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in the listening room

Rogers Stevens & Christopher Thorn

Blind Melon

The surprise music revival of '93 was the reemergence and widely accepted spirit of San Francisco rock, circa Quicksilver Messenger Service and Moby Grape. Loose, live and playing around the groove is a prominent part of bands like



Spin Doctors, Col. Bruce Hampton and Phish. The newest addition to this fold is Blind Melon with their hit "No Rain." Guitarist Thomas Rogers (he goes by just Rogers) Stevens describes the band's recording technique as "everybody just setting up and playing."

William Hammes

"All the music is played live on the record," he says. "We're not concerned with getting everything just so perfect that you can't get a shoehorn in any gap of music." With their influences seemingly so obvious, a trip into the Listening Room for Rogers and fellow Melon guitarist Christopher Thorn was quite the opposite of what you might expect.

by

john

stix

"Babe I'm Gonna Leave You"

Sons of Mercury/Quicksilver Messenger Service (1969-1975)
(Rhino)

CHRISTOPHER: Moby Grape? This is one of those bands we've never heard of that people

tell us we sound like. Am I close?

ROGERS: I can tell he picked this because it sounds like some of your guitar playing.

CHRISTOPHER: I definitely play loose and he was pretty loose in there. I'm burnt out on classic rock right now but this is kind of cool.

This is something I haven't heard. It almost has a Mamas and Papas vocal feel but the guitar work, I can't put a finger on it. I hear a little Garcia.

ROGERS: There's a Pete Townshendism at the end. I'm not as into the clean sound as I am that fuzzy thing at the end. It sounds like he poked holes in his speakers. This song goes on and on. There's plenty of room for them all to wank off if they want to. It didn't move me in any way. It's obviously a late '60s/early '70s band and there are much better ones than this.

CHRISTOPHER: The drums sounded terrible, too. It was a very thin production sound. Some of the guitar playing was pretty cool but I'm not doing backflips. I'm burnt out on classic rock. I've been listening to classic rock since I was 10 and I feel like I'm done with it. I know it's part of Blind Melon but I'm trying to move on and get into some different things. Right now I'm just in a phase that the thought of classic rock just makes me want to puke. I want to hear something new.

ROGERS: I've permanently written off that style of music. I heard that in a phase of my playing development [but] now I'm not interested in it at all. I'm more interested in writing concise songs. This was a sprawling, directionless song. We're victims of that ourselves. But, personally, I'm interested in sewing up all the frayed pieces rather than [letting] them fly all over the place.

"Omaha"

The Very Best of Moby Grape • Vintage
(Columbia/Legacy)

CHRISTOPHER: It could be a theme song to a bad beach movie that you'd see on a Sunday afternoon.

ROGERS: This is a song they sell on late-night TV. "Freedom rock."

CHRISTOPHER: This is pure shit. When I hear bands like this, which are obviously from the '60s, I don't know what drugs they were on but they were not the same ones The Beatles were on because that to me was definitely not head-drug-induced music. It's nearly obnoxious. The production is horrible, too. It sounds like a tin can.

ROGERS: They were sloppy players but they weren't sloppy players in a cool way—they were just shitty players.

CHRISTOPHER: And too happy-go-lucky. You just want to smack them.

ROGERS: Anybody that smiles that much should be punched right in the face.

GUITAR: This time it was Moby Grape.

ROGERS: Now we know we don't have to buy Moby Grape or Quicksilver Messenger Service. I always knew I would never

like those bands. They never got quite up there. You had them, and then the next echelon would be Jefferson Airplane. Then you moved into the upper echelon of The Allman Brothers and The Beatles, who were the greatest all-time band.

"Medicated Goo"

Last Exit

Traffic

(Island)

ROGERS: We went through a very serious Traffic phase for about a month—right when we were writing some songs on our album. So there are some pretty direct Traffic ripoffs on our album.

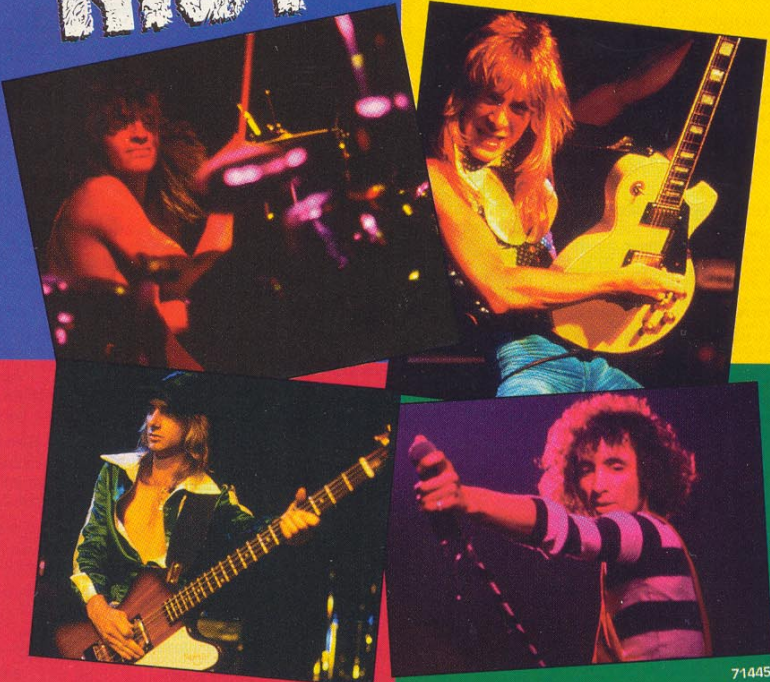
CHRISTOPHER: The biggest thing about Traffic is the drumming. You press "play" and you feel it. You've got to move. This is about rhythm. I love this.

ROGERS: Steve Winwood had a very distinctive voice, plus he was a great songwriter. That wasn't one of my favorite Traffic songs but the rhythm section are serious musicians. They are not hackers like the first couple of bands here. You can tell these guys have listened to a lot of jazz and serious groove things.

CHRISTOPHER: Glen [Graham, drums] and Brad [Smith, bass] were more influenced by Traffic than me as a guitar player.

ROGERS: I don't think I got anything gui-

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tar-wise out of Traffic. At that point I was as developed as probably I'm ever going to get on the guitar. Listening to these guys I heard a rhythm section that is very similar to ours. It showed me not how I would necessarily want to play over a rhythm section, but how some people do play over that sort of rhythm section. This is all about the rhythm and the vocals. We sometimes play "Dear Mr. Fantasy" in our set because the song "Change" is the exact same song on our album. You can sing all the words to "Dear Mr. Fantasy." We also do [The Allman Brothers'] "Midnight Rider" in the middle of "Holy Man." It's rhythmically very similar.

CHRISTOPHER: To give credit to Shannon [Hoon, vocals]—he wasn't a Traffic fan and he wrote "Change." It just happens to be the same chord structure.

"Midnight Rider"

Club R&R: Epic Records Presents An Acoustic Evening with The Allman Brothers

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ROGERS: Of the jamming bands, The Allman Brothers Band was my favorite. I was more of a Dickey [Betts] fan than I was of Duane Allman. They had great songs, too, like this and "Blue Sky." "Jessica" is one of the only jam instrumental songs that I really got off on. I was never into any of the other Southern bands, but I really like the Allmans. They had the looseness and were almost jazzy a lot of times. Their melodies don't stick to straight-up blues scales. A lot of their melodies were in beautiful major scales or they will go out and do some weird things.

CHRISTOPHER: Out of all the jamming bands they are the best at it. I never got that deep into The Allman Brothers Band. I probably did [through] osmosis, being around these guys listening to it a lot. They are about songs and jamming and I like bands that are really concerned with songs. For me, regardless of playing, every single song by The Beatles was amazing. I don't get that from this band, but that was beautiful. I listen to a lot of acoustic music. That was a cool version. I never heard it before.

"Pull Me Under"

Images and Words

Dream Theater

(Atco/East West)

CHRISTOPHER: This could be metal at any moment—I'm just warning everybody.

ROGERS: Either that or it could build up into a power ballad.

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CHRISTOPHER: I feel like we might have to excuse ourselves here for a second. We might have to leave.

ROGERS: This is one of those guitar sounds that when he hits a note, about a million lights jump up on his guitar rig.

CHRISTOPHER: Any minute now there is going to be a squealy.

ROGERS: Is this, like, Queensryche?

CHRISTOPHER: If it is, let's turn it off right away because I hate that band.

ROGERS: Hate it. This is the kind of music you listen to right when you start to get your pubic hairs.

CHRISTOPHER: I can't even be fair to this music I hate it so bad. I can't even sit through one song. I know I'm not being fair but I think it is complete garbage. That sort of guitar playing is just stupid.

ROGERS: If I want to hear a metal band I really like old Black Sabbath and Soundgarden; heavy bands with brains. If I were listening to an angry metal band I would be more into Rage Against The Machine or Sugar. I like that Sugar record a lot, I like Sonic Youth a lot. That's heavy, guitar-based music that I listen to.

CHRISTOPHER: Playing fast for the sake of fast is hideous. I hate that whole mentality of sitting around playing scales and cock-rock crap.

ROGERS: I heard some squealies. I don't really like that sound either. I'm not into those guitar sounds. When I hear that stuff I get squeamish.

GUITAR: That was Dream Theater.

CHRISTOPHER: We'll remember not to buy that record. I bet they have really nice hair.... Now I'm being mean.

ROGERS: This is just our opinion. There's a lot of people that like Dream Theater and that's fine. They get off on it—good for them. They'll probably hate us, maybe they won't.

CHRISTOPHER: They probably do because we sound like we're playing sloppy. But that's alright, it's just a different thing. We're just coming from a different space.

ROGERS: In no way do we condemn this sort of music. These people have the right to exist.

CHRISTOPHER: Just keep it the hell away from us.

"Little Miss Can't Be Wrong"

Homebelly Groove

Spin Doctors

(Epic Associated)

CHRISTOPHER: You played that song and I immediately saw the video. That is the one bad thing about MTV. Immediately I saw those happy-go-lucky faces jumpin' around for that song in the video and it just makes me sick. I don't like the

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band and I think their songs are kind of gay. They might be great players, I don't know. I haven't really given them a chance. This is a good example of a band that, for me, was really burned out from MTV.

ROGERS: I just don't like the music. It doesn't have any salt to it. There is no grit under their fingernails. It's one of those smiley bands again which starts to bother me.

CHRISTOPHER: I will say they have been really successful and I have no problem with that because that band has toured their ass off. I respect them for that. They have been working at it for a long time and I can appreciate that.

ROGERS: This is the band that rubs me completely the wrong way when I hear them. I have nothing against the guys personally, I just hate the music. I'm sure both them and Steve Miller are aware this song sounds like a Steve Miller tune. To me they are like Huey Lewis with this '90s hippies vibe.

CHRISTOPHER: Other people listening to us would pick out all the shit we ripped off and go, "Jesus, isn't that obvious?"

ROGERS: "Who is suing them [Blind Melon] today? If not it will be somebody else tomorrow."

CHRISTOPHER: In Europe we did this same sort of thing that you are doing right here. We had a record listening

party where each person could play two songs and everyone had to be quiet and listen. You had to listen to the whole song and each person would go around and critique the song.

ROGERS: I picked Rage Against The Machine and Dinosaur Jr. I'm way into Dinosaur Jr.

CHRISTOPHER: I picked Stevie Wonder, who is a genius. That's all you can say about him. I picked [Shame] by Brad, the Stone Gossard record. The songs are really good. It's cool that he can separate himself from Pearl Jam and do different things like that.

"Always with Me Always with You"

Time Machine

Joe Satriani

(Relativity)

ROGERS: It's the theme from *Bay Watch*. It's very dramatic in a stupid way.

CHRISTOPHER: This is obnoxious. I can't listen to this. I feel embarrassed for whoever this is.

ROGERS: It's overly dramatic. Who is it?

GUITAR: Joe Satriani.

ROGERS: I never listened to Joe Satriani. I never really got him. I really hate the way his guitar sounds.

CHRISTOPHER: It sounds like he is going through a Rockman.

ROGERS: We're bastards.

CHRISTOPHER: I don't feel it. With the exception of it being embarrassingly dramatic, it doesn't hit me the same way as a Beatles or Dylan song does. I'm sure a lot of people get off on this.

ROGERS: This guy is really getting off on himself. That is the main point of this music. He is really enjoying doing this, which is fine. He suckered a bunch of people into listening to it. Boy, that was mean.

CHRISTOPHER: It's awful. But it's honest. It's just our opinion. ●

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