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NO. 136, NOVEMBER 10-23 1993 £1.95

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OUTSIDE AMERICA

More than a year after its release, BLIND MELON's eponymous debut album has stormed to the top of the US charts, helped by a girl dressed as a bumble bee. PAUL REES (words) and TONY MOTTRAM (pics) catch the buzz, the burn out and the shooting sprees in Florida ...

TOURISTS HAVE a habit of getting shot in Florida. A British motorist was recently killed driving down the freeway in a rental car. "Oh, you've got more chance of being fired at on the street than in a car in Orlando," beams the salesman at the hire car company. "Do you wanna hire my gun as well?"

Florida, just like every other American

State, has its fair share of crazies. Here, they're hot, sweaty and sticky all year round, and quite possibly all the more weird because of it. In Orlando, home of Disneyland's Magic Kingdom, anyone with a psycho stare is usually wearing a Mickey Mouse T-shirt. Apparently, it's the in-breeding.

Outside Orlando's International Airport and in its surrounding chain of fast food

joints and stopover motels, the pop-eyed locals have found a new game to play.

"Hi, are you guys Blind Melon?" they will screech at any passer-by who happens to have long hair. "I just love your record."

'No Rain' is America's latest big teen record and, at the moment, Blind Melon are hotter than the Florida sunshine.

"It's so weird," shrugs guitarist Christopher Thorn. "I'm flattered when someone wants my name on a piece of paper, sure, but why? You know, there's

Blind Melon's Shannon Hoon onstage at Orlando's Edge Field outdoor arena.

nothing special about me."

Christopher Thorn's first fan letter in Orlando said, 'You are one of my three favourite live performances, along with 10,000 Maniacs and Maria McKee'. He is still trying to work out whether this is good news or not.

BLIND MELON, as a band, are currently contemplating the up and down side of their success. Their self-titled debut album has just been certified Platinum in the US, more than a year after its release. The award, for sales in excess of a million copies, coincided with Blind Melon's 18th month on the road. "See, the problem is, our record came out and the company (Capitol) didn't know what to do with us," explains drummer Glen Graham. "They experimented with a few different things, but it took until the 'No Rain' video (the one with The Bumble Bee Girl in it) for it to



Lenny Kravitz (left) steals a riff off Shannon Hoon!

finally start to build. And that was after a year of touring.

"So, we toured the normal cycle that any band would do on a record. Now, it's really supposed to be the beginning for us, although it feels

close to the end."

"We're not complaining, but right now we feel tired," adds guitarist Rogers Stevens.

"We feel very fortunate to be able to do this, but we'd like to be able to do it just a little bit less. We wanna make a second album."

And, despite being on the cover of *Rolling Stone*, Blind Melon have said enough about themselves and posed for one too many pictures.

"We thought, rather naïvely, that being in a band meant you would just be concerned with being creative, but there's so much more to it than that," reasons Thorn, with the weary voice of a man who's just been asked by an Orlando fanzine which historical figure he would choose to resurrect.

"I mean, I could be playing a guitar or writing a song, but instead I'm talking to YOU! It's just one of those things that you have to get used to. Your expectations aren't always correct."

"I hate being photographed," drawls vocalist Shannon Hoon. "The flash blinds you, and when you can see again, you're still in the same place. That's kinda depressing, don't you think?"

"I've just realised how I always used to take a lot of my time for granted. I'm sure people could find a lot more to look at than just me; I'm pretty disgusting."

And then there's the hangers-on and the celebrity whores and the bullshitters.

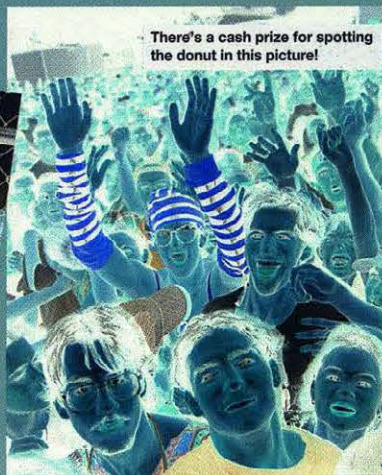
"It's disgusting," hisses Thorn. "You have people who you've met here and there, and now they're calling up claiming to be your best friend 'cos they want a ticket and a backstage pass. It's annoying, but I know who my friends are, and I know the people at the record



Here's an amplifier that buzzes!



There's a cash prize for spotting the donut in this picture!



Hoon (left) and Brad Smith sample Melon mania!



DE IT'S RICA!

company who have supported us from day one.

"What's a bunch of shit is, next year, if we release a record and no-one buys it, these people who have just come into our lives won't be around."

"You just laugh at it," insists Hoon. "There's a lot of things about this that amuse me. *Spinal Tap* really becomes less and less of a funny movie every day; it's starting to become a drama. You just try and separate what matters from what doesn't."

"Some people take this so f**king seriously, you know. Yeah, I love music and I love writing songs, but everything else is just funny. If you can't laugh at it, then you don't have any business doing it."

And there's more, so much more ... Outside the band's tour bus at Orlando's Edge Field outdoor arena, the pre-pubescent have begun their siege. Some of them have come dressed as bumble bees. Blind Melon are sick of being asked about The Bumble Bee Girl ...

THE ESCAPE route, as every single band will tell you, is up on the boards. In Orlando, supporting Lenny Kravitz in a park slap, bang in the middle of the city centre, Blind Melon make you feel like Woodstock happened yesterday. 'No Rain' is received like the second coming.

"We've got a couple of international journalists here," (who are they? - Ed) grins Hoon over the song's bouncy acoustic chords. "I want you to show 'em how loud Americans can sing." Orlando obeys like a flock of sheep.

Afterwards, a little high and wired, Hoon is still smiling: "You noticed how I pulled out one of those little sayings for you guys? All those people get all patriotic for, like, two seconds."

"It's so funny to pull that stunt. It makes me laugh at the whole thing, as opposed to with the whole thing."

"About a year ago, Jon Bon Jovi, Sebastian Bach and Vince Neil, I believe, put together this

Blind Melon 1993 (l-r): Brad Smith, Christopher Thorn, Shannon Hoon, Glen Graham and Rogers Stevens.



Tattoo You! Shannon Hoon reveals all!

book of cool phrases for frontmen," Thorn interrupts. "We bought it for Shannon on his birthday, and he's been using them ever since."

Blind Melon are not moaning old gits all the time ...

"Well, I walk that fine line between being and not being a moaning old git," Thorn responds.

TAMPA, THE next day, is hotter and stranger. "You don't walk anywhere in Tampa, 'cos you get mugged or end up dead," reveals the hotel porter with a what-can-you-do cackle.

Bassist Brad Smith does go out, to a pool hall. "Nobody cares about music there," he says. "And you get to meet all of a town's great characters in the pool hall." Brad Smith knows where the pool hall is in every city.

While he's gone, the rest of the band are distant and unseen. Girlfriends and wives

have arrived for a couple of days, and nothing else matters.

On the morning of the show, the band leave to play an acoustic set at Tampa's Rockin' radio station. The bullshit detector sounds off when word arrives that 'management' have insisted that no-one goes along for the ride. Success screws you up. Fact.

Across the city's airwaves, Blind Melon refuse to play more than one song, and Shannon Hoon relays a message to friends who are 'hiding out from the law' in the city. Having been 'busted for smoking pot' back home in Indiana, both have run to Florida under aliases. "I wanted to know what names they're using, so I can put 'em on the guest list," Hoon elaborates later.

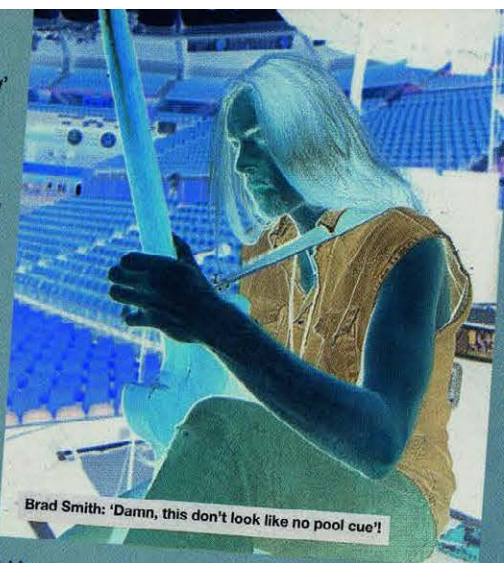
The venue, The Sun Dome, is typically American - an antiseptic basketball arena with corridors that snake like a nest of vipers. You can get lost, or wander around picking up scraps of gossip (although he's

on a self-proclaimed 'one-meal-a-day' diet, Lenny Kravitz surreptitiously takes a Fruit And Nut bar from the catering staff whenever the need arises).

Blind Melon hang around for hours, soundcheck, speak to college newspapers, play, then wait to drive through the night. Sometimes they look bored and vacant; most times they're learning to cope.

"I go through periods where I can't stand the other f**kers, and I wanna kill them in their sleep," Thorn admits. "But it's just like any situation where you have ten people in a submarine-type setting. You're gonna get on each other's nerves. Like a family, you hate each other, you fight, and then you make up.

"To me, it's still the best job you could possibly have. You know, I could be pumping gas or something. Every day, I'm trying to not lose track of that and start complaining about silly things. It's an



Brad Smith: 'Damn, this don't look like no pool cue!'

ongoing struggle."

"Everything's great with the band, but it's just a small part of the big picture," sighs Hoon. "I have a life that is aside from these four guys, and it's more precious than anything.

"You can never neglect the sacred things. The family. And your growth away from ... this. You need time to sit back and reflect. You get to that point, and you realise that you're taking it too seriously again."

And, if it is all just a flash in the pan, a one-hit wonder?

"Then it should be over very quickly."

WHO'S THAT GIRL?

She's appeared on the cover of Blind Melon's debut album and in their 'No Rain' video, but what's the secret behind The Bumble Bee Girl?

CHRISTOPHER THORN:

"The girl on the front cover of the album is Glen's sister about 15 years ago. Her name's Georgia, and that was just a picture that was hanging up in Glen's house. We thought it would make a great album cover, 'cos it's so bizarre and weird and humble. It's the opposite of having a gorgeous model on your record sleeve - a dorky little girl at a tap dance recital."

GLEN GRAHAM: "My sister loves it. She has no problem with her success."

CHRISTOPHER THORN: "The girl in the video, her name is Heather. She was found through a casting agent, and she looks remarkably like Georgia 15 years ago. She's a great little actress, very charismatic."

ROGERS STEVENS: "We owe a lot to that little bumble bee, 'cos she's famous and we're not."

Georgia is currently signing autographs at home in Mississippi. Heather has an agent, and is pursuing a career in films.



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THE BEE'S KNEES!



PHOTO: TONY MOTTAM

BLIND MELON

The Sun Dome, Tampa, Florida

VERDICT: Soul providers!

HALF AN hour into Blind Melon's set, you finally realise just how much one pretty little Folk song and a girl dressed up as a bumble bee can do for a band. Prompted by a gentle acoustic jangle, 8,000 Americans scream in a collective voice that still hasn't broken. 'No Rain' is the US of A's latest youth anthem. It has etched Blind Melon onto one nation's consciousness.

Tonight, supporting Lenny Kravitz in one of those high-tech enormodomes that Uncle Sam specialises in, Blind Melon can do no

wrong. The bumble bee girl might not appear on stage, but her costume is dotted throughout the audience and, if you can gauge success on the evidence of one State, America likes this scruffy quintet. A lot.

Which is good, simply because Blind Melon are good. The whole look may have been wrongly filed in the 'Grunge' fashion book, but Blind Melon's sound has more to do with Led Zeppelin's fireside moments or The Allman Brothers' rootsy swing (they play a snatch of 'Midnight Rider' to enforce the point) than any lo-fi noise you might care to mention. And 'No Rain', insistent as it is, is merely a novelty introduction.

The 'real' Blind Melon emerge somewhere between the sprawling, snapping jams that

cut through 'Time To Go' and 'Deserted', and the patched-up mellow vibes of 'Change' and 'Holy Man'. It's here that guitarist Rogers Stevens and bassist Brad Smith soak up the musical juices of their Deep South upbringing, and roll 'em out like tight skins filled with dope, and Shannon Hoon rasps and moves as if Janis Joplin had popped out of her grave for a sex change. If they were once a Thrash band, if they have leapt on a passing bandwagon - as their detractors claim - Blind Melon have at least mutated with enough spirit and soul to take in a lot of people.

"Every day above ground is a good day," offers Hoon before the closing 'Soak The Sin'. He's having a ball.

PAUL REES