



"Rain" supreme: Blind Melon's Shannon Hoon

BLIND MELON

CHICAGO

Riviera Theater, March 8, 1994

YOU'VE GOT TO HAND IT TO BLIND Melon. With naught but a solitary 20-month-old album to their credit — a double-platinum album, mind you — the Melons took this well-worn material and concocted a remarkably fresh listening experience at the sold-out Riviera. It was an even bigger feat when you consider that much of Blind Melon's music — brawny, funkied-up, distinctly '90s Southern-style rock — follows the same basic blueprint. There's the folkie intro, which kicks into meaty, syncopated high gear, eventually downshifting to the mellower mode before usually revving up again. But while Blind Melon tend to ride the same groove, song after song, it's one hellaciously satisfying groove — and their loose-jointed song structures allow for plenty of tinkering.

For instance, the Melon's best known tune, the summery, deceptively carefree-sounding "No Rain," was barely recognizable at first. Brillo-voiced singer Shannon Hoon screamed out the opening verse over a slowly churning swamp-blues bed — which then deftly morphed into the familiar, strummy, happy-go-lucky version. Concertgoers howled their approval, and Hoon promptly let them take over vocals, which they did with earsplitting relish as the beaming vocalist held his microphone stand aloft.

Hoon, a charismatic frontman, worked the crowd like a tent-show preacher: beseeching, exhorting, collapsing to his knees, baptizing the front lines with cups of water. But he was hardly the whole show. The real charge here was

sharing the excitement of this young band as all five members fed and bounced off one another's playing. Guitarists Rogers Stevens and Christopher Thorn traded imaginative lead and rhythm parts over the adventurous bass lines of Brad Smith, who harmonized with Hoon on tunes like "Holyman" and "Paper Scratcher." Glen Graham's skillfully unobtrusive drumming was the subtle adhesive for a band both deliciously tight and disarmingly loose.

By the final song — a wild rendition of the album opener, "Soak the Sin" — Blind Melon had ratcheted up the musical give-and-take into a freakout jam that was positively electrifying. — MOIRA MCCORMICK