

From Bee Girl To Big Time

By Michelle Cordle
Music Monitor

The story of how Blind Melon got signed is an amusing one. Basically, the band had only been together a few months and had two or three songs. When the labels began showing interest, the boys lied through their teeth and said, "Yeah we've been together for years and we've got tons of songs!" None of that seemed to matter when they burst, or buzzed, onto the music scene with the infectious "No Rain" and that infamous Bee Girl video. Well, the Bee Girl has been laid to rest, but Blind Melon hasn't. They return to the music world with a new album, *Soup*, and a renewed enthusiasm. I recently had the opportunity to talk with Blind Melon's bassist Brad Smith, and lead singer, Shannon Hoon. Here's what they had to say about what they've been up to for the past couple of years, what they think about MTV and how they feel about being a band.

Where have you guys been? It's been almost two years since the success of your first album, how come it's taken so long?

Brad: It's been longer than I want, too, believe me. There have been various reasons...court dates, drug rehab, Capitol Records dropping the ball half the time. We've had our share of problems.

Shannon: We have been putting together the side of life that has been neglected due to the engulfed rock 'n' roll side. I think everybody has been focusing on other foundations of their life, sometimes that entails a little bit of absence.

I have been reading about how the members of the band kind of took a vacation from each other. Was that a good thing?

Brad: We need to get away from each other. It was good for this record because we all wrote individually and when we got back together we had all these new songs to show each other.

Shannon: Yeah, it was definitely a good thing. The end result, regardless of how anyone else embraces this record, I see a lot of accomplishment in how we're coping and growing together. I feel like we're proceeding forward, progressing. Our enthusiasm has been reinstated.

What was it like recording in New Orleans?

Brad: It was crazy! There's a weird vibe in New Orleans. I can't really put my finger on it, but it's definitely dark. I think that certain vibe came across in the album. It's a little weird, a little strange, slightly psychedelic, but just reeking with a certain melancholy attitude, too.

Shannon: There was so much to do down there the main focus wasn't making the record. Which basically made the air about making the record more comfortable. The city has so much to corrupt you with, so much to distract you with. There's so many elements about that city that are dangerously entertaining.

What was different about recording this album from the first? Was it as rushed?

Brad: In contrast, this record came together so easy it wasn't even funny. We got together a month in advance, put the songs together, recorded it and mixed it. Boom, it's done! The actual physical recording and getting together of the record only took about three months and it was done. It was all the other bullshit of people moving away, being fed up with touring and wondering what the hell was going to happen next. Then realizing, "Oh, we're going to make it happen next."

Shannon: It wasn't rushed and we were able to remove a lot of the pressure that we had created ourselves from the first record. I think with this record everyone was a little bit more familiar with the process.

Did you feel a lot of pressure coming from your label or did you feel any personal pressure because your previous album was such a huge success?

Shannon: Yeah, there was pressure there, but it wasn't coming from the label. Our label doesn't pressure us too much. We have a good working relationship, they let us do our thing and they do theirs. When we went in we realized the pressure was only there if we let it be. I think everybody was so bent on not letting it manifest itself in the studio. It may have existed when we were getting ready to go into the studio, but once we came into the studio, our producer, Andy Wallace, was a big factor in helping to alleviate a little bit of it. I think everybody kept the pressure at arm's length. I'm happy with this record. I'm not going to equate the success of it by the amount of copies it sells. I'm more happy with this one than the first. I think we've progressed as a band and in our working relationship with each other. We know where each other stands. Obviously we're not all best friends; there's a lot of friction in this band but we've productively learned how to use it. We all have a common denominator as far as respect for each other.

You guys sort of had an overnight success with the first album, even though it had been out for over a year. Did you enjoy all the attention it brought you?

Brad: It was weird. It felt completely awkward. Sometimes I felt like we didn't belong there. I'd much rather see a band like the Meat Puppets get the cover of Rolling Stone instead of us. I respect so many other bands. In a way it's kind of f**ked up. We got big too fast and it kind of f**ked with us. We've had to check our egos and kind of make sense out of what's going on. There are so many other bands that I respect and when stuff like that happens I kind of feel guilty. I feel guilty that we're just slipping through the cracks so easy. On this album we're really working to stumble on stuff that's creative and intriguing, whether you like it or not. You're either gonna love this album or you're gonna hate it. But we want it that way. We're digging deep and we expect people who are into us to dig deep also.

What is your attitude towards MTV?

Brad: MTV has their own agenda. They put on stuff that many people can grasp on to. MTV is a good vehicle. I wouldn't know some of the bands today if it weren't for MTV. They would have completely slipped through. MTV is definitely one of the bigger tools in the industry for getting the band's face out there.

Shannon: I think we're at a time that society is a little bit more lazy. You have to show it to them before they will embrace it. It's really a cheap form of corporate whoring, to be honest. It's like, "Did you write a song to make a video for it?" Obviously, MTV is a very powerful thing and I have no gripes about them. They draw in the youth of the world, and I feel like what they do is fine, but at the same time I feel like a lot of people need to look at it and not let it brainwash them. There are so many good bands and just because they don't get played on MTV doesn't mean they're not a good band.

Are you bothered by the fact that you work really hard to put out a quality album but it all depends on the kind of video you have as to whether or not it's going to be successful?

Brad: When you're in a rock band, you're no longer just a musician. You're also a face. You're also a creative element in a video. I mean, if someone is still living in the '80s going, "Man, videos are taking over the music world," well, you're damn right. So you better shape up and be creative on that level, too. I don't have a problem with that. Bands have to learn to expect that if they want to put their face out there on a big level, they're gonna have to shoot a video. And they're gonna have to make it really good and have people subscribe to it.

You guys are really big on getting across the point that Blind Melon is a band and not just a singer with musicians backing him up. Why is this so important to you and do you think you've been successful in getting this message across?

Brad: We're just trying to make it more politically correct. So that everybody's egos are still in check. One person is not better than the other one just because the music hierarchy perceives it that way. Everybody understands that musically speaking we're all on the

same level. There's no genius or virtuoso in the band. That's where it kind of lies. It doesn't really matter who gets the most press. We know in our hearts that nobody in the band is any better than the next person. It's important.

Shannon: I don't know if people are recognizing it or not. I like the team effort. I like the solidarity. Some of us are not the best of friends and to have that solidarity in this type of situation, to me, means so much. I'm in a band where not one guy is writing all the songs, everybody writes songs. Everybody has the ability, musically, to write a song. Therefore, there is no leader of this band. We've never treated it like that. No one's opinion has more weight than anyone else's. We run everything by majority rule. I'm so sick of seeing good bands go down the drain because the singer wants to alienate himself from the band. Sometimes I feel like some of these people should define what 'band' means. It doesn't do that individual any good to try and carry that weight; that's uncarriable weight. I see a lot of people bitching and moaning about the pressure that's on them. Why don't they backtrack and maybe see how much of that pressure they're bringing onto themselves. Maybe the big bite that they're trying to take or the weight they're trying to pick up is something that you can't carry. So when you have five other people to help you and rely on and maybe consolidate all the weight lifting characteristics of what a band is supposed to be, it makes it easier to tolerate.