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The inside story

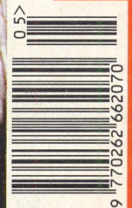
**BLIND
MELON**
The last
interview

**WIN
KORN's
rarest
track**

SILVERCHAIR
Freaky vid action
& new LP

The Offspring

Smashing punk kings ride again



4 POSTERS
No Doubt
Korn
Reef
Bush



Nine Inch Nails
3 Colours Red
Def Leppard
Lodestar
Pantera
Thunder
Placebo

The Long Kiss

On February 3, **BLIND MELON** will release their final album, 'Nico', 16 months after Shannon Hoon died from a cocaine overdose in New Orleans. In his first interview since the tragedy, guitarist Rogers Stevens tells Paul Rees about the band's long battle to keep their singer alive...

OCTOBER 20, 1995. Blind Melon played what was to be the last show of their 'Soup' tour in Houston, Texas. By all accounts it was a poor gig, with observers particularly noting the erratic performance of singer Shannon Hoon.

The band left Houston straight after the show to drive to New Orleans. Shannon, who had recently been through two drug rehabilitation programmes, sat at the back of the bus, taking cocaine and bemoaning the fact that the 'Soup' album had failed to repeat the success of the band's self-titled debut record.

Blind Melon's bus arrived in New Orleans at 7am on October 21. Shannon went out to call his girlfriend, Lisa Crouse. He bought a drink in a local diner, sat and read a newspaper, then returned to the bus, where he climbed into guitarist Christopher Thorn's bunk and went to sleep. Several hours later, Blind Melon's soundman, Lyle Eaves, went to wake Shannon for soundcheck.

"I turned on the light, and as soon as I saw him I knew something was wrong," Eaves told US magazine 'Details'. When an ambulance arrived, Shannon Hoon was pronounced dead – from a cocaine overdose, a coroner's report later confirmed. He was 28. His and Lisa's daughter, Nico Blue, was three months old.

Shannon's body was taken back to Dayton, Indiana, his hometown. He was buried in Dayton Cemetery in his favourite T-shirt. His family, his girlfriend and his bandmates have spent the past year coming to terms with the fact that he is gone forever.

TWO MONTHS after Shannon died, the remaining members of Blind Melon – Thorn, guitarist Rogers Stevens, bassist Brad Smith and drummer Glen Graham – got together to listen to all the unreleased songs their late singer had recorded.


They dated from the beginning of the band's brief history ('Soul One' was one of the first songs Blind Melon recorded, in 1990), to the 'Soup' sessions, through to the final tracks Hoon taped, where all you could hear was a lone, cracked voice, an acoustic guitar and the hiss of the tape.

These songs make up 'Nico', the third and final Blind Melon album, which is released in the UK on February 3. In the US, it was accompanied by a video, 'Letters From A Porcupine', incorporating live footage of the band and film shot on their own camcorders – the usual goofing around on the road stuff, here sad and tragic.

"When we went into the studio we weren't sure we were going to put 'Nico' out," explains Rogers Stevens, speaking from the apartment in New York where he's currently living. "But when we finished, we felt like it stood on its own as a third record. Some of Shannon's best songs and lyrics are on it, and I just want people who were into the band to have



"Shannon
a dance



ss Goodnight

more of him to remember than just two records.

"It was therapeutic. We felt like we got cut off right in the middle of something. So, to get in and do this last record, it was somehow as if we were finishing what we were doing."

It's impossible to hear much of 'Nico' and not feel that Shannon Hoon knew what was coming. On the harrowing 'Hell', for instance, he sings 'I'll disintegrate over time', while both 'Swallowed' and 'Pull' are rife with eerily prophetic lines.

"Yeah," says Rogers, "that's something you have a whole new perspective on now. When Shannon was alive and sitting around playing these songs, a lot of the time he was laughing and joking. But now, looking back on it, they have a whole new meaning."

"You know, these things (the drugs) were always an issue; we were always talking with Shannon... I mean, you met him, you saw, these things were discussed with him all the time. We got him into rehab a couple of times and we were aware, and he was aware, that there was a danger in his lifestyle."

More than anything, 'Nico', speaks of many promises left terribly unfulfilled.

"Absolutely. I mean, we felt like we were going through a period where we were really starting to evolve and turn into something unique as a band."

WHEN BLIND Melon started their 'Soup' tour, their manager hired a drug counsellor to accompany Shannon on the road. He was fired within days.

Prior to the tour, in June '95, Hoon told me he'd prefer to remain at home with his girlfriend and await the birth of their child than go straight back on tour. After his death, questions were asked as to whether a man who was still fighting a lengthy drug addiction should have been forced into that environment.

"I want to say that we felt Shannon was better off and healthier on the road with us than he was at home with a lot of time on his hands," Stevens insists. "He seemed to do better when he was busy and didn't have time to sit around and dwell on things, and basically start f**king around."

"It seemed to be better when he was playing shows and getting all these things out onstage."

Shannon made his last UK appearance at London's Mean Fiddler in August '95. On that night, he appeared to be in his element, wearing a joke shop pair of glasses and a flashing red clown's nose for much of the set.

Did Blind Melon think that the events of October 21, 1995, were somehow inevitable?

"I think there were times in our career when I was genuinely thinking it was gonna happen," says Stevens slowly. "But at that point, Shannon was generally pretty healthy and, you know, he'd just got out of rehab in the summer and his attitude was positive. We felt like, with the baby and the record and the touring, we were finally starting to beat this thing."

"Addiction is one of those things where if you turn your back on it for minute, it's there again. It caught him by surprise. He wasn't bingeing at the time; this was a one-night thing." ➤

Shannon was aware that there was a danger in his lifestyle..." **ROGERS STEVENS**

"I really miss not getting a call from Shannon every day..." ROGERS STEVENS

➤ After his death, were you annoyed at him for going back to drugs?
 "I was just crushed, you know. And then, yeah, I got mad and like, 'Here we are left with all these problems'. But that's just selfish."
 "I think all bets are off when somebody's dead, and you have to assess a person's life and what got them where they were... Shannon's greatest gifts were also his downfall. So you just try to understand the person, and to carry any bitterness or anger towards them isn't going to help and... it's not right."
 What did you do immediately after he died?
 "Everybody was really freaked out. It's one of those things where you've got to spend a lot of time by yourself and try to make sense of things."
 "It's been a really hard year. At this point I feel like I'm ready to move forward, but it's taken a while to get here."

ROGERS SAYS that picking up a guitar and writing songs was the "therapy" that got him through the past year. The rest of the band spent time together at Brad Smith's wedding in Seattle last June, and came to the conclusion that they'd continue to make music together, whilst laying the name Blind Melon to rest.
 "There's a bond between us after all this," Rogers considers, "and we still write well together. We're gonna change the name and do new songs..."
 "We want to try to, I guess, step away. It'd be insulting to Shannon and all the people who were into the band for us to tour around as Blind Melon."
 Last summer, an ad appeared in the New York paper 'Village Voice' announcing: 'Blind Melon is looking for a singer. We will continue with a new name and new songs. Please send a tape, a letter or whatever to...'

They got a lot of tapes through the mail. Stevens is working with a singer in New York at present, but nothing's definitely been resolved just yet.
 "It's pretty depressing listening to tapes of singers at times," he says. "You realise how really amazing Shannon was."

A PORTION of the proceeds from the US release of 'Nico' will be donated to the Musicians Assistance Programme, an American organisation founded by jazz musician Buddy Arnold to provide financial aid for touring musicians with drug problems who can't afford to get treatment.

In the wake of Shannon Hoon's death, and those of Hole's Kristen Pfaff and The Smashing Pumpkins' Jonathan Melvoin, senior figures in the US music industry called for stringent measures to combat drug problems within the musical community - including establishing a compulsory testing programme for artists. Under this system, anyone found to be taking illegal drugs would be excluded from signing to a record company until they'd been through a treatment programme.

"Just think how ludicrous that would be," responds Stevens. "It's not going to work. I think people are best helped if they have all the available information and they aren't having fingers pointed in their faces; that just turns them the other way."

"People like us, it's our job to hold up our example and say: 'If you live like this, there's a chance that this is going to happen to you, so you can choose'. It's pretty anti-rock 'n' roll, I guess."

If, in the future, you found yourself working with a singer who had similar problems to Shannon's, would you handle the situation differently?

"Well, we made a lot of choices along the way, to do this and that, we got Shannon into rehab twice... I feel like every situation is unique in some ways, and in some ways it's the same."



BLIND MELON '95 (from left - Rogers, Christopher, Shannon, Glen, Brad): "It'd be insulting to Shannon if we were to tour around as Blind Melon..."

"You provide this person with every opportunity to quit, but ultimately it's in their hands. They have to really want to do it. And Shannon did, but it's one of those things that's a day-to-day thing."

THE REMAINING members of Blind Melon are still signed to Capitol Records. According to Stevens, a lot of new songs have been written, and once they've completed the line-up "things will happen quickly". A new name will be the last thing they decide upon.

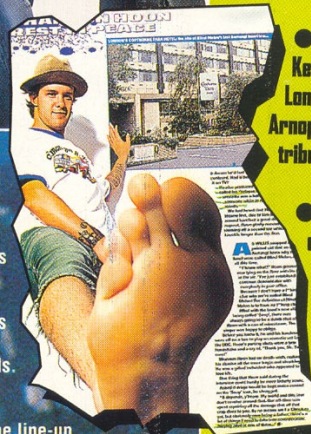
All that's left of Shannon Hoon are three records, a baby girl, and the memories he left behind with those who loved him.

"The love this guy had for other people was powerful," says Stevens, "but he could also be vicious at times. If somebody else would've done all the things to me that he did, I probably wouldn't have stuck with them. But he did so many amazing, beautiful things it made up for everything."

"There were a lot of really intense moments. I really miss not getting a phone call every day from him, telling me about his latest calamity."

"Nico" ends with Shannon Hoon singing "Letters From A Porcupine" onto Christopher Thorn's answerphone. There's a couple of verses, a fumbled chord change, and then the tape runs out.

"It's unavoidable that it's symbolic," says Rogers. "He's cut off before he got to finish. Absolutely." ■



THE LAST WORDS

Shannon Hoon's final interview with Kerrang! revisited...

● Shannon Hoon's last interview with Kerrang! took place in August '95 at London's Copthorne Hotel with Jason Arnopp. It was subsequently published as a tribute to him on November 4, 1995.

● He talked with pride about the birth of his month-old daughter, Nico. "It's the healthiest thing that's ever happened to me," he said.

● Shannon was carrying two children's books on the road with him - he'd read them onto tapes and send them to Nico. "It's the only way I can be there without being there," he said. "I'd be lying if I said I was enthusiastic to be back on tour. It'd be easier if I had Lisa and Nico with me."

● Later, Shannon talked with humour about his spells in rehab. He recalled staying in one hotel, and the concierge removing the mini-bar from his room: "He was from Zaire. It's weird when someone from Zaire knows that you have an alcohol problem."

● He finished by clowning around for snapper Dave Willis and insisting: "Being a father, there's a lot of things I need to take into consideration. Staying alive is one of them..."