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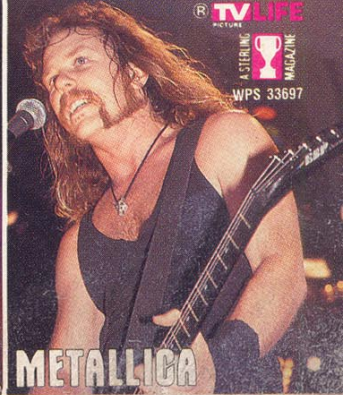
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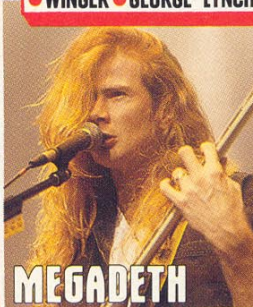


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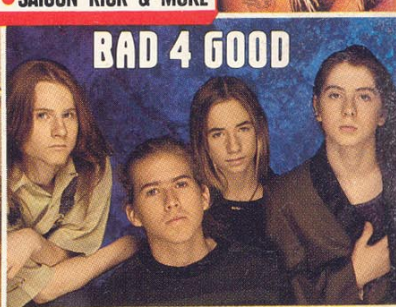
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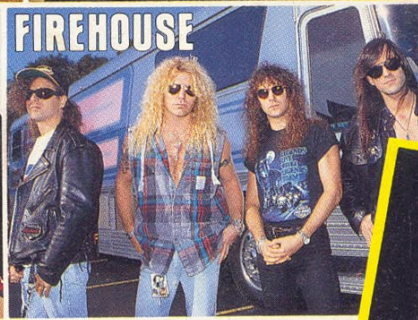
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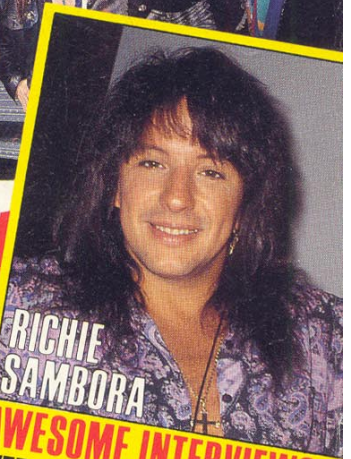
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BLIND MELON



RIPE FOR THE PICKING

Though definite plans were unset at press time, Blind Melon (l. to r., Christopher, Glen, Shannon, Rogers, and Brad) plans to remain on the road well into '93.

by Marina Zogbi

■ It's hard to believe Blind Melon's debut album has only been out since the end of September. For a year or so prior to its release, the quintet (vocalist Shannon Hoon, drummer Glen Graham, guitarists Rogers Stevens and Christopher Thorn, and bassist Brad Smith) managed to garner major exposure without benefit of a recording. Happily, their self-titled LP lives up to all the advanced hype with its stirring blend of hard rock, folk and Southern boogie.

Blind Melon first came to our attention via Shannon wailing backup on Guns N' Roses' "Don't Cry" and his subsequent appearance in the video. (An acquaintance of fellow Lafayette, Indiana native Axl, he happened to be in the studio the day GN'R cut that track). After touring with Soundgarden in the fall of '91, Blind Melon scored the prestigious opening slot for MTV's 120 Minutes tour, headlined by PIL and Big Audio Dynamite II. At the same time, MTV aired a video for

"Dear Ol' Dad," a song off the band's forthcoming album. With all that going on, why did they wait so long to put out an album? "We didn't want to make a record until we were ready," says Shannon. "We weren't about to go in and record because we had a lot of hype behind us, and everyone working with us was content to wait with us."

This band of small-town guys first met in Los Angeles, where they'd each gone to seek their musical fortunes. Rogers and Brad, originally from West Point, Mississippi, hooked up with Shannon in March, 1990 and the trio began writing immediately. Dover, PA native Christopher joined next and after a fruitless search for a drummer, Rogers and Brad called their friend Glen up from Mississippi. After showcasing and signing with Capitol Records, Blind Melon relocated to Durham, North Carolina to get away from the distractions of L.A. and write new material. The song "Sleepyhouse" details the atmosphere of the band's living quarters. "Everything was kind of one big nap there," laughs Shannon. "We would get up, go to the living room, migrate there to play like 3:30 in the morning. All five of us lived there together, plus a couple of the guys' girlfriends."

The time proved fruitful for penning new songs and working on older tunes. "I actually found different versions of 'Change' when I went back to Indiana recently," muses Shannon. I had that song from like 1988. Then Brad and Rogers had written the majority of 'Tones of Home' before we even met. There were all these little potholes and gaps in the songs where everybody put their hand in and added their own little touch to make them complete, but a lot of ideas were things that we had carried with us for a while."

Aside from writing, the band really gelled on a personal level in NC. "There were a lot of relationships being built there," says Shannon. "There was a lot of music we were writing, but more than that, we were all becoming friends." He compares assembling the band in L.A. to meeting someone at a carnival. "There's all kinds of distractions and you never fully get to know someone until you leave the carnival and go someplace quiet. Everybody lives in separate locations now and we can take a month away from each other and still pick up where we left off because of what resulted from Durham, NC. It was probably the healthiest move as a band we've made."

Another good move was hiring Rick Parasher (Pearl Jam) to produce their album, as his light touch was perfect for Blind Melon's loose sound. Recalls Shannon, "We all liked the Temple Of The Dog record and thought on a whim, maybe we can get a hold of Rick. We didn't need a producer's ideas as far as arranging because we do all that ourselves. We just needed a good guy who would listen to our ideas. Rick flew down to North Carolina and we had dinner and it was obvious that we could work together. He's a good guy; we had fun in and out of the studio."

For a relatively new band, Blind Melon have a lot of touring experience under their belts. Shannon believes that's just the natural way to go: "Touring is what it's all about, it's more important than an album to me," he states. "Anybody can go into the studio and make an album, but a good album ain't worth a f.ck if you can't do it live." Before the band's recent headlining club tour, they opened six Ozzy/Alice In Chains shows, playing to their biggest crowds yet. "The big rock shows are just really kind of unrealistic to me," says Shannon, "You can't really relate to someone who's 20 feet taller and 20 yards away." On the other hand, audiences were receptive and "It was great to see the song 'Paranoid' being played every night!"

On their club jaunt, Blind Melon toured alone with local bands opening. "It's cool," notes Shannon, "A lot more intimate, a lot more real." It also afforded the band more of a chance to talk with their fans. Since the album's out and people have had a chance to peruse Shannon's introspective lyrics, "They have something to grasp onto, a different tool to try to find the mood of the song," says Shannon. "I don't like to describe the songs that much to other people because it kind of steals the freedom of the listener to base his own story. Last night a guy came up to me and said 'I kind of have my own interpretation of this song,' and that's exactly what I want." As for people looking up to him as fans inevitably do, Shannon demurs, chuckling, "I'm not the most confident person in the world, not the most stable character to be around. I feel my way through the dark every day just like everybody else . . . I find things to make me feel good and if they make someone else feel good, that's great and I'm happy for them. Obviously, I don't expect to cure the world with our lyrics."

In talking about his own diverse musical tastes, Shannon noted, "It's funny, I wake up to Nine Inch Nails and I go to sleep to Simon and Garfunkel . . . I like mood music, I don't like gimmick-oriented things. It's got to have some kind of substance." Not so coincidentally, these are the very qualities that make Blind Melon shine. ●