a compendium of accidents.

Accident #1: They found each other at all

Thousands of country miles separate the tiny hometowns of Blind Melon. Singer Shannon Hoon hails from Lafayette, Indiana; guitarist Christopher Thorn from Dover, Pennsylvania; and guitarist Thomas Rogers Stevens and bassist Brad Smith from West Point, Mississippi. Like the bee girl in the band's video for "No Rain," each ran away to a magical place where they hoped to find others like themselves. "It's just one of those stroke of luck happenings that we all met in L.A.," Smith says.

Hoon, Smith and Stevens formed the band in March 1990. Thorn was then lassoed and, after auditions failed to produce a drummer, Smith and Stevens rang Glen Graham, an old Mississippi buddy. They considered the names Naked Pilgrims, Head Train, Mud Bird and Brown Cow. "Blind melons" were what Smith's father once dubbed some unemployed hippie neighbors.

Killer showcases and a popular four-track demo raised enough A&R eyebrow to get Blind Melon signed only eight months after forming. Capitol Records hired producer David Briggs (Neil Young) but the EP, *Sippin' Time Sessions*, never happened. "There was too much reverb and it wasn't

Blind Melon's formula for success reads like a compendium of accidents.

honest enough," Smith says. "We didn't need cannon-sounding drums."

Accident #2: Shannon visits Guns N' Roses in the studio during the recording of "Don't Cry"

Axl Rose, who went to high school with Shannon's older brothers and sisters, looked at Hoon and thought it would be fun to try a vocal duet. The resulting sound bit like a speeding four-by-four. Shannon reprised his role in the "Don't Cry" video. When MTV aired it, the only question asked as much as "Where's Izzy?" was "Who's that other singer?"

"I think it helped tremendously," says Smith. "A lot of people probably went out and bought the album for that very reason. And I think that half the people that bought the album

because of Guns N' Roses were probably unpleasantly surprised. I think if a really heavy Guns N' Roses fan goes and buys a Blind Melon album, he'd go, 'What is this happy shit?'"

Before the group's self-titled debut album was even recorded, Blind Melon opened national tours for Soundgarden and MTV's 120 Minutes, featuring PIL and Big Audio Dynamite II.

Accident #3: The reign of "No Rain"

"The whole Guns N' Roses connection got us 90,000 records," Smith says. "We've sold five times that through this video already." Smith, who wrote "No Rain" between solo folk gigs just after his arrival in Hollywood, is dumbfounded. "None of us think it's the best song on the album," he says. "It was just one of the songs I had on a cassette somewhere... It's our lightest song—this lame song about co-dependency—but it's like our mascot song!"

"There are other messages we want to get out to the people," Smith continues, "and I think they're going to come across just as strong as 'No Rain.'" He pauses, then offers an anecdote only a long-haired bumpkin from West Point, Mississippi could conjure: "I think it's like, the big field has been plowed and we're going to plant our seeds for real now."

The Melon camp: Christopher Thorn, Glen Graham, Shannon Hoon, Brad Smith (seated) and Rogers Stevens.

