



# SLAID CLEAVES

BY MARIAN MONTGOMERY

If there's one thing that is consistently said about Slaid Cleaves, it's that he is such a nice guy. It's the first thing Terri Hendrix said about him at a recent showcase at the Makor Lounge in New York City. He looks the part, too. With ruddy cheeks, an ample amount of wavy black hair and a young, friendly face that he tries to hide with a scrappy goatee, he's the kind of guy you would be proud to take home to mom and dad. And one night in New Jersey, that's exactly what one fan had in mind.

"After the show in New Jersey last night, some girl came up to us and invited the band to come stay at her parent's place," Cleaves began. It should be noted that Cleaves' wife, Karen, was with him, too. "We'd only met her once or twice. But she assured us that her parents would love having company. She said the mother has 'empty-nest syndrome.'" Sure enough, her mother welcomed Cleaves and his band into her home, even offering them food and the comforts of home. "We kept her up talking until two in the morning. Her dad woke Ivan [Browne, Cleave's stand-up bass player] up at 6 a.m. to go golfing. I fixed my car in their garage. We were just at home." CONTINUED ON PAGE 67



WILL VAN OVERBEEK



WILL MICHAELS

## One Bad Month Leads to One Good Band

In October 1995, Justin Furstenfeld had a life-changing revelation sparked by the disappointment of a collapsed relationship and the acceptance of grown-up responsibilities.

"I just had a real bad month," says the now 24-year-old singer-songwriter of the Houston band Blue October. "It's like one of those months when you realize that you either have to change your act, get your shit together or you're not going anywhere."

From Furstenfeld's epiphany came a period of soul searching, poetic expression, therapy and then inspiration. His inspiration formed a band that has received numerous local accolades and cultivated a strong following in only a few years. "I made a decision that October that I needed to grow up, so I called the band Blue October," Furstenfeld says. "It was the saddest month of my life, but it was also a stepping stone. I knew I had to name this project after that."

Blue October made its major label debut on August 15 with the Universal release *Consent to Treatment*, a prolific combination of music, art and rehabilitation, as much performance art as progressive rock. Mixing the power of spoken word with the energy of hard rock and emotionally-charged lyrics, Blue October delivers a sound that is not easily categorized. While the CD deals with feelings of loneliness, rejection and depression, its ultimate message is a positive one.

"If I had to use colors to describe it, I'd definitely say it was a gray mixture of maroon and blue for feeling," Furstenfeld says. "It is just a hopeful album. The last album we" CONTINUED ON PAGE 69

# BLUE OCTOBER



BY CINDY ROYAL

# Blue October

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 66 made was a little down, and it was personally difficult to make. It was something that I had to get off my shoulders. With this album, it's like letting you know that it is O.K. to go through things."

Furstenfeld is candid about every aspect of his life. The theme of mental health and treatment is pervasive both in song and in conversation. "When you go to a shrink's office, the first thing they hand you is a consent-to-treatment form," Furstenfeld says. "Are you consenting full force to getting better with yourself? Yes? Then sign your name. The first time I saw that, I knew that would be the name of the album."

Their first CD, *The Answer*, released independently in 1997, sold over 5,000 copies and gained the band critical acclaim locally. They were named Best New Act by *Houston Press* readers in 1998 and Best Rock/Pop Band for the past two years. They also gained a loyal following for their live show, which attracted Michigan agent Michael Rand and, ultimately, Universal Records.

High-profile producer Nick Launay (Silverchair, Midnight Oil, Semisonic, Talking Heads, INXS) was selected to work with Blue October on the release. It was important to Furstenfeld to find a producer who would buy into their concept, a CD that would tell a story from start to finish, taking the listener on a journey.

"The label would find a producer, and the producer would call me, and I would talk to him to see if he was into the same concept because we are really into the concept thing," Furstenfeld says. "Not just twelve songs, one after another. It was like a story, and Nick was into it from the beginning."

Blue October consists of Furstenfeld on vocals and guitar, brother Jeremy Furstenfeld on drums, Matt Noveskey on bass, Brant Coulter on guitar and Ryan Delahoussaye on blue electric violin, an instrument not often heard in modern, rock music. All members are now living in San Marcos, but Furstenfeld first met Delahoussaye when the two were students at Houston's High School of Performing and Visual Arts in 1993. He was impressed with Delahoussaye's creativity and training.

"Ryan does wicked things with the violin," Furstenfeld says. "He plays reverbs, delays and wahs on it. It's another instrument. It's not a violin anymore. It's like another guitar. It gives us the blue in Blue October. Without him it would be much less moody, and I love moody."

The final track of *Consent to Treatment*, "The Answer," is a perfect example of Blue October's melancholy style. It showcases

Furstenfeld's raspy, Peter Gabriel-like vocals and weaves Delahoussaye's moody violin strains. The lilting keyboards are provided by new-age pianist George Winston. "I thank God that he played on our album," Furstenfeld says. "When we were signed to Universal, I decided to see if we could really pull some strings, so I asked our producer if we could get George Winston, and he said, 'Sure.'"

Winston agreed, went into the studio and came out with four different takes that were delivered to Blue October. "We didn't get to meet him, but it's better that way," Furstenfeld says. "If I would have gotten to meet him I would have been just freaking out like a fan."

The cover art of *Consent to Treatment* depicts Furstenfeld's face covered in dirt, landscape, street signs and telephone poles, as if the weight of the world was resting on his head. On some tracks, like "HRSA" and "Schizophrenia," the theme of mental illness is overt. On others, like the U2-esque "Independently Happy," the repetition of "happy" in the chorus leaves the listener wondering if he truly is happy or is merely trying to convince himself of it. "Breakfast at 10" is a rolling, rock anthem of male bonding, dispensing advice on getting over a broken heart.

The opening cut, "Retarded, Disfigured Clown" is a simple spoken word track delivered unaccompanied by Furstenfeld. It serves as an overview for what is about to be heard, and ends with "Sneaking into the lives of strangers and letting them fall apart to a new rhythm, just to feel better," a full circle message of breakdown, recovery, triumph and ultimately sharing that newfound insight with others.

## An Automatic Steeple for Depressed and Lonely People

A line from "The Answer," "I'm an automatic steeple for depressed and lonely people," succinctly defines the magnetism of Blue October, with a strong following of worshipping fans in the Houston area. Of the fans, Furstenfeld says: "I love them all. It started when I was 13 years old playing in [the band] Last Wish and they have never left my side. Every time I play in Houston, I get choked up."

"It is fun to play everywhere, but when we play in Houston there is so much love there," says Jeremy Furstenfeld. "People accept us with open arms. When Justin comes out there and tells everything and opens up, the audience just opens up."

The band's reach has grown beyond Houston to Dallas, Fort Worth, Austin, Denton, San Marcos and points between. Blue October fan Jamie Hardy from Dallas recently made the trip down I-35 to an Austin show at La Zona Rosa. "I think they

CONTINUED ON PAGE 70

# Blue October

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 69 have such a unique sound, and part of their unique sound is their violinist," Hardy says.

Mandy Holly from San Marcos is attracted to their distinctive style and passionate lyrics. "I like the music, the words to the songs," Holly says. "They are different. I know that the songs are about something and that they are not just made up."

The crowd at La Zona Rosa is primarily

female of the-young-and-the-backless variety. They seem to hinge on Furstenfeld's every word and move on stage. But the appeal is not specific to the women in the crowd. Young men feel the power of Furstenfeld's message with equal regard. "Their music is their own, everything is artistic," says Michael Sexton of San Marcos. "The whole violin thing is awesome, and their lyrics are so on."

Furstenfeld is touched by his fans. He says that it is not unusual for men to come backstage with tears in their eyes after a particular song has meant something to them. It is the openness of

his fans that helps sustain his commitment to reaching out to them with honest lyrics.

"People are so stuck in themselves, so afraid to talk about real things," Furstenfeld says. "That's why you have so many fake relationships, and people lying and constant hurt and disregard. The sadness of our music is used to make the happiness evolve. I just want to say it all, and I see the importance of it when people come backstage and say thank you for getting that deeply into it."

The potential of exposing his personal struggles to a national audience does not daunt Furstenfeld. "There are people that say that I should shut up, that I say too many personal things," he says. "This is just my diary, and people are giving me the chance to put it in an album."

Blue October's live performance is a showcase of talent, but the big draw is in the emotional connection between band and audience, with fans crammed up to the front of the stage, singing along and feeling every lyric. Overcome with emotion, one girl in the crowd at La Zona Rosa proclaims, "Sometimes you feel like it's you. You're singing it because it's your life."

Now the goal is to spread the word outside of Texas. Blue October plans to tour throughout the Midwest promoting *Consent to Treatment*, which means time on the road in the cramped quarters of their 15-passenger van.

"We are still learning to live with each other," Furstenfeld says. "One thing that we are very big on is that if you have an issue, just say it. If you bring it up a week later, we are going to tell you to shut up because you should have brought it up when you were mad in the first place."

"Yeah, if you bring it up later, you are just whining," adds Jeremy.

These days when Blue October is touring, the new CD by Perfect Circle, *Mer De Noms*, makes everyone happy. The van's CD player also features Stone Temple Pilots and Sunny Day Real Estate. Not surprisingly, one of Furstenfeld's primary influences is Morrissey, the gloomy, yet clever front man of '80s alternative band The Smiths.

"When I put on The Smiths, everybody goes, 'Ahh, he's whining again,'" Furstenfeld says. "The road manager and I sit in the back of the van and get into it, but after we listen to more than five songs, everyone else in the band is telling us to shut up."

Just as *Consent to Treatment* is a journey that ends in hope, Furstenfeld speaks hopefully about the future of Blue October. "We just want to keep making albums, keep making music. We just want to be respected more as artists instead of just being seen as these rock 'n' roll guys." X