

SMASHING PUMPKINS & Blind Melon

Eccentricity not limited to the stage

By Rob Clark
The Battalion

Smashing Pumpkins and Blind Melon. No, it's not a fruit thing, it's the two latest alternative darlings of the music industry.

With the success of Blind Melon's "No Rain" video that has been played by MTV approximately 1.7 billion times, and Smashing Pumpkins' double platinum "Siamese Dream" album, the groups have become the poster children of the alternative genre. So, the pairing of the Pumpkins and Melons in Austin warranted a road trip.

5:30 p.m. — Arrive in Austin and stop at a gas station for directions to South Park Meadows.

The woman: "Go up under that tree (read: traffic-infested underpass), and turn right."

Carefully following her precise instructions, we spent the next hour and a half touring loop 360 in beautiful Austin suburbia.

6:30 p.m. — Radio station 98.9 Z-Rock is broadcasting live from the concert. The two opening acts, Reverend Horton Heat and Red Red Meat, have already played. Z-Rock mentions nothing about who has played, who is playing now or who will play next.

6:41 p.m. — Stuck in the traffic jam near the Meadows with a hundred drunken concert-goers.

One tattooed motorist: "Hey man, you have any pot to sell?"

Me: "Uh... no."

6:48 p.m. — A glossy-eyed motorist, with a car full of giggling girls, provides divine insight into our travels.

The girl: "You know where you're going?"

Me: "Yes, yes I do."

The girl: "We know where we're going, too"

Me patronizing the girl: "That's good."

7:15 p.m. — Find a parking spot, begin trek to entrance and discover that Blind Melon has already taken the stage. Again, thanks to Z-Rock for their informative broadcasting of the event schedule.

7:24 p.m. — Find a place to view the band and pull out a spiral to take notes.

Some guy: "Who are you?"
Me: "I'm a reporter."

Him: "You're not going to mention that the whole place smelled like pot are you?"

Me: "Uh... no."

Back to the notes on Blind Melon. It's definitely a more subdued Blind Melon than their October performance in Houston. In fact, the only band member making any movement at all is the constantly-bouncing lead singer Shannon Hoon. Guitarists Rogers Stevens, Christopher Thorn and Brad Smith are practically immobile during the performance. Hoon even plays solo guitar and harmonica on the mellow solo intro to "Change."

As the Shannon Hoon show continues, he shares good interaction with the crowd. The bongos he plays sporadically throughout the night soon become fan fodder, as Hoon throws three of them into the crowd, causing a mad rush for custody of the elusive drums.

Hoon is in rare form. Before singing "Soak the Sin," he wishes the crowd warm holiday cheer.

Hoon: "I hope everybody has a Merry Christmas and a happy new year."

Hoon changes the subject: "Everyone is guilty of watching 'Schoolhouse Rock' at one time in their life."

And with that, he launches into a sing-song version of numbers that are multiples of three.

But the song everyone is waiting for is "No Rain," Blind Melon's mega-hit. The crowd roars as the mellow chords of the song start, but Hoon doesn't sing the first verse. Instead, he puts the microphone to the crowd, allowing them to share in the lead vocals.

8:00 p.m. — Blind Melon leaves the stage with a simple "Bye" from Hoon.



Photos by Kyle Burnett/The Battalion

Billy Corgan, lead singer of Smashing Pumpkins, works through the chorus of a song during Friday's show in Austin.

8:05 p.m. — Three girls see me writing in the spiral and they question my activities.

One of the teenyboppers: "Is that your grocery list?"

Me: "No, I'm a reporter."
Teenybopper: "A what?"
Me: "A reporter."

Teenybopper: "I'd like a chicken sandwich, french fries, a large Coke and an apple pie."

8:18 p.m. — A girl from Southwest Texas State learns of my occupation.

The girl, grabbing my pen and talking into it as if it were a microphone: "Hi, this is Micha from Southwest Texas and I'm live at the Smashing Pumpkins show."

8:24 p.m. — Three people attempting to work their way to the front of the pit: "Mooo, mooo..."

8:48 p.m. — Smashing Pumpkins takes the stage. Kicking their set off with "Cherub Rock," they sound remarkably good. The boyish lead singer Billy Corgan's vocals are just as good live as on the "Siamese Dream" album. In supporting roles, guitarists James Iha and D'Arcy provide nice backing to Corgan.

8:56 p.m. — Corgan's stage presence is better than expected. Especially on "Disarm," and "Today," the crowd roars with delight at the sound of his raging vocals.

Corgan takes a jab at Blind Melon: "You're not tired yet are you? I'm sure those Blind Melon guys jammed their asses off — I mean those Blind Melon BOYS."

9:32 p.m. — Corgan and Iha are amused at the crowd's infatuation with throwing footwear.

Corgan: "We're from Illinois. In Illinois, we do not throw shoes like idiots."

Iha: "This is just like an MTV video — everybody moshing and throwing shoes."

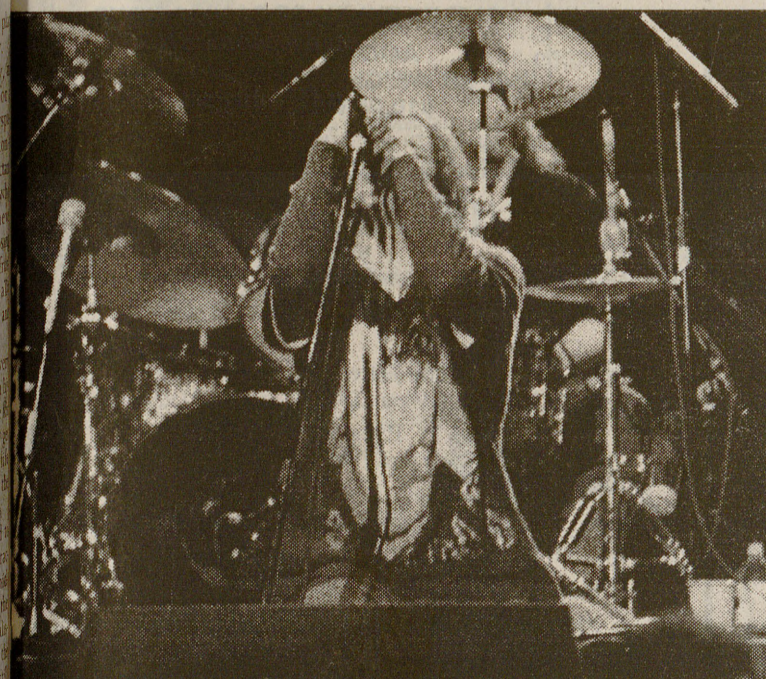
9:45 p.m. — The Pumpkins leave the stage. After the first encore, they leave again with a cry of "Thank you and good night!" People start filing out, but wait, here come the Pumpkins again. And now they're ticked at those who are leaving.

Corgan mocks the departing crowd: "I gotta get home, I gotta work tomorrow at Pizza Hut and they are really mad at me 'cause I been smokin' too much dope and coming in late."

He leads the crowd in a cheer of "F---k you" to the Smashing Pumpkins two-percenters.

Got a tip for ya, Bill: don't leave the stage for the second time, say "Thank you and goodnight," and expect people to stay.

10:16 p.m. — Concert is over. With muddy Converse All Stars, a camera full of film and a notebook full of notes, we head back to College Station. I don't think we'll ask for directions on the way back.



Lead singer of Blind Melon Shannon Hoon falls to his knees on stage during the band's set in Austin last Friday.

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