

Elusive

Blind Melon: the post-grunge pop group as slippery fish.

Blind Melon: (from left) Shannon Hoon (vocals), Rodgers Stevens (guitar), Brad Smith (bass), Christopher Thorn (guitar), Glen Graham (drums).



BLIND MELON Soup

CAPITOL EST 2261

For those who like to pigeonhole their bands, Blind Melon are as frustrating as trying to bottle smoke. It's easy enough to say what they sound like but a different matter altogether trying to work out what they are actually about, and why. It shouldn't really matter except that their debut album notched up platinum coloured sales that even Michael Jackson might now quite fancy. Yet nobody seems too sure how.

Soup starts and ends with a New Orleans brass band. No reason, that's just where this second album from the Californian-based quintet was recorded. In between slot 14 tense little songs full of melodic blind alleys, much staccato riffing and a certain resigned lyrical vagueness. Is it post-grunge with an added layer of irony? What about the '70s-inspired heaviness with a bit of R.E.M. fuelled mock pastoralism or the tentative Chili Pepper funk? Isn't the choppy 2 x 4 or wandering Dumptruck a deadringer for Jane's Addiction? More worrying, what about singer Shannon Hoon's occasional Jon Anderson turn? Add that little lot up, shake it about and no wonder this blend of slacker generation guitar rock proves to be so elusive.

It's the songs, though, that are the real sticking point. There's certainly nothing as immediately appealing as the whimsical No Rain this time around. The vigorous Galaxie with its genuine adrenaline rush is about as good as it gets. Fashionably terse titles like Wilt and Walk don't give much away either. Suffice it to say that a creepy fascination with death appears to exert a powerful stranglehold on their imaginations. St Andrew's Fall, Car Seat and Skinned, the latter dressed up as a jolly acoustic romp, deal respectively with teenage suicide, child murder and serial killer Ed Gein. Tight trousers, love truncheons and some good old fashioned rock'n'roll decadence are not, it seems, part of the modern agenda. The deal is solace as opposed to escapism.

Having clawed their way up the ladder playing to anyone, anytime, anywhere before finally taking off, Blind Melon plainly know the rules and their constituency inside out. Their inward-looking brand of noise fits the times to perfection, typified by the united front they present to the world and the fact that songs are deemed to be a team effort. But if that means that nobody is the star, it also means that nobody really gets to shine. And come the end of Soup, you probably still won't be any the wiser either.★★★

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