

August 1992

GIN BLOSSOMS

When the members of Tempe, Arizona's **Gin Blossoms** are hard-pressed to describe their sound, which the press has hailed as everything from "a cross between the Byrds and Husker Du" to "sons of Petty and REM," lead vocalist Robin Wilson offers up his own comedic analogy: "It's like a big slice of American cheese."

A more lyrical description comes from one journalist who applauded the band's ability to "generate sympathy for the messed-up menagerie of folks in their songs: beautiful losers always falling behind in the rent and short of their dreams." **NEW MISERABLE EXPERIENCE** suddenly seems like an apt title for the Blossoms' first full-length major label release.

Ever since their inception on Christmas Day 1987, the Gin Blossoms, comprised of vocalist Wilson, guitarist/vocalist Jesse Valenzuela, drummer Phillip Rhodes, bassist Bill Leen and guitarist Doug Hopkins, have established a distinct musical identity offering up their brand of southwestern-flavored pop, whose powerful, and often wry lyrics combine with melodies fueled with enough hooks for a weekend fishing party. Hopkins has since left the band only to be replaced with Scott Johnson—a long-time staple of the Arizona music scene.

Following the pattern set by countless regional bands, the Gin Blossoms eventually recorded and released their own indie album, **DUSTED** (1989 San Jacinto Records), to significant acclaim. Soon the band achieved status as one of Arizona's best rock bands (an honor bestowed upon them by countless local reader and critics polls), and later they earned a spot as the only unsigned band on an MTV-aired CMJ awards show (alongside such luminaries as Lou Reed, the Red Hot Chili Peppers and the Neville Brothers).

The band's powerful live shows began to generate notice from the world outside Arizona, taking the quintet on the road across the United States, and in 1990 the band inked a deal with A&M Records.

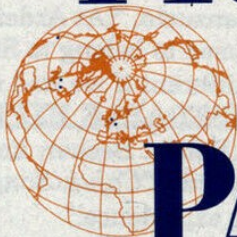
Following a stint in Los Angeles, where the band's attempt to record tracks with a notable producer proved unsuccessful, A&M gave the green light for the Gin Blossoms to return to their native Arizona to record a handful of tracks on their own. The resulting **UP AND CRUMBLING** five-song EP released last year, marked the band's major label debut. The EP generated substantial commercial alternative and AOR airplay for the tracks "*Allison Road*" and "*Mrs. Rita*" (both remixed for inclusion on **NEW MISERABLE EXPERIENCE**).

When the time came for the band to record its first full-length album, the Gin Blossoms chose to travel to Memphis' Ardent Studios and pair up with producer John Hampton (The Replacements, Tommy Keene, Robert Cray, The Vaughn Brothers).

"Hampton was great," says Valenzuela. "For the most part we came in with a lot of ideas for the songs we wanted to record. He taught us how to trust our instincts and really led us in the right direction. I don't know how to describe our working relationship other than saying he definitely gave us enough rope to hang ourselves."

"It's easy to get overwhelmed in the studio at times," adds Wilson. "John was really good at

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making sure we stayed true to ourselves.”

The combination of Memphis’ rich musical heritage and the legendary status of Ardent Studios proved an equal inspiration for the band. “The whole experience was amazing,” Wilson describes. “You can’t help but get caught up in the whole Memphis experience. When we were in L.A. the height of culture was Melrose Avenue and Fatburger. In Memphis we were surrounded by the Civil Rights Museum and Graceland.”

Adds Valenzuela, “[At Ardent] we got to use the same amps Big Star used to record with, and the organ that used to belong to Stax Records. There’s no doubt in my mind that the record would have sounded different if we had recorded anywhere else.”

NEW MISERABLE EXPERIENCE features guest shots from Pedal Steel player Robbie Turner, pianist Robert Becker, and Zydeco legend CJ Chenier, who adds his inimitable accordion playing to the band’s “Cajun Song,” which, Wilson recalls, was “one of the magic moments of the whole recording experience.”

All in all, the Gin Blossoms have fashioned what proves to be a classic American pop album. Timeless songs surrounded the listener - from the driving, heartfelt first single “*Hey Jealousy*” to the traditional country stylings of the album’s closing cut, “*Cheatin’*” (a contemporary “tears in your beer” anthem) with the resounding hook: “You can’t call it cheatin’, She reminds me of you.”

American cheese, indeed.