

GIN BLOSSOMS

No Chocolate Cake

Temptation is a crazy and curious feeling, but some things are just cool and decadent enough to warrant our indulgence. Over the years, the Gin Blossoms created the whimsical “no chocolate cake” rule for crew members who tried to hit on the band’s considerable female fanbase on their tours. As it’s the title of their highly anticipated 429 Records debut, *No Chocolate Cake* is more a playful warning. Those who dare to dig in will find that the musical desserts provided by Robin Wilson (lead vocals), Jesse Valenzuela (guitar), Bill Leen (bass) and Scott Johnson (guitar) are just as sweet, high spirited and infectious as ever.

A decade and a half since defining that era’s post grunge pop rock experience with “Hey Jealousy,” “Found Out About You” and the Top Ten Billboard pop hits “Till I Hear It From You” and “Follow You Down”—and four years since the release of a *Major Lodge Victory*—an album Billboard called “an effortless triumph of melodic perfection”—Gin Blossoms are at the top of their seamless harmonic songwriting game with *No Chocolate Cake*.

Because the band members no longer live in the same city—Wilson divides his time between Tempe and New York, Valenzuela is in Los Angeles—putting the sonic pieces of *No Chocolate Cake* together presented an exciting new challenge for the Gin Blossoms. While Wilson contributes a handful of songs, the bulk of the material chosen for the 11 track set was written by Valenzuela either solo or with different collaborators, including Danny Wilde of The Rembrandts (the Blossoms guitarist first worked with Wilde on The Rembrandts’ song “Long Walk Home”).

Wilson recorded his tracks, “Wave Bye Bye,” “Go Cry Baby” and “Something Real” at his studio, Uranus Recording of Tempe. The other members of the band including Danny Wilde produced the mid-tempo drive tune “Goin’ To California.” Valenzuela and Wilde produced the rest at Wilde’s Pueblo Studios in Thousand Oaks—the jangling, inspirational “Don’t Change For Me,” the optimistic “I Don’t Want To Lose You Now,” the high spirited “Miss Disarray,” the heartfelt yet hard rockin’ “I’m Ready,” “Somewhere Tonight,” “If You’ll Be Mine” and the summer-y, brass-tinged “Dead Or Alive on the 405.” Typical of today’s modern recording process, lead vocal (Wilson), vocal harmony (Valenzuela) and instrumental parts were exchanged back and forth electronically—with no single session where the band was in the same studio at the same time.

“In the old days, we used to joke that there was something for everybody in this band,” says Wilson. “There’s just something about the way we play and sound together, but in the end, it’s really about the quality of the songs. If you’re a band and want to sustain a career, no matter what you look like or how you play, you’ve got to have great songs. So it’s those songs and the sound we make...my voice, the guitars, tempos, that add up to something undefinable.”

Valenzuela points out that with the exception of the very early years, the Gin Blossoms were never the kind of band that sat in a single room and composed songs together. “I’ve always felt

that bands that get together to jam and just hope something emerges are wasting their time,” he says. “Writing on command is no guarantee of creating a successful song. There’s something to be said for having a level of experience where you instinctively know what works. The best ones are those that feel like they’ve already been there, as if they are just waiting to naturally emerge. I think it’s the quality of the songs we have and Robin’s voice. It’s also a matter of trust. I know when I bring in a song that Robin will know how to sing it, Scott will know how to play it and Bill will know the groove. I wouldn’t work with guys I had to tell what to do. The key is to not try so hard.

Johnson adds: “We’ve strengthened over time. It’s like having brothers who may get mad at each other once in a while but who care about each other and at the end of the day communicate better over the years. As a guitarist, for me, there’s nothing like having the right chemistry to inspire my own playing.”

Gin Blossoms have always benefited from that innate sense of chemistry and inspiration. From the band's birth in their hometown of Tempe, Arizona, their fanbase grew quickly as they earned a great reputation as a live act. Readers of the Phoenix New Times chose them as the city's best rock band, qualifying them to play at the South by Southwest Music Festival in Austin, Texas in March, 1989. Later that year, CMJ dubbed them the “Best Unsigned Band in America” and invited them to play MTV's New Music Awards in New York City.

Major label interest quickly followed—a mixed blessing reflected in the title of their 1992 full length debut *New Miserable Experience*, which followed their 1991 EP *Up and Crumbling*. Gin Blossom’s trademark first hit “Hey Jealousy,” which peaked at #25 on the Billboard Hot 100, was penned by founding member Doug Hopkins, who later committed suicide. *Miserable* spawned four more singles: “Mrs. Rita,” “Found Out About You,” “Allison Road” and “Until I Fall Away.”

Between album releases, Gin Blossoms scored a major hit with “Till I Hear From You” from the soundtrack to the film “Empire Records,” which went Top Ten on the Billboard Hot 100 and Top 5 on the Mainstream Rock, Modern Rock and AC Top 40 Charts. *Congratulations I'm Sorry*, the Blossom's final original album of the decade, hit #10 on the Billboard Top 200 and included two more hits: “Follow You Down” which spent ten weeks in the Top Ten and “As Long As It Matters.” Gin Blossoms then took a lengthy hiatus, during which time some of the members pursued outside band endeavors—Wilson launched Gas Giants, Valenzuela fronted Low Watts and released a solo album and Johnson joined Roger Clyne and the Peacemakers. In 2002, the band reunited for an 80 date U.S. tour and released the critically acclaimed *Major Lodge Victory* in 2006. The song “Learning The Hard Way” was a hit at AC Radio.

“In this world and especially in the music industry,” Wilson says, “it’s hard to find your place, and so you’re lucky if you can find your true calling that brings you joy and allows you to be productive. It’s really a miracle of chaos mathematics that the Gin Blossoms came together and has endured this long, but it’s been an incredible journey for all of us and we still very much enjoy working and performing together. As a studio owner, I have the privilege of working with and mentoring many young bands and I try to clue them into the most important goal of all...to

be a band that is still around years later, viable and creating music people want to listen to and performing shows that people still want to pay and see.”

Gin Blossoms’ roller coaster ride of massive success, personal tragedy, a lengthy breakup, solo projects and reconciliation makes the deep emotional impact and overall optimistic nature of *No Chocolate Cake* all the more remarkable.

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