



Blind Melon experience life at the top, LA, 1995. (l-r) Glen Graham, Rogers Stevens, Shannon Hoon, Christopher Thorn, Brad Smith.

What's got into **BLIND MELON** vocalist **SHANNON HOON**? He's cut off his hair. He's having a go at hippies. He's writing songs about serial killers. Has the major success of the band's debut album driven him mad? On the eve of the release of new album, 'Soup', **DAVE LING** flies to LA to find out...

WHY IS Shannon Hoon lying on the roof of the Capitol Records building in Los Angeles, with his face covered in mutilated sunflowers? And why has the Blind Melon frontman written 'No hippy s**t' in magic marker on his left hand? There's a simple explanation: Shannon has twigged that RAW think his band are a bunch of hippies and has just exacted his revenge by taking the beautiful yellow and black flowers that snapper Cronin has brought along as photosession props, jumping up and down on them and shredding them all over the roof of the building.

It's all done jokingly, but Hoon succeeds in making his point. So does it irritate him when people call his band hippies or maybe even slackers?

"Nah, that's just laziness on their part," sighs the newly shorn singer. "The people who say that should look a bit further into the picture. If I got mad about things like that I'd just be wasting my energy."

Nevertheless, it's a fact that Blind Melon began life in a commune-style environment. Just five guys playing music for the sheer enjoyment of it, oblivious to the scheming and manipulation which is the trademark of the modern-day music industry.

"Isn't that why everybody starts?" he objects. "To call us hippies is a misrepresentation which has maybe been based on our appearance or on the people that we've hung out with. However you define a hippy, I'm sure you'll find those

NO

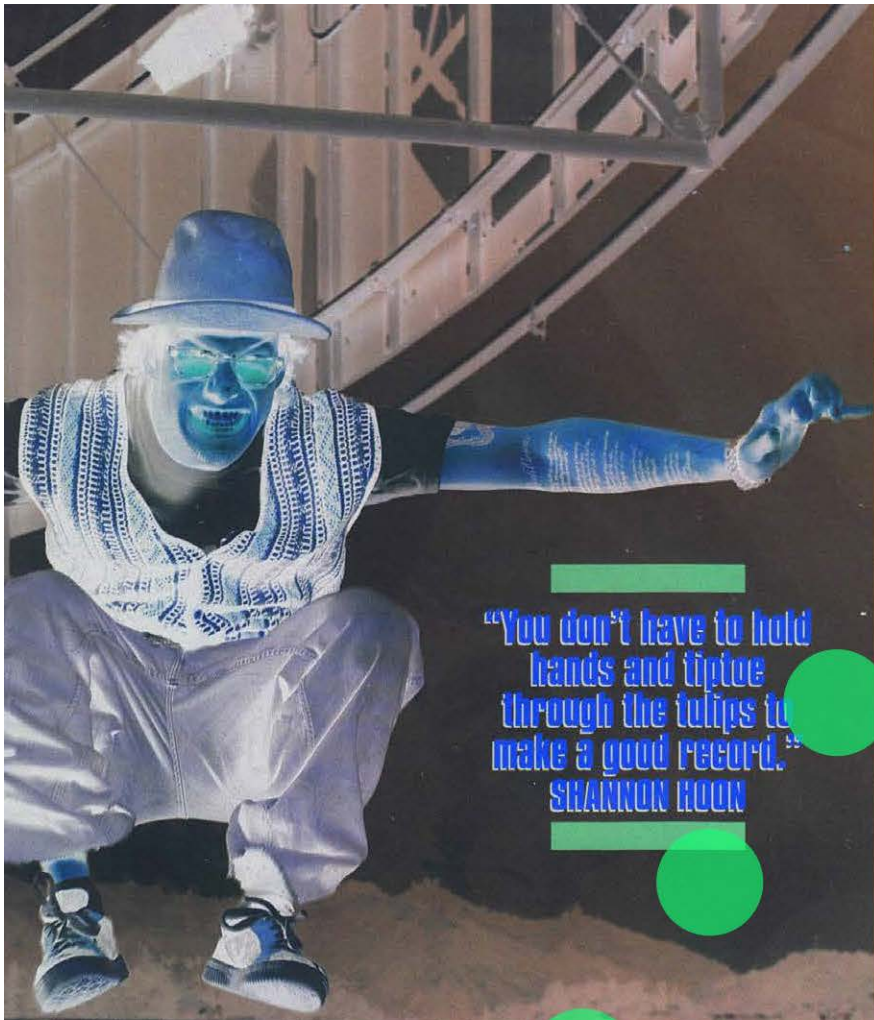
characteristics in every single human being."

Our supposedly pot-crazy subject doesn't even support the legalisation of cannabis.

"There are so many ignorant people around that I wouldn't want them enhanced by anything," he theorizes. "To some people it would be a good thing, but I don't want to see a nine-year-old getting high."

SLACKER OR otherwise, Shannon Hoon is an unconventional interviewee. As we chat he opens a bag of multi-coloured jelly bear sweeties and arranges them in a pyramid shape on the table, saving the clear ones till last. And later, while discussing Blind Melon's difficult acclimatisation to fame, he springs

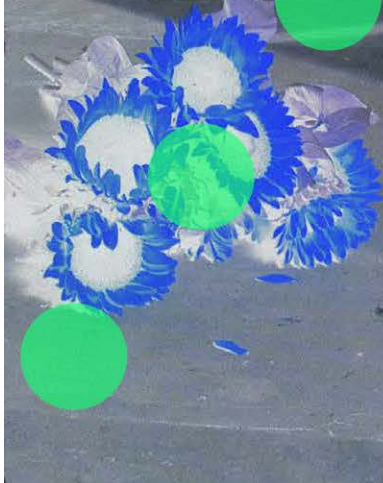




“You don’t have to hold hands and tiptoe through the tulips to make a good record.”

SHANNON HOON

PPY SHIT



up from the sofa, explaining that a large sculptured wooden cupboard in the corner of the room is distracting his train of thought. “I once tried to buy it, man, but it wouldn’t fit through the door,” he confides.

Hoon was in a considerably less chirpy mood when RAW flew to Orlando in November 1993 to catch the band winding up their 18-month world tour. The ‘Blind Melon’ debut album had somewhat belatedly been certified Platinum in the States a year after the breakthrough of the ‘No Rain’ video - featuring a dorky-looking, female bumble bee character which they’ve since thankfully ditched. But at the time Blind Melon were totally pissed off with each other and the attention being heaped on them.

“Although there were fragments of friendship remaining, we were ready to kill each other when we got home,” recalls Shannon. “We’d been wanting to make the next record and the lack of enthusiasm was showing in everyone’s playing, so the last thing we were gonna do was hang out together when we got back! But we’re not the kind of band to sit down and say, ‘We’ve got to be friends because we sold so many million albums,’ and once we answered the questions that weren’t to do with music, it made the music itself so much better again.”

SOME MONTHS later, Blind Melon were deemed important enough to be asked to participate at the Woodstock II Festival (“A little too manicured for me,” says Shannon) and they also contributed ‘Out On The Tiles’ to the star-studded Led Zeppelin tribute album, ‘Encomium’. Even though the campaign to promote the band’s second album is just revving up, those industry-related nightmares still haunt Shannon. But he

claims he’s better prepared for it second time around.

“I’m happy with myself today. I’m not anti-record companies at all, but they sugar-coat music, they milk out its very soul. I know that if I wasn’t in a band a lot of these people wouldn’t be hanging out with me and if we weren’t making them a lot of money they wouldn’t be interested in me. If we know our friendship is based on sales figures we’ll get along just fine.”

Surely it’s naïve to join a band then complain all the time about being famous?

“Fame is not the whole reason why you join a band, but when you’re fishing with a worm what do you think you’re gonna catch? A truck or a car?! Do you get mad that you caught a fish? The thing is you never know how big the waves will be or

how you will behave. Your world gets smaller and your problems just get bigger."

Once that nightmare first tour was over, Shannon moved to Chicago and discovered that his girlfriend Lisa was expecting, guitarist Christopher Thorn got married and some of the guys moved to New Orleans. Blind Melon also got into a little straight talking.

"It's true, some of the guys in this band don't have the best relationships with each other, but we know how to use that to make each song better. Sometimes that kind of energy between two human beings can be a very positive thing. You don't have to hold hands and tiptoe through the tulips to make a good record. Are we different from all the rest? No, we've just grown more content with how we go about things."

The point that I'm trying to make is that if you played the first album to a group of people and told 'em it had sold several million copies, most wouldn't believe you. It just wasn't that commercial!

"A couple of songs on it were," he says. "But I'm not gonna sit here and tell you I'm pissed off that it sold so much. But at the same time, it does turn up the pressure when you make the second record."

'SOUP' IS the second album and it comes heartily recommended to anyone who

appreciated the band's first release. Equally as diverse as 'Blind Melon' - maybe more so - it was recorded in an old house in the French quarter of New Orleans with Nirvana/Faith No More producer Andy Wallace. And Blind Melon have certainly chosen to address a multitude of subjects. Topics offered up for discussion on 'Soup' are the regeneration of life, serial killers, suicide, friendship, hatred, religion; the whole damn caboodle.

"It's a buffet!" Shannon beams. "Just help yourself to whatever you want!"

'Toes Across The Floor' contains some deep religious observations ("It points out that the way man treats a dog is the same way people treat God"), while 'New Life' documents Shannon's delight at impending fatherhood. An ultrasound scan has already predicted that it will be a girl (and Shannon and Lisa have chosen Nico Blue as her name), but as Hoon so delicately puts it: "We won't believe it until the acorn sprouts. We don't really care what sex it is as long as it's healthy."

And only a band like Blind Melon would have songs



Shannon Hoon: "To call us hippies is a misrepresentation."

dealing with serial killer Ed Gein ('Skinned') and Shannon's grandmother ('Vernie') back-to-back!

"My grandmother is such a beautiful person," smiles Shannon. "She tells you that she loves you and kisses you every time you leave her presence - even three times in one day - because she thinks it might be the last time she sees you. When I was younger I couldn't believe that she prays

for 45 minutes every night; how on earth could she be talking to somebody like that for so long? She introduced me to God and a lot of really good, simple things."

On the flipside of the coin, 'Skinned' tackles serial killer Ed Gein's sick story without resorting to gore.

"He was the guy who used to build furniture out of his victims' bones and skin. I think *Silence Of The Lambs* was

about him," Shannon says.

"They say that when they raided Gein's farm he had four complete bodies of human skin hanging in his closet and he would dance around wearing them."

The song also includes the rather freaky line, '*I realise this skin I'm in isn't mine*', which could have far deeper connotations.

"Yeah, it's ambiguous. Sometimes you don't feel like