

Robin Wilson - vocals
Jesse Valenzuela - guitar
Scott Johnson - guitar
Bill Leen - bass
Phillip Rhodes - drums

GIN BLOSSOMS

"So many bands just explode or fall apart before they get the chance to reach fruition," observes Gin Blossoms guitarist Jesse Valenzuela, on the eve of the release of his band's second A&M album CONGRATULATIONS I'M SORRY. "But somehow we've been lucky enough to make it through all kinds of punishment and come out of it a stronger band."

The Gin Blossoms' double-platinum breakthrough album NEW MISERABLE EXPERIENCE established the down-to-earth Tempe, Arizona-based quintet as a potent musical force, and sent the band on an intensive three-year whirlwind of touring activity. Now, the pithily-titled CONGRATULATIONS I'M SORRY (recorded with producer John Hampton\ at Memphis' legendary Ardent studios) continues the Gin Blossoms' tradition of thoughtful, accessible guitar-based rock, boasting instantly memorable melodies, bittersweetly insightful lyrics and effortlessly impassioned performances. Once again, the band transcends momentary musical fads in favor of timeless musical and lyrical qualities.

The 12-song album builds on its predecessor's musical and lyrical strengths, with driving, emotionally nuanced songs like "Follow You Down," "As Long As It Matters," "Day Job," "Virginia" and "Competition Smile" provide compelling showcases for Robin Wilson's engagingly expressive vocals, the jangle-crunch yin/yang of Jesse Valenzuela and Scott Johnson's guitars, and the solid, inventive rhythms of bassist Bill Leen and drummer Phillip Rhodes. "Being out on the road for four years will either break you up or make you a better band," says Valenzuela. "In our case, it made us a better band. A lot of things that we used to really have to work at come naturally to

us now."

"Everything that's happened in the last four years has helped to make us a stronger band and stronger individuals," Wilson states. "NEW MISERABLE EXPERIENCE breaking forced us to either fall apart or get it together. For whatever reason, it triggered something in us that made us get our shit together, instead of hiding in our hotel rooms crying about being famous."

The Gin Blossoms first generated interest outside of the Phoenix scene with 1989's self-released indie album DUSTED. They made their A&M debut two years later with a similarly acclaimed self-produced five-song EP, UP AND CRUMBLING. That disc set the stage for the Summer 1992 release of NEW MISERABLE EXPERIENCE, which didn't take off commercially for nearly a year after its release-but when it did, it did so with a vengeance. The radio success of such tunes as "Hey Jealousy," "Found Out About You," "Allison Road," "Mrs. Rita" and "Until I Fall Away" sent the band on a series of tours that helped the fivesome develop into a world-class live act.

"We'd already been touring for over a year, often playing two shows a day, when NEW MISERABLE EXPERIENCE started selling," Rhodes recalls. "So when it finally happened, we felt like we'd worked for it."

"It was kind of odd to have put in all that hard work just to get people to listen to it, and then have it look like an overnight success," adds Leen.

The Gin Blossoms consolidated NEW MISERABLE EXPERIENCE's sales success in the fall of 1995 with the hit "Till I Hear It from You," from the EMPIRE RECORDS soundtrack. It was the #1 most added track at five different radio formats in its first week of release.

The chops-enhancing regimen of live work helped the band to overcome the standard pressures inherent in writing and recording the follow-up to a commercial smash. The boost in confidence is obvious on CONGRATULATIONS I'M SORRY. "It's been suggested that because there was so much riding on this, our big sophomore record, it must have been hard," says Wilson. "But it was actually surprisingly easy. We just tried to focus on the task and concentrate on writing good songs."

"I'm sure that everybody was feeling a certain amount of unspoken pressure," admits Rhodes, "but we were able to put our doubts aside and get down to work. By the time we hit Memphis to record, we were really well rehearsed and we made the record in seven weeks. We

weren't afraid to mess with our ideas, or mess with the format of the band. We feared nothing, and we didn't really worry about what anybody else would think."

"Recording NEW MISERABLE EXPERIENCE was kind of a nightmare in a lot of ways, but this time around it was pretty smooth sailing," Leen notes.

"We even came in under budget," adds Johnson, who joined the Gin Blossoms just after the recording of NEW MISERABLE EXPERIENCE. "Everybody in the band was feeling really positive and excited, so everybody got very involved in making the record." That sense of inclusion extended to the album's songwriting process, which saw the band members experimenting with a variety of songwriting combinations. "We just kind of stumbled onto that," says Wilson, adding, "Actually, I think the songs we wrote together are the ones that came out the best."

Indeed, CONGRATULATIONS I'M SORRY finds the bandmates consistently pooling their strengths to create an album that's every bit as essential as its predecessor. "I think people like that sort of bittersweet quality that our songwriting has," says Wilson, who counts a double UFO sighting as one of the highlights of the new disc's recording process. "It's like the band's name; it sounds pretty, but it represents something a bit darker. We seem to manage to write really commercial songs without having to try too hard, but it's also nice to put something in a song that means something to people, or creates a little bit of mystery. Or at least inspires a little bit of confusion."

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