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LONDON'S KALASHNIKOV COWBOYS/SMELL LIKE AN ARSENAL PLAYER/BOLD SPRING FASHION

BLIND MELON
ANNOUNCED
THEMSELVES
TO THE WORLD
BY APPEARING
STARKERS ON
THE COVER OF

strange fruit

ROLLING STONE.

NEXT TIME.

THEY SAY, THEY'D

LIKE TO DO

SOMETHING

A LITTLE LESS

NORMAL. SIMON

WITTER MEETS

THIS YEAR'S

HOTTEST NEW

ROCK BAND.

Shannon Hoon, beautiful, trouser-dropping frontman of America's fastest rising rock band, drops his fork and looks at me like a rabbit staring up a shotgun barrel. "She got married," he sneers. "Boy was I depressed!"

Aware of Shannon's impatience with familiar questions, I've just friviously enquired if there's any likelihood of a relationship with Shannen Doherty. She used to relentlessly pester fellow hairy frontman Eddie Vedder and, given Hoon's Christian name kinship with her, I thought he might be getting some of the action now.

"You've been getting a lot of phone calls from the two five-year-old twins who are on that TV show," goateed guitarist Christopher Thorn says helpfully. "Waiting for you outside the hotels, thinking that the Bee Girl was with you."

"Shannen Dorky," mumbles Shannon, shunting his food about with a perturbed frown. "Wow! That question almost killed my appetite."

It's a cold winter evening in a west London tandoori house. Around us the leaves are not so much falling as stuck to the walls in an explosion of post-flock wallpaper aesthetics. Three minutes ago Blind Melon – Hoon, Thorn, fellow guitarist Rogers Stevens, drummer Glen Graham and bassist Brad Smith – were salivating with culinary anticipation. The only thing that has passed Shannon's lips in over 36 hours is what he mysteriously terms "highly un-nutritional fluid" (that rules out sperm, so we must be talking alcohol). And now I've spoiled his dinner.

"Vanilla Ice and Brian May were at our shows in Dallas," Shannon announces suddenly, recovering his enthusiasm. "I introduced them and took a picture. Five minutes later Vanilla Ice realises who Brian May is. He had no idea! They were only acquainted through lawyers and litigation. What a dork! That guy looks like he should work in an athletic shoe store; Foot Locker or something."

It's hard to know whether Shannon is amused by the juxtaposition of "Foot Locker" or the idea of "working" with the image of Vanilla Ice. Blind Melon are, after all, the sexiest ambassadors of the slacker generation.

"It seems like a lot of my friends, twentysomethings, are not buying into wanting to work a 40-hour week and having weekends off," explains Christopher. "Is it just about making money or is it about being happy in

life? Maybe that's part of the slacker mentality, or maybe they're just lazy. I haven't figured it out, but it's probably a bit of both. A slacker is also more selfish than our parents were. It's about making yourself happy. You might not have any money, but you'll be happier than your parents were."

Given Blind Melon's enormous success, they may well be burningly ambitious and not slackers at all.

"We're fortunate slackers," Thorn continues. Of course we're lazy and we don't wanna have a real job, either, and

we've lucked out into being in a band, where you're making money and you're doing exactly what you wanna do. We have the best job possible."

"To get the best out of yourself," adds Shannon, "to bleed yourself, is something I couldn't do in a job. The superficial cool of being a rock star becomes so irrelevant, and the money you only need to keep being able to do this, to keep the hunger alive."

"I plan to be a slacker for the rest of my life," Christopher smiles. "I'm always gonna be selfish about what I wanna do. Hopefully the band will set us up so we can just do what we wanna do. I want to do a lot more, but I'm extremely happy right now."

Luck has no doubt played some part in the Melon's commercial ripening, like being managed by the same company as Shannon's old pal Axl Rose and, more importantly, getting heavy rotation on MTV. But no one can deny the work they've put into it. In the 14 months after their eponymous album was released in September 1992, Blind Melon played 225 shows, supporting Guns N' Roses, Neil Young and Lenny Kravitz. Between the latter two tours they had one day off, in which they had to drive from Dallas to Cleveland. It hardly sounds lazy, and indeed it may be physically impossible for Shannon to be a slacker since, at the age of six – in

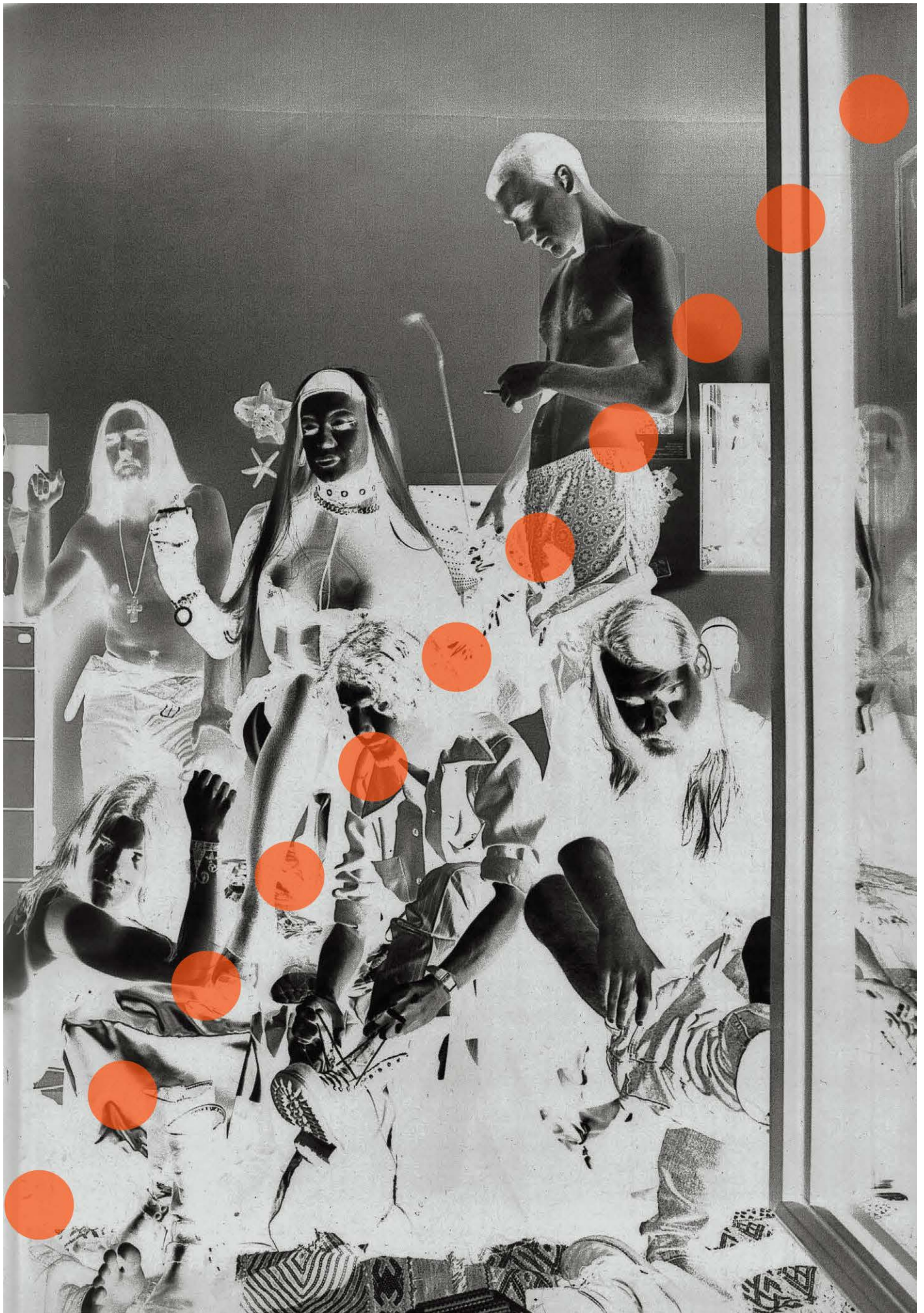
an uncanny parallel with Dave Lee Roth – he was medically diagnosed as hyperactive.

"That means," he laughs, "that you'll probably only be able to put up with me in short doses."

"It means," Christopher elucidates, "that your mother was going fucking crazy. She couldn't keep you locked in the closet. You kept finding your way out."

"She used to give me Nyquil (a Night Nurse-type ▶

PEELED MELONS:
Clockwise from
left: Shannon Hoon,
Brad Smith, Rogers
Stevens, Glen
Graham and
Christopher Thorn
with friendly drag
artist Lola.



sedative cough mixture) all the time. Like, 'Honey, you look a little sick. Time to go to sleep.' Instead of orange juice in the morning, I'd get a glass of Nyquil."

But hyperactivity, it seems, is not always funny. "It's a condition that has, to be serious, completely shattered my nervous system," says Hoon. "My mother didn't want me to keep taking medication for it, hoping that I would grow out of it. But I'm 26 and I still can't get my words right, 'cause I'm trying to shove a billion of them out at any one time."

"But it works in this business," says Christopher, "'cause every night you get to jump around like a complete idiot and release all that pent up..."

"Yeah!" Hoon jumps in. "My therapy for it is what we're doing right now: just being able to primal scream and get it out in lots of different ways. It makes you realise the therapeutic value of music. Some people get it from listening to it, others from playing it. I get it from both. I just live with it, and these guys have to live with me. I'm a very intolerable person. I'm the first to admit it, because sometimes I can't even stand myself. But there's nothing I can do about it."

Shannon's condition means that, shockingly, Blind Melon don't even have beer on the tour-bus. ("It's just not even worth it. One beer, and Shannon will punch a cop for you.")

"I'm a terrible drunk," he admits. "I can't even pass out, because my frigging hyperactive state won't permit me to. But I like to drink. There's nothing worse than when you wake up with your clothes still on, like today. I mean, when you can't even kick your boots off, how good was your sleep, really?"

It's Christopher's chore to explain how the rest of the group cope with Shannon.

"You mean the unbound energy that he has?" he says tolerantly. "Just like you cope with all the other personality ticks you have to learn to live with on a bus. We just make sure there's plenty of drugs around to keep Shannon subdued, and plenty of belts to tie him down with."

"Selective hearing has become a good characteristic of every individual in this band," Shannon laughs.

"You know," adds Christopher, "what's funny is that my mother claims my father is starting to lose his hearing. And he's like, 'No way. I just have selective hearing because your mother has so much to say all the time.' He just picks what he wants to hear. His ears are fine."

For a group who've been sardined together on a bus for 16 months, Blind Melon are still touchingly close. But, fab as it is to have your pals around you all the time, things considerably less wild than Shannon's disposition begin to grate.

"You know," muses Christopher, "I hate it when Brad cracks his knuckles in the morning. That just bothers me so much. Every goddamn morning I hear it! If he had four fingers it would be OK, you know? If he had three fingers, I could deal with that. But all 10, every one! I count 'em down: 'There's the thumb, there's the pinky, ring finger, middle finger..."

And the tensions can't even be allayed with a bit of mindless bad behaviour, for Blind Melon are not a wine-women-and-whisky band.

"It's not a question of us being more sophisticated than anyone else," says Christopher. "That's just not what we do. All of us have girlfriends or wives. We drink a little and smoke pot, but we don't have wild orgies with naked women on our bus. Never, ever! The crew does. We live



vicariously through the crew. They're way cooler than we are."

"There is so much to learn," adds Shannon seriously, "so many ways to feed your head, that to waste your time partying would be sad. There's a place for partying, but there's so much more."

Blind Melon met in LA, and bonded through their mutual loathing of the LA metal scene. But one cliché the five of them share with almost all LA metal merchants is the fact that none of them come from LA (Indiana, Pennsylvania and Mississippi are home).

"I sold second-hand clothes on Melrose [LA's trendy shopping street]," explains Christopher. "The way we all found each other was we realised that we had something in common, all being geeky people from small farm-towns."

"We didn't really fit in at all," agrees Shannon. "But then you realise that trying to fit in wasn't worth the energy."

To this day Blind Melon have no idea what sort of music they're trying to make – "We're just sporadically following a lot of different hunches" – but Christopher had a clear vision of what they wouldn't be.

"I was totally turned off by all the metal bands that were happening in Los Angeles. So I was just playing folk music, and that's how I met Brad. I hated the metal scene. It had produced really great bands, like Van Halen or even Guns N' Roses, and Jane's Addiction were really good, so I



"We just make sure there's plenty of drugs around to keep Shannon subdued, plenty of belts to tie him down with."

CHILLED MELON: Shannon takes his clothes off — again.



thought there'd be loads of unique, great bands like them. By the time we got there, it was just loads of guys trying to look like Slash and Axl, living the rock-star life without actually making any good music to go with it. They looked ridiculous, all that metal mentality of booze, women and big hair. It looked so immature to me."

"I had friends like that," counters Shannon. "You're like that when you're 15. But, for crying out loud, some of those people were in their late 20s, still dressing up."

To restate their antipathy to LA's metal values, Blind Melon adorned the sleeve of their album not with an oiled, pneumatic temptress or cartoon rape victim, but with a 15-year-old photo of Glen's sister Georgia in a bee costume. This humble, sweet, funny gesture — having a dorky little tap dance recital as opposed to a glamorous model — backfired slightly when Heather DeLoach, the girl they hired through a casting agent to recreate the Georgia part in their breakthrough *No Rain* video (now in the UK charts), became a cult icon, and was interviewed almost as much as the band. The Bee Girl had to die, and is now — along the meaning of their name and the Axl connection — a conversational no-no with Blind Melon.

Blind Melon, the very fine platinum album, is an organic, folksy grunge-fest, betraying influences as diverse as early Pink Floyd, the Allman Brothers, REM, U2 and *Jane's Addiction*. It's highly engaging and sounds, oddly, very 90s. But these days it is by your eccentricities rather than your music that you become known; in their case, the inability to remain clothed in public. When asked about their routine outfit-shedding, Shannon denies that they wear clothes at all.

"We just have a really good body-painter on tour with us. You're brought into the world naked, there shouldn't be anything wrong with it."

The problem is, it's illegal to be naked in most public places. Recently in Canada, Shannon was arrested for stripping and pissing on the audience, but other bouts of exhibitionism have been more pleasing.

"There was one time, after a show in Pittsburgh," Christopher cackles, "when Shannon got up on the roof and did it. People could only see his chest and neck and were screaming, and then he climbed up on the ledge and they saw he was naked. It was like 'Aaaaargh!' That was so hilarious."

"What about the time I did it during the Guns N' Roses show in Basel, Switzerland, in front of 50,000 people?" Shannon chips in. "There's a part in their acoustic set where one of the crew goes out and delivers a pizza to Axl onstage. Since it was the last show we were doing with them, I decided to do it, so I took him his pizza wearing nothing but a horned Viking helmet. Then I sat down and played the congas. Axl was very shocked."

But Blind Melon isn't just about risqué high jinks. All of the band share a passion for travel, self-discovery, personal growth and their art. Back in Dover, Pennsylvania, Christopher's adolescence was characterised by the most unusual kind of teen angst: the worry that his life was too picture-perfect.

"Of course it wasn't perfect," he insists defensively. "I went through a lot of shit as a kid, just like anyone else. I just had a feeling that I was buying into the system, the conventional patterns of everything you're expected to do in a small town, and I didn't want to do that. I was really concerned about living that mundane life. I wanted to do something more, to struggle and starve for a while in Los Angeles. So I moved out there and was miserable for a couple of years."

He was, of course, blissfully happy being miserable.

"I look back at my journals and I was so inspired. I was writing like crazy. I'm not saying you have to suffer for all great art. I don't want to run in front of cars and get hit so that I can write a song. It's more about seeing the world, getting out of a small town, than about being miserable."

After visiting Europe, Christopher has even formulated an architectural masterplan for Los Angeles.

"People should be responsible for the houses that they build," he pronounces. "They should put a picture with the guy's name who built a lot of those houses in Los Angeles, so he could be beaten up when he's walking down the street. It's embarrassing that there's no regard there for beautiful architecture and art in general."

And that's Blind Melon for you, irreverent pranksters with a puritanical passion for all forms of art and a touching enthusiasm for life. Mind you, they haven't the faintest idea what their new album — to be recorded at Easter — is going to sound like or be about. Maybe they really are slackers, after all. □

Blind Melon's new single, Tones of Home, is out this month.

Blind Melon



The Debut album

Includes the hit single 'No Rain' & 'Tones of Home' and 'Change'

'Roll over Nirvana, stop hogging the duvet Pearl Jam...'

Blind Melon want to get in' Vox

For the latest information on Blind Melon please write to Blind Melon, PO Box 21, London, W11 6XA



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