

Smashing Orange, MCA Aren't Worried About Playing Name Game

■ BY GIL GRIFFIN

NEW YORK—When singer/songwriter and guitarist Rob Montejo formed his band six years ago, he gave it a name he thought couldn't be approximated by any other.

"Boy, was I wrong," he says, chuckling. "I always liked the way the British use the word 'smashing' as a positive adjective, and I always liked the word 'orange,' so I put the two together." But any similarity between Montejo's band, Smashing Orange—which hails from Wilmington, Del.—and Chicago alternative rock act Smashing Pumpkins begins and ends with the "S" word.

"No Return In The End," Smashing Orange's major-label debut for MCA Records, is a gritty and somber, guitar-driven hard-rock set that is scheduled for an Oct. 11 release. Don't expect it to arrive in stores with a "not to be confused with..." sticker.

"There won't be any problem with name recognition," says Robbie Snow, MCA's VP of product management. Whether or not Smashing

Orange will distinguish itself, Snow adds, will "come down to the music."

"The Way That I Love You" will be the leadoff single, according to MCA staffers. "Our promotion people felt strongly about that song," Snow says, "so we're going to work it to college and alternative radio."

Those formats eagerly supported Smashing Orange's debut album, "The Glass Bead Game," which the band released independently in 1992. With not much demand in the Wilmington-area clubs for an alternative band, Smashing Orange, with the backing of a now-defunct British label, found an audience while touring the U.K., Belgium, and France. "Wilmington isn't like Seattle, where we could go play and make \$2,000 a night," Montejo says. "Most of the bands that played in Wilmington when we started were cover bands. There was no such thing as alternative back then."

Now that there is, Smashing Orange has been building a small following in the Mid-Atlantic region, playing numerous dates in Wilmington, Philadelphia, Baltimore,



SMASHING ORANGE

and Washington, D.C. Snow says that building on that fan base will be a key part of MCA's marketing strategy. "We want the band to continue touring in that base," he says. "We want them to build a database. If people are fans, they'll want to know about the band. Having a database is a way to keep the fans updated."

Montejo probably couldn't envision having a legion of fans even two years ago, when Smashing Orange recorded "The Glass Bead Game." The money to record the album was put up by perhaps the band's biggest backer, Bert Ottavio, who owns

the Wilmington record store where Montejo had worked since he was 15. After the album was completed, Ottavio—now the band's manager—helped Smashing Orange find a lawyer. "Bert's been a great source of support," Montejo says. "The record store is like a second home. We want him to benefit as much from this record as we do."

But the band wouldn't have benefited from signing a major-label deal with any of the other labels that courted it before and after the release of "The Glass Bead Game," says Montejo. "It was a risk not taking the offers, but we had to have the right deal. Anything can be written in a contract. Other companies wanted to have creative control, tie us up for a long time, or not give us a share of royalties." But by signing with MCA, Montejo says, "the way our deal is set up, we're a major part of the decision-making process."

"It's their record," says Ron Oberman, MCA's VP of A&R. "They have exceptionally strong songs, and we believe in them as a creative act."

Montejo and band mates Stephen Wagner and Rick Hodgson had to exercise extraordinary creativity when they decided to re-record "No Return In The End," because a since-dismissed drummer's rhythms were off-tempo and couldn't be cleaned up in the editing room. Luckily, session drummer and engineer Andy Kravitz was on hand and played drums on the re-recording, which was done in a hectic five days. Stroller White has since taken over as the band's new drummer.

"It was a challenge to make something good out of an adverse situation," says Hodgson, the band's guitarist. "It showed we could stick together and make something even better."

LEADERS OF RELATIVITY'S MERCY RULE KEEP MUSIC, MARRIAGE SEPARATE

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band that recorded for the Chicago-based Pravda label).

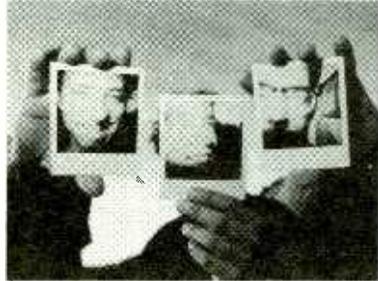
Relativity product manager Paul Bibot says that further roadwork—with a substantial number of in-store

appearances along the way—is essential to the label's campaign, which began with this spring's reissues of "God Protects Fools," originally issued on Lincoln micro-indie Caulfield Records.

"We re-serviced that to get the buzz going, but we really used it to set up ['Providence']," Bibot says. "I was honestly surprised by how well the reissue sold, even around the band's home base. But we didn't want to wait too long. We wanted to create momentum, then build."

The next steps in the building process are college radio (targeted for early September) and commercial alternative (which will be serviced with a single version of "Tell Tomorrow" two weeks after the album's in-store date).

That song (more or less a pessimist's revision of the "Annie" theme) distills Mercy Rule's basic formula—an aggressively pounded verse, followed by an anthemic



MERCY RULE: Ron Albertson, Heidi Ore, and Jon Taylor.

chorus—with invigorating results. Considering the members' relative inexperience as writers—13 Nightmares' songs were all penned by its former frontman—"Providence" is surprisingly deep in fully realized songs.

"Our whole thing is power ballads," Taylor says, laughing. "None of our songs are the fastest, peppiest things you'll hear. On the first record we just had a bunch of riffs, since we were just learning to write. But the new ones are led by the vocals, because Heidi's voice is our strongest element."

Ore brushes off that notion, insisting that the band's strength is its spontaneity. "We're constantly writing songs in practice and then doing them at the very next show, whether they're finished or not," she says. "They may not be finished, and I may have to make up lyrics, and we may just throw it out the next day—but I think the less time we spend on something, the better off we are."

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ROLLING STONES COUNTING CROWS	Giants Stadium East Rutherford, N.J.	Aug. 12, 14-15, 17	\$9,531,214 \$50/\$25	201,547 tour sellouts	Concert Prods. International USA
ROLLING STONES STONE TEMPLE PILOTS	Exhibition Stadium Toronto	Aug. 19-20	\$3,281,367 (\$4,521,067 Canadian) \$50/\$29.50	97,197 two sellouts	Concert Prods. International USA
EAGLES	Coca-Cola Star Lake Amphitheatre Burgettstown, Pa.	Aug. 15-16	\$2,402,765 \$110/\$65/ \$45	43,054 two sellouts	PACE Concerts DiCesare-Engler Prods.
EAGLES	Hardee's Walnut Creek Amphitheatre Raleigh, N.C.	Aug. 18-19	\$2,180,482 \$97/\$39.50	38,332 two sellouts	Cellar Door PACE Concerts
PHIL COLLINS	Great Western Forum Inglewood, Calif.	Aug. 8-9, 11	\$1,212,430 \$50/\$30	35,000 37,500 three shows	Avalon Attractions
MICHAEL BOLTON CELINE DION	Jones Beach Theatre Wantagh, N.Y.	Aug. 6-7, 10	\$1,174,169 \$36.50	32,169 32,679 three shows two sellouts	Delsener/Slater Enterprises
LOLLAPALOOZA '94: SMASHING PUMPKINS BEASTIE BOYS GEORGE CLINTON & THE P-FUNK ALLSTARS THE BREEDERS, L7 A TRIBE CALLED QUEST GREEN DAY	Houston Raceway Park Baytown, Texas	Aug. 19	\$582,123 \$30.50	21,007 30,000	PACE Concerts
BONNIE RAITT BRUCE HORNSBY	Jones Beach Theatre Wantagh, N.Y.	Aug. 18-19	\$554,380 \$36/\$26	19,030 21,694 two shows	Delsener/Slater Enterprises
AEROSMITH JACKYL	Hersheypark Stadium Hershey, Pa.	Aug. 10	\$549,630 \$22.50	24,428 sellout	Electric Factory Concerts
METALLICA SUICIDAL TENDENCIES FIGHT	Coca-Cola Star Lake Amphitheatre Burgettstown, Pa.	Aug. 12	\$532,665 \$27/\$22	23,024 sellout	PACE Concerts DiCesare-Engler Prods.

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