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music for the mind

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blind melon

FROM NOWHERE TO EVERYWHERE

BY ROGER LEN SMITH

From the obscurity of a North Carolina house where Blind Melon wrote its debut album (including the hit single "No Rain") to its "naked" *Rolling Stone* cover, this rock group has literally shot up the charts to become one of the biggest success stories of 1993. Residing in the top ten of the *Billboard* charts for several months in the summer and fall of 1993, Blind Melon's million-plus selling self-titled Capitol Records' debut is a blend of psychedelic, hard and folk-flavored rock. Even though two band members are from the northern part of the Midwest, they are a bona fide Southern-sounding band.

The name comes from a Cheech and Chong skit about a fictitious blues man from the early part of the century, based on the real Blind Lemon Jefferson. For the three-year-old Blind Melon, which includes lead singer Shannon Hoon, guitarists Roger Stevens and Christopher Thorn, bassist Brad Smith and drummer Glen Graham, the hard work is paying off.

Blind Melon's album, released in September of 1992, didn't hit until the following summer. The "No Rain" video kicked the tune, the album and consequently, the band, into overdrive. The rest of the album is markedly different from that lilting tune, proving that there's more to them than the fairy tale success of "No Rain." Radio oversaturation aside, the bouncy, loopy tune about insanity and insecurity is catchy.

The overall feel of the album is raw and

fresh, although Hoon's very high-pitched voice is undeniably similar, at times, to Porno For Pyros' lead singer, Perry Farrell. There's not a keyboard, horn or stringed instrument to be found—this is unquestionably a guitar album. Reverberated, distorted, and funky electric guitars over a solid rhythm section make for most of the sounds, and though some of the tunes bleed together a bit, there's enough variety and freshness to make it a satisfying repeat listen. "Tones From Home" is an electric standout. Every now and then, an acoustic guitar is thrown in, as on "Changes." "The album is kind of unintentionally loose, but we liked it that way," Graham said.

The Blind Melon non-stop touring effort started with MTV's "120 Minutes/Coast to Coast Tour" in the spring of 1992. Since then, they've either opened for or shared bills with a who's who list of modern and classic rockers. In that quick span of time, the group has warmed the stage for Neil Young, Guns N' Roses, Pearl Jam, Dinosaur Jr., Social Distortion, Stone Temple Pilots and Lenny Kravitz.

"Well, it's taken longer than we would have thought," said Graham. "Once it started happening, it happened very fast. I mean, 'No Rain' is the sole reason that we're still on the road. We were getting ready to make another record. We were seriously considering starting over before 'No Rain,' the video, came out. That sort of changed everything,

and that's basically why we're sitting here right now."

At a Santa Barbara concert, where Blind Melon opened for love guru Lenny Kravitz, they rocked through a dynamic, loose set. They were visibly tired from the previous night's show at UCLA with Kravitz, but Hoon pranced around the stage barefoot while his hoarse voice cracked.

Hoon is friends with another Indiana native, Axl Rose, which helped Blind Melon land the opening slot with Guns N' Roses. Hoon appeared in Guns N' Roses' video "Don't Cry" and sang backup on four other tunes on its *Use Your Illusion 1* album.

"We were out with Soundgarden for a couple of weeks before that," said Graham. "It was Soundgarden, Sister Double Happiness and us. We were first. That was a very interesting bill. We played small theatres, large clubs." As the magnitude of all those dates sank in, he added, "We've been out for a really long time. We've been on the road for a year-and-a-half non-stop, with like one week off here and there."

Touring with Neil Young and Booker T & the MG's undoubtedly gave the band some perspective. "It was just nice to be able to see him [Young] for a month every night, even if it was just for a few minutes," recalled Graham. "I mean, Neil Young is one of the most amazing people, musician/songwriter guys I've ever been exposed to. Jim Keltner was playing drums, so it was really a treat. He's in the position to pick his [opening] bands," added Graham, "and he picks new ones. That's nice."

The band has been closely associated with the bumble bee girl who is the star of the album cover and "No Rain" video. She's as famous as the band itself, and, as it turns out, is Graham's little sister. "It's just a picture. It's hanging up in my parents' house," said Graham. "[Guitarist] Christopher [Thorn] saw it and said we should use it, and we did. We wanted to use her in a video in some way. We didn't really know how. And Samuel Beyer, the director, pretty much is responsible for it. She's 22 now. MTV found a similar-looking teenager to play the part in the video."

With such a busy couple of years, it seems inevitable that the band will need to slow down soon. "Probably not seriously until the spring," said Graham. "We're gonna go and get a house somewhere and just concentrate on finishing the new record. Probably more similar than we would care to think, it certainly will feel different. There will be more to choose from on this record. We'll go in and record more songs than will fit on the record. I'm sure we'll take more time.

"Shannon writes complete songs," Graham continued. "Brad does, too. Occasionally, we use those. The bulk of the stuff is just jamming and the lyrics come later. I like it both ways. It's nice to come in with someone who has completed ideas and just slightly affect it, but knowing what that person's intentions are, before you even start thinking about it."

When asked if the band had considered working with outside producers, Graham said, "Several people have been discussed to produce the next record. Personally, I'd like to get the guy who did *Check Your Head*, the Beastie Boys' last record."

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