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# BLIND MELON'S

## GRASS ROOTS SOUP

(OR, NO MORE BEES PLEASE)

by Kristina Eshlund

L-R: Stevens, Hoon, Thorn, Graham, Smith.

JEFF TISMAN

When Blind Melon released their self-titled debut in 1992, no one at their label (Capitol) or in the band, for that matter, expected the album, with its catchy "No Rain" ditty and dorky yet endearing Bee Girl, to catapult them into the limelight. The quintet—vocalist Shannon Hoon, drummer Glen Graham, bassist Brad Smith and guitarists Christopher Thorn and Rogers Stevens—have toured worldwide, including a cool stint at last year's Woodstock, where Hoon, decked out in a long white dress, looked every bit the flower-child.

And Blind Melon's anticipated new record, *Soup*, is a marvelous evolution for the band—a cleanly paved street guiding the way toward a long-lasting career. Unlike their first LP, this effort is hypnotic and folksy with a decidedly grassroots feel.

After their success—not to mention the early Guns N' Roses connection, which was overhyped in the press—I was worried I was going to get a bunch of single syllables or an angry, press-hating, we-don't-wanna-be-successful bunch. What I got instead was a very tired, yet open, Hoon, an upbeat Stevens and a quiet, thoughtful Graham.

Hoon's exhausted. Thorn locks and eyes like slits, he drifts in and out of conversation and has a habit of falling asleep. He looks like he needs a nap, but he's convinced that if he gets a beer (which he eventually does), he'll pop right back into society. It seems to work.

RIP: What's the difference between Blind Melon now and two years ago?

SHANNON HOON: We know what we want to do now. I think the relationships amongst every one of the guys have—I can't say taken a turn for the better—but in a sense, like Brad and I, we don't get along. If it wasn't for us being in this band, we wouldn't hang out together. But we've managed to use that in a productive way. Therefore, I respect the guy a lot, because he knows how to write a song, but I think it's just because we're sort of perfectionists to a fault. So he and I kinda bump heads.

RIP: Does he write lyrics or music?



SH: He wrote some lyrics on the first record, but on this record I wrote all the lyrics. [He yawns and apologizes.] I'm sorry, I didn't get to bed till six in the morning. You know, I made the dreadful mistake where at the end of the evening you always run into that one person who's holding that one thing you just really, really want to say no to.

RIP: What's going on in your personal life?

SH: I have a girlfriend and we're getting ready to have our first child in July. I'm so happy. I haven't prepared myself to be a father. And my girlfriend, Lisa, we've been together for like ten years. We went to our senior prom together. All that sweet, Midwest bullshit... *Hmmm*, it's weird, because when I'm holding the baby, then I'm going to be a father. But up till then, anything I've ever prepared myself for never turned out right. You know, yesterday I did one interview—some guy from Germany—and after I got done, I almost didn't say a word to anybody. Almost just walked downstairs and got a cab.

RIP: Why?

SH: [Whispering] My manager would have been so f!cking furious...

RIP: Was it just the interview?

SH: It was just the fact that I'm not really, really ready to jump back into this with both feet. I'm not a business; I just want to be home with Lisa during this pregnancy. That's my pride and joy. That's more important to me than this band is. I'm going to be a father longer than I'm going to be the mother...motherf!ker [laughing]. The baby had the hiccups the other day.

RIP: When did you guys start writing for this record?

SH: When I think about the record, and making it, and all those stories, and nonmusical type things that went on there, I don't know how our album got made. I was just... Sorry, I just gotta rest my eyes. [He nods off.]

RIP: So you're not looking forward to the touring either? Will you take Lisa and the baby with you?

SH: Unbeknownst to the band, I think I am. Not to say that my baby's a dog or anything, but, *ahhhmm*, I don't want to come home to a dog that's raised by somebody else. You know?

RIP: Will you be here when the baby's born?

SH: That's why we took off between July 10 and August 7. I want to try and keep my girl away from a lot of this. If she wants to learn about it, I would be more than happy to teach her, but right now... [nods off again]. I'm sorry, I need to sit up.

RIP: Do you think success encourages excess?

SH: I would be lying if I said that I didn't learn a lot of things being high on various amounts of whatever it was that was in front of me. But I don't believe in legalization. I mean that drugs, in the right... This sounds like a complete justification, but the problem is that I get carried away. I abuse it. I take it past the point of mental stimulation, turning it to physical annihilation.

RIP: Do you mind that this is on tape?

SH: Use your own discretion. It's crazy, man. I don't know what it does to your mind. Man, you know what it does, it makes your mind...you have input overload, man. You're so caught up going down this one street so fast that you fail to realize that, wow, that was a cool street. But the one thing that frustrates me the most is, I like a lot of other things. I like writing music, doing things like this, but at the same time, it's like there're other things that I have just as much enthusiasm in doing, and when I can't equally

give the same amount of time to each one of them, I feel like telling one of my identities that this one's better than that one. And that's not true. So I'm on my way to the Frolic Room.

*Stevens comes in and is definitely wide-awake. Chipper, in fact. Excited to talk about Soup and anxious to get the releasing-a-record ball rolling.*

RIP: What's the difference between Blind Melon now and Blind Melon two years ago?

ROGERS STEVENS:

Now we're openly admitting our psychological warfare against each

other [laughing]. Now we get along great. It's just that it can be a real headache sometimes. But to make an album and record—there's five different ideas of the way things should go. Going in and making an album is a lot of fun, and when it's done with, you feel like you never want to make another one. It's this weird sort of like musical Darwinism, survival-of-the-musical-fittest...

RIP: Then why is it so worth it?

RS: For a number of reasons, the first and foremost being the satisfaction of seeing it done and hearing what you did and what everyone did together, and, I mean, there's nothing that can top that. Then there's money, traveling—there's all those things.

RIP: What did you guys think of the marketing and the takeoff of the Bee Girl?

RS: I thought it was great! We knew exactly what we were doing. It's such an obvious gimmick—that's what it was, and I'm so into that sort of media-manipulation. It just fascinates me about what people lock on to, the things that they latch on to. We knew what we were doing. It was as much of a joke to us as it was to everybody else. I mean, c'mon, we're dressing up in bell bottoms and dancing around a flower field. Nobody got the joke.

RIP: When did you guys start writing for this record?

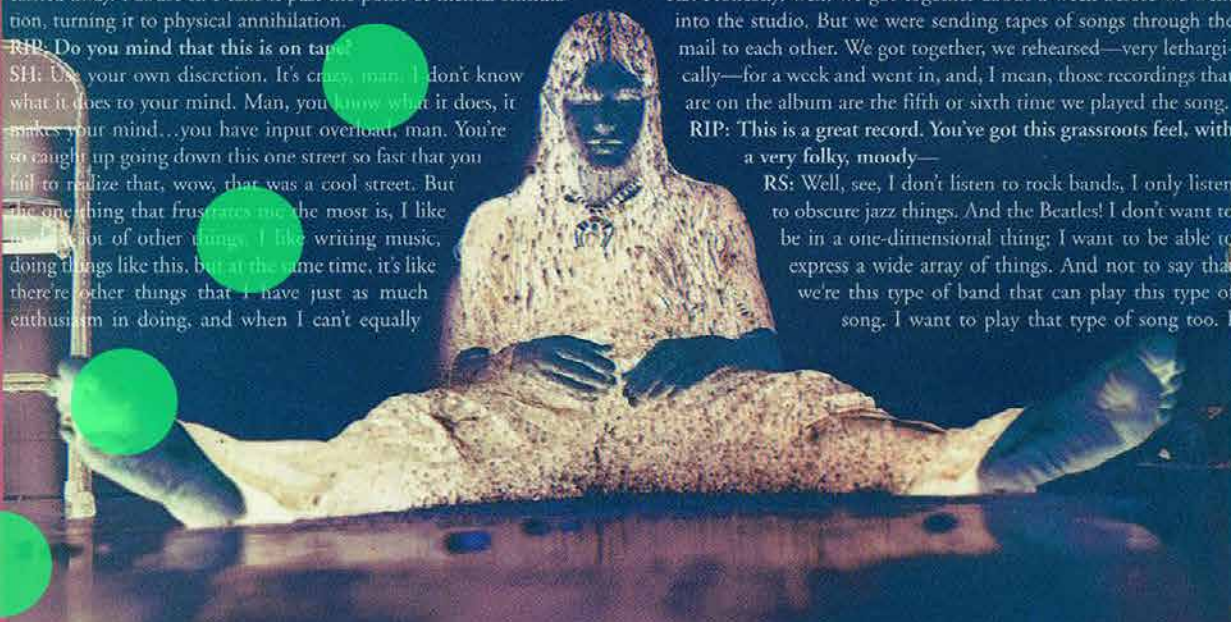
RS: Honestly, well, we got together about a week before we went into the studio. But we were sending tapes of songs through the mail to each other. We got together, we rehearsed—very lethargically—for a week and went in, and, I mean, those recordings that are on the album are the fifth or sixth time we played the song.

RIP: This is a great record. You've got this grassroots feel, with a very folksy, moody—

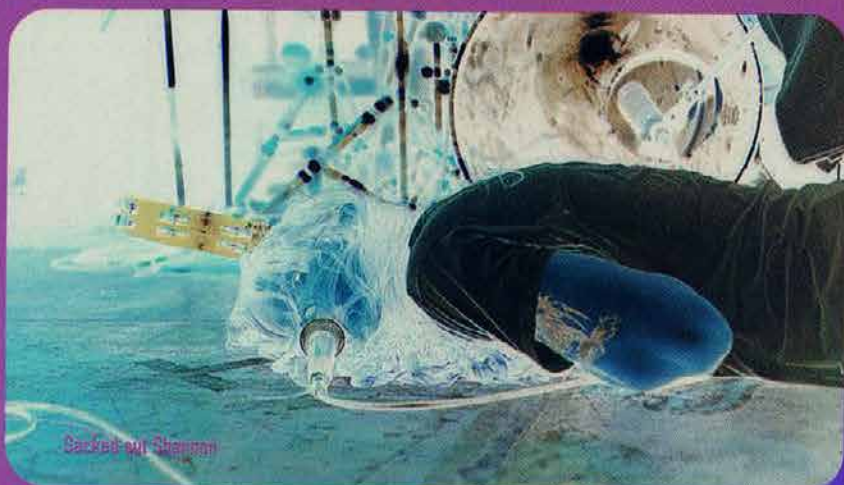
RS: Well, see, I don't listen to rock bands, I only listen to obscure jazz things. And the Beatles! I don't want to be in a one-dimensional thing; I want to be able to express a wide array of things. And not to say that we're this type of band that can play this type of song. I want to play that type of song too. I



FRANK FORCINO







ANDREAS SCHOWE/PHOTOFEATURES

mean, we have blatant ripoffs of the Rolling Stones and blatant ripoffs of the Beatles. My whole take on this thing is that obviously there's been some great music that has come out in the last four or five years, and things that seem to be different. There's a certain type of music that is going on now that, ya know, I'm a bit more in tune with than things that were going on in the '80s. But for every great band, obviously the record companies are going to go out and have a bunch of other stuff that are marginal things and things that they feel like they can sell. I would rather everything get through the door in hopes of something good getting through than a whole scene or whatever being shut out.

RIP: There's a variety of musical instruments this time around.

RS: There's a B3 [Hammond organ], there's a violin, there's cellos, kazoos, accordions, harmonicas, and there's a real, second-line New Orleans brass band. They came on Super Bowl Sunday and pulled up in the back of a truck with all these beat-up instruments. I wrote these horn parts out, I showed them the

horn parts, and they did it and we all got incredibly drunk. What second-line brass is—you know the New Orleans "jazz" funeral, right? Where they have a band and they march to the funeral, and it goes for miles through the city and it's just lots of people. Then they come away from the funeral, and it's a party. With party music—like the horns that go out on the record. What the second line is, is a bunch of guys who just show up behind the regular brass band. They don't even know the person who's died. They just show up and are just drunk, and they raise hell, and they play, and they go behind the first section. These guys (on *Soup*) are called The Little Rascals Brass Band.

RIP: You recorded in New Orleans?

RS: [With] Daniel Lanois. He produced U2 records and stuff. He has a studio in New Orleans; it's a Victorian paradise. It was built in the 1820s, and it's three stories of grandeur. You know that movie *Blaze*, with Paul Newman? It's that house. It's magnificent. It's really low-rent, low-tech—we had to bring in some stuff—but the atmosphere's incredible. And Andy Wallace worked it—he just mixed the Soul Asylum record, *White Zombie*, *Bad Religion*...

RIP: What about touring?

RS: Our goal is to go out [in the fall] and stay out and play lots of shows. Clubs and theaters. We're gonna start playing in the smaller places, because we really don't know what the response is gonna be. Rather than put ourselves in some situation where we have to sell out the big places or whatever, we're gonna go and play small places and just enjoy playing.

*Blind Melon's publicist comes in and announces we have to switch Melons once again. She's bringing in drummer Glen Graham.*

RIP: Are you getting tired of the shuttling?

GLEN GRAHAM: [Laughing] Well, I always wanted to be doing this. When you start off, you don't realize that all this part's involved, because you just want to play.

RIP: Do you like the other side of it—the marketing, that it's not only good music?

GG: Yeah. On the one hand, it's an evil, big-business sort of thing, but on the other hand, I mean, hey, it's an opportunity to get to play for a lot of people, which is what I've always wanted to do. You know, from being a kid in the fourth grade seeing KISS on TV, going, "Wow, that looks great! Can I do that?"

RIP: As far as Blind Melon goes, what's the difference between now and then?

GG: Well, personally, I'm much more relaxed about the whole situation. Two years ago, before the Bee thing happened, [before] we got famous, one-hit-wonder people or whatever you call it, we were all done [touring on the record]. We had been on the road for a year, made a

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# BLIND MELON

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record, it had sold beyond our expectations but, more likely, far below the company's expectations, and we were resigned to the fact that it was time to go in and do another record. Plus, we'd had it. It was like, "Okay. It didn't work." I don't know what we thought. You go get signed to a major label, and you go and you do it and it works. So, since then, at the point of our complete exhaustion and acceptance of the fact that it was over and time to go back and do it again, the thing opened wide up. The video happened, that started a series of tours, opening for big people. Now, looking back, having made another record, toured all over the place, I guess the biggest difference is, we all just feel a little bit more relaxed. Possibly with the exception of Shannon.

RIP: This record has its own individuality that doesn't fit in the "current" sound.

GG: Well, we all have very different tastes. I mean, there're certainly things that overlap. We all listen to different things. I feel like the first record was sort of writing songs, figuring out what to do—"Okay, this is the record, this is us." Ya know, sort of hippie stuff. Now, whatever we were gonna be, we have found. I think Blind Melon has finally worked its way around to its sound, whatever that may be. This record *sounds* like us. I don't know what that is; I've never heard anything like it.

I don't initially know if that's to say that the next record will be very much like this one. But whatever that Blind Melon thing is—the intangible thing that none of us could ever really define—is present now and is more defined than the first record. I'm really happy with the record, and the first one I was not happy with at all. The first record was people who *hadn't* been together for years, sluggin' it out in the clubs, getting signed and making a record with very little preparation time and time being a band. The second record is four years down the road.

RIP: In "Carseat" there's an interesting message on the answering machine.

GG: Oh, Shannon found a journal in his grand mother's attic or something, and there's a poem in it called "God's Presents," and he read it into an answering machine. He really felt strongly about putting that somewhere on the record. It was written on April 18, 1895, and Shannon recorded it on the same day 100 years later.

RIP: What do you think about *Soup*?

GG: It might not be very instantly digestible, but there's a lot of stuff in there, and if you give it a little time you'll realize that it's a complete thing. It's not just a collection of songs, it's an album, start to finish. It has an intro, sort of the state-of-things, and takes you through this roller coaster of emotions and points of view and then, at the end, reminds you where it came from. •



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