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MAY 12-25, 1993
NUMBER 123 £1.95

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BLIND MELON: SMALL TOWN

From the depths of Hicksville, USA to the bright lights of Los Angeles, **BLIND MELON** frontman **SHANNON HOON** relives his great adventure with **PAUL REES**!

SHANNON HOON speaks in a quiet, almost timid voice that stumbles clumsily across sentences. He spends minutes searching for the right word or phrase, concluding each one with a nervous, self-conscious chuckle. The man who appeared in Guns n' Roses' 'Don't Cry' promo-video could be the 'small town white boy' Axl Rose described in the infamous 'One In A Million'.

Like Rose, Shannon Hoon came to Los Angeles from Lafayette, Indiana, joined a band and made a record. Blind Melon's self-titled debut album isn't the next 'Appetite For Destruction', but the two bands will be sharing a stage at the National Bowl in Milton Keynes on 29 and 30 May. A long way from home.

"Where I'm from, it's a very small community," Hoon explains. "We have good small city government there, and there's a few factories that have good retirement benefits. You're able to live your whole life there, and really be quite comfortable. But as far as what I wanted to do... I wanted to see more."

"When I was watching the news, I wanted to understand what it was all about. I wanted to see the country. So I left this repressed environment that I had been raised in and moved. It wasn't necessarily for musical purposes, it was more just to broaden my spectrum of what I thought the world was about."

Three years ago, Shannon Hoon packed his belongings into a small car and headed for the West Coast.

"It took me four or five days to get to LA, but I took my time," he recalls. "It was nice, because it was just me. If I wanted to exit off the freeway, I could do it. It was a time in which I could really think about what was going on and what I wanted to do. I love driving by myself; you get a chance to be away from everything else."

LIKE MILLIONS of hopefuls before him, Hoon arrived in Los Angeles with nowhere to stay and nothing to do. "It was a culture shock," he says. "There was a lot going on there that I had no idea about. I was, like, 18 years old and the place seemed like such a big deal. I grew up a lot there, man. I was just thrown into this chaotic environment that I'd never even imagined. Where I was raised, it was pretty mellow. You never had any problems with traffic or parking. When I got to LA, you

had to base your whole day around the traffic and finding a place to leave the car."

"I enjoyed driving around. I would go up into the hills and drive my shitty little car through all these really rich neighbourhoods. You could skip a rock across the city I came from, and in LA it was just endless. I also used to enjoy people watching. You just go into a part of town, sit down and try and be invisible. I just used to eavesdrop and zoom in on different kinds of people, 'cos it's such a mixing bowl of people in LA."

"In Lafayette, there's only one kind of person, everybody is basically the same. When I moved to LA my mind was opened up to a lot of things. I knew that I was never a prejudiced person, but where I'm from it's easy to not think about it. Everybody got on, but you were never put in a position where you had to interact with a lot of different races. When I got to LA I was put into that environment. It was my chance to really interact with all kinds of people; blacks, homosexuals, every kind of human being you could imagine was there. I enjoyed doing that, and realising that I could get along with everybody."

Among the first people that Hoon met were guitarist Rogers Stevens and bassist Brad Smith, who had relocated from West Point, Mississippi. The trio immediately began writing songs together, and Blind Melon was born.

"I met Rogers and Brad within 30 days of being in LA," Hoon begins. "The thing that was really refreshing about that was that all the other people I'd met when I got out there were so concerned about what kind of stars they knew. That had nothing to do with my reality."

"When I met Rogers and Brad, we were all pretty much raised in small town communities and so they were able to see my point of view. Glen (Graham, drums) is from the same place as Rogers and Brad, and he came out when we couldn't find a drummer. He just dropped everything he was doing, and arrived with ten bucks in his pocket. Christopher (Thorn, guitar) is from York, Pennsylvania, which is a very small town."

THEIR COLLECTIVE roots may explain why Blind Melon have introduced themselves on such a low-key level. Blind Melon haven't left a trail of destruction and controversy in their wake... so far.

"Yeah, we are a product of our environment," Hoon nods. "Because you're raised in a repressed atmosphere, and because your community might not have a lot to offer you, finding a way to deal with things is hard. That's where all of us spent our formative years, so it has had an effect."

"With the band, we kind of wanted to start at a real grass roots level. Before a lot of hype hit the band or the record came out, we did a couple of small club tours. Then we went out with Soundgarden for a short time, which was a chance to break into a new audience. We've also been out with PIL and Big Audio Dynamite, and right after that we finished the record."

"We were fortunate enough to be able to build a good base for when the record came out; a lot of people were familiar with what we sounded like. It's been growing ever since."

'Blind Melon' is a distinctly old-fashioned record. There are moments - 'Change', 'No Rain' and 'Sleepy House' - that echo Led Zeppelin's blend of Folk and Rock, while others create a mood that smells of dope.

"We've been tagged Retro and all this stuff, but we've always been into a lot of the older records when there weren't many gimmicks," Hoon considers. "We didn't use a lot of big effects. There are a few of the guys who're into classic artists, and every now and again in a song that'll soak through. Listening to the record as a whole, I think there's a lot going on that would be really hard to pigeonhole."

People haven't had to look too hard for a pigeonhole, though. 'Blind Melon' was recorded in Seattle with producer Rick Parasher (Temple Of The Dog, Pearl Jam).

"There were a few bands who became successful who didn't abide by any organised chord progressions, and they happened to come from the Northwest," Hoon responds. "If you were a band that came out that didn't follow any guidelines, you were immediately categorised as the 'Seattle Sound' by the press. You know, there's music like this going on everywhere. The people who lump it all together don't have any originality or sense of musical information."

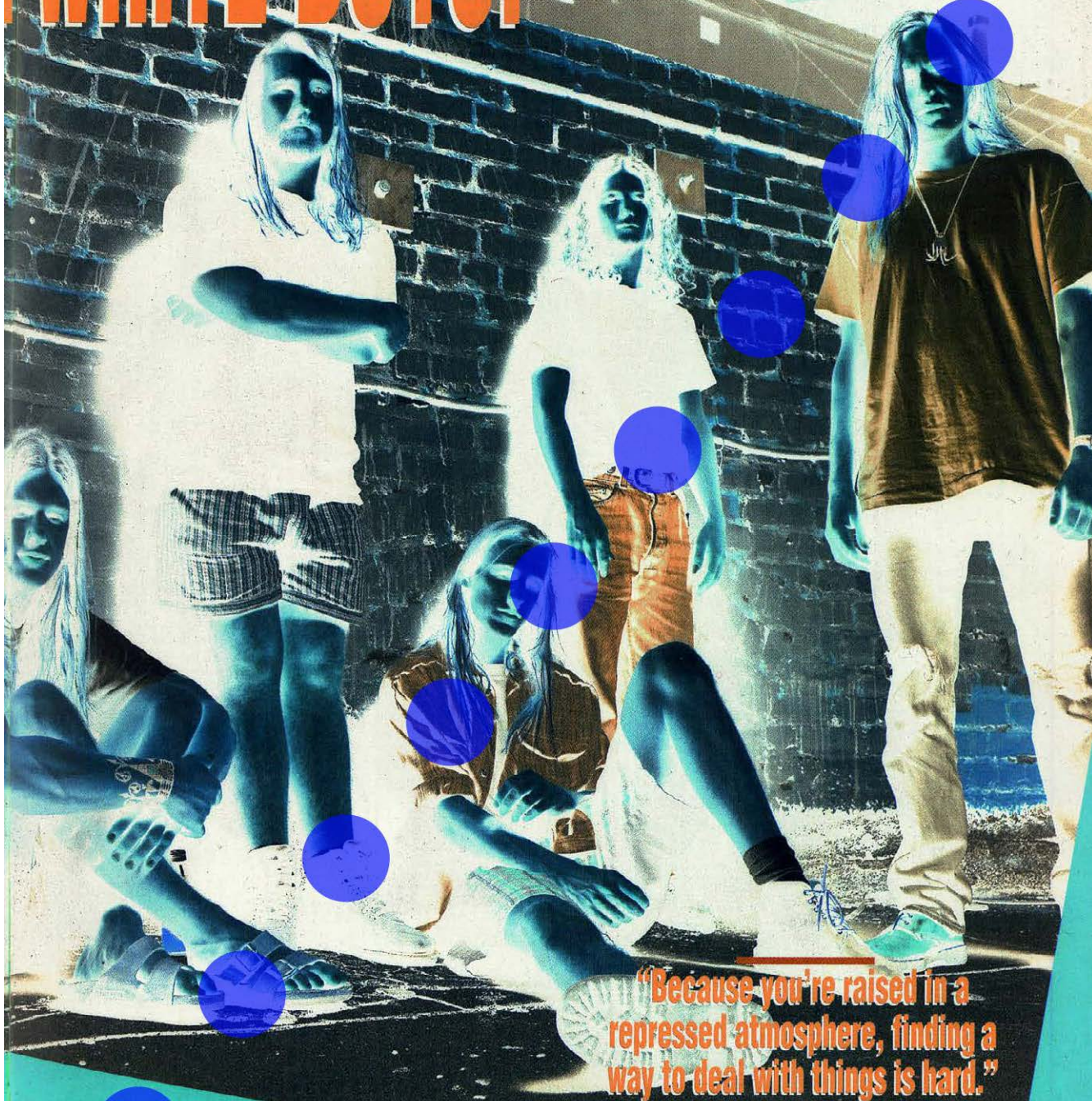
"The thing that appealed to us about Rick was that he was a new producer who wasn't a big Rock 'n' Roll fan, so his ears

aren't burnt on it. He works well with a band, rather than for or at the band. There was never any kind of pressure that surrounded making the record."

MELLOW AS he sounds, rumour suggests that young Mr Hoon is likely to detonate at the very mention of Axl Rose. His association with the human mood-swing has dogged Blind Melon's every move. Strange then, that they should choose to support Guns n' Roses and exacerbate the

Blind Melon (Shannon Hoon, far left):
A product of their environment!

WHITE BOYS!



"Because you're raised in a repressed atmosphere, finding a way to deal with things is hard."

SHANNON HOON

pet-band theories.

"No, I'm over that," he replies without ripping his phone out of the wall. "People just wanna hold onto that (the 'Don't Cry' video) as a part of Blind Melon, but that's irrelevant to what we're about as a band. That was something I did as a friendship thing. I'm happy to be playing with them - they're a good band."

"We have a record, and I'm very proud

of it. Axl is from my hometown, we're friends, and I was very fortunate to be able to see what the music business is all about through him. I could see what was coming before I was actually in the fire."

So, what are Blind Melon about as a band?

"Just communication. I enjoy seeing

people after our shows and having conversations with them. When there's some kind of communication through one of the songs, maybe it's just a line, then that's what it's all about. That's what I'm looking for, more than anything."

WILLIAM HAMES/IDOLS