

BLIND MELON

SOURS OF THE ROAD YET STAYS THE COURSE

A LIVE REPORT FROM KANSAS CITY

by Corey Levitan


KANSAS CITY, KS

Shannon Hoon peers up into the rafters, at none of the 3,000 Blind Melon fans in particular. "All these people won't leave me alone," sings the baggy-eyed man at center stage, whose hands are raised in a gesture somewhere between prayer and neck-ringing. "We need a little time to ourselves!" The lyrics, from "Time," off Blind Melon's self-titled debut album, are cathartic.

As much as Blind Melon seems to appreciate its audience, the band wants off the road. For nearly two years, an inhuman itinerary has whipped the Melons around North America on a tour bus that likes to depart at midnight. Hoon especially must be frustrated, as these could be his last days of freedom. The singer has numerous criminal charges pending against him for allegedly attacking police and a security guard outside the American Music Awards in February.

How Hoon, guitarists Christopher Thorn and Rogers Stevens, bassist Brad Smith and drummer Glen Graham manage an inspired, powerful performance under the strain is a joyous mystery. Here—500 miles from Hoon's Indiana hometown of Lafayette

Melons (clockwise from l.) Christopher Thorn, Brad Smith, Rogers Stevens, Glen Graham and Shannon Hoon.



"Touring all the time kind of gets to be a drag, but not as long as there are nights like this."—Hoon to the audience





Hoon is a tornado of energy, leaping in pirouettes then landing his Timberlands squarely on the downbeats.

—songs about blue skies, trees and red-necks on sun decks would play well even if the band rolled their beds onto the stage. Yet Hoon is a tornado of energy, leaping in pirouettes then landing his Timberlands squarely on the downbeats. His husky voice triples the force of ballsy tunes like "Time," and its ragged soreness adds a sense of despondency to slower songs like "Change."

Melon's exquisite new single.

"This is good shit!" says a mosher in a T-shirt emblazoned with the insignia of an opening band. "I told you you'd like it," his friend responds. The crowd packing Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Hall averages 16 years old, quite a feat for a band the media pegs as Generation X's own. Even if many fans did come just to see the grunge-pop group Dig, they will leave singing Melon's "Paper Scratcher."

Blind Melon offers an organic alter-

native to the grunge rock choking today's charts. The band is introducing young fans—and reintroducing their parents and older siblings—to songwriting and performance values neglected since the early 70's. They jam through vintage Strats and Telecasters distorted by wah-wah pedals. Tonight they transform "Time" into a 12-minute monster in which Hoon loosely inserts the chorus to Beck's "Loser."

True, other contemporary bands



STEVE FICHNER '93

planted roots in the retro garden earlier, but Blind Melon is digging its own niche—left of Lenny Kravitz' extravagant traditionalism and right of the Spin Doctors' trippy Deadhead vibe.

Shannon pulls his microphone stand back toward his body like it's a loaded spring about to catapult him over the crowd. He's singing "Tones of Home" with the intensity of two Perry Farrells as a whirling moshpit offers bruised bodies unto him. He misses many of

the song's high notes, including his famous "Ai-yai-yai" chant, but compensates with atomic bursts of enthusiasm. Forget the bee girl. This is how Blind Melon made a name for itself, giving audiences everything it has even when exhaustion depletes what there is to give.

Shannon addresses the problem midway through Blind Melon's two-hour set. "Touring all the time kind of gets to be a drag," he tells the audience, "but not as long as there are nights

like this." The gesture is appreciated, but it's hard to believe every night isn't a drag lately.

Three guitar notes seem to cure Blind Melon's fatigue, at least for the moment. They're the notes that launch "No Rain," and they elicit the lustiest crowd reaction all night. Guys grab their bubble-gum popping girlfriends as Shannon sings Brad Smith's lazy song about co-dependency. When Hoon swings his mic above the crowd, no mouth in the arena isn't forming the words, no torso isn't swaying along to Blind Melon's biggest hit.

"No Rain" connects this group of young concertgoers in a way that sug-

Blind Melon offers an organic alternative to the grunge rock choking today's charts.

gests nothing short of the blooming of a new generation itchy to distinguish itself from the values and culture of its predecessors. However and whenever this Generation Y gels, "No Rain" is destined for the K-Tel oldies albums of its future.

Lush applause for "No Rain" is gradually replaced by befuddlement. How can Blind Melon top that? Play the song again? Headlining after only one album poses the problem of pacing a two-hour show to climax around two or three familiar songs, and the Melons have already climaxed before their encore. They're not Aerosmith, after all, who can keep the hits coming all night.

The answer is delivered as a glorious romp through the music of Blind Melon's own past: "Out On The Tiles" by Led Zeppelin and "Candy Says" by the Velvet Underground. Strangely, defining itself by the music of other bands seems to bring Blind Melon's own uniqueness into focus. While Blind Melon doesn't sound like Zep or the Velvets, it exudes the same primal exuberance. On today's rock landscape, this is unique.

The evening closes as Blind Melon's self-titled debut album begins—with the warm, simple strains of "Soak The Skin." When it's over the Melonheads, both new and old converts, head home with fully sated musical appetites. Blind Melon boards a bus, on which it will awaken in six hours staring at the Denver sunrise.