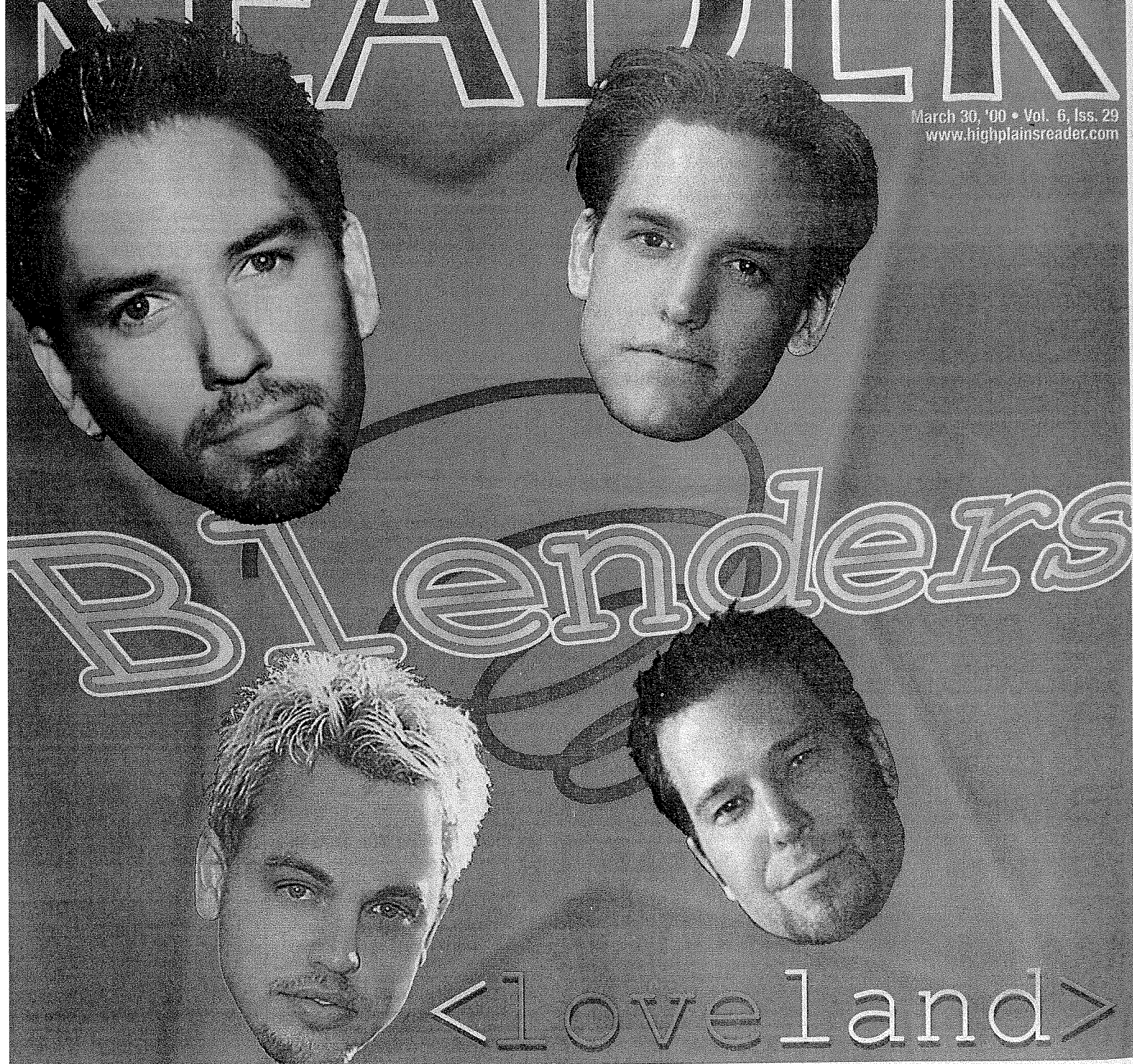


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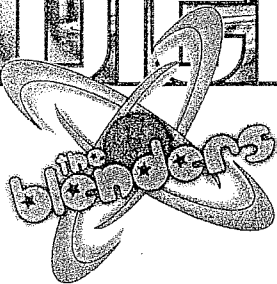
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Blenders

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Blenders return to their loved land



By Ana N. Rusness

The Blenders have announced plans of once again returning from the world of major record labels to their hometown to celebrate the release of their sixth full-length album, *Loveland*.

Loveland, released by Cowtown Records, sold about eighty copies during the first day of sales, March 22, solely through the group's website. Stores will carry the product beginning April 11. Distribution snags held up the release date, which was originally set for a aptly chosen Valentine's Day premiere.

"We have had our share of ups and downs with this project, but it's finally finished...I think completing this album was a test of will and persistence for us. The road was rocky, but we knew in our hearts that we had promised an album to our fans and that's what we're gonna give 'em. We hope that everyone

can find a new 'favorite song' on this, our sixth album...*Loveland*," Blender Darren Rust said.

Not afraid of a little hard work and ready to have some fun with their friends and fans in Fargo, the Blenders [Tim Kasper, Darren Rust, Allan Rust and Ryan Lance] will turn NDSU's Festival Concert Hall into a land for lovers of old and new Blender's material. Several local organizations, including the *High Plains Reader* and Radio City will host the full blown concerts May 11 and 12. The shows will be totally focused on the fourteen years of music produced by the Blenders, with material from their first CDs and public performances sharing the spotlight with the newly released songs from *Loveland*.

Tickets for the two Fargo performances will go on sale through Ticketmaster [701-235-7171] and NDSU's box office [235-9442], Monday, April 3.

"These concerts might be the last time for people to hear our old stuff..." Tim Kasper

warned. Some of the past material is likely to be retired following the May performances. Kasper also announced the group's plans to stop booking high school performances after August.

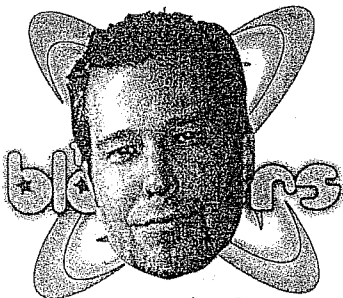
"It's just a point we're at in our careers...We started doing it to help music departments and reach



darren rust



ryan lance



tim kasper

younger audiences," Kasper said. Now the groups will focus on theatre, college and festival venues which reach the different age groups that make up their wide target audience, which pinpoints primarily women of all ages.

In an effort to raise general awareness of their new CD, the Blenders will back the album regionally with touring performances. The first pressing of *Loveland* will be distributed to stores within the same six state radius in the Midwest, including Chicago and Sioux Falls, before a larger market is saturated with the product. Still attempting to prove to Universal that their product does have money making potential, the group is pushing the album with little help from the major label. With a fresh product and the hype and attention associated with a CD release, the group hopes to gain some major radio airplay and give the fans an album they will enjoy.

STARDOM

Even among throngs of screaming teenage

girls at performance venues around the nation, Tim Kasper does not feel famous, or let the success of the Blenders go to his head.

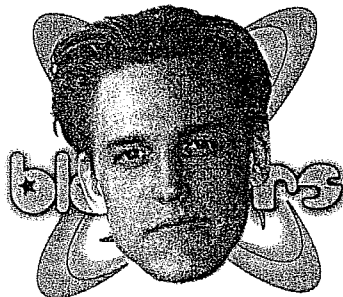
"There are no stars, no egos in our group," Kasper stated firmly.

Instead of focusing on being idols or hometown heroes, the guys appreciate the opportunities their careers have allowed them, including working with and being among a talented pool of producers, recording artists, and others who work on behalf of musical artists.


"I feel more that, especially in certain cities like Fargo or Minneapolis, we're well known. It's rewarding to have the respect of musicians and be recognized for what we've done. It helps to realize that our work counts," Kasper said.

It is easy to sense the great respect Kasper and the others hold for the producers and other talented industry professionals they surround themselves with.

"The talented people we work with are great people, and great friends. They're just so normal," Kasper began as he told the story of one such person, Minneapolis resident and



allan rust



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[Life Rites]
We punctuate our lives with ritual as a way of affirming the positive in our world. Life Rites are for everyone. The rules: 1. A Life Rite should make you feel good or should comfort you. 2. It should harm no one. 3. It should never be used to manipulate others. Thought form has power. The rituals are for and about you.

[Life Rite for an Ending Relationship]
Materials List: 1 small black candle; 1 item that belonged to, or a photo of, the individual going out of your life; 1 piece of parchment; 1 black bag or piece of black fabric.
At a time and place that you will not be disturbed, place all of the above items on a cloth on the ground or floor. Light the candle. Sit before the items. Think about the hurt that the break-up or loss has caused. On the parchment, write the things that you wish to have leave you and the other person. For instance, you may write emptiness, pain, guilt, or you may be more specific. DO NOT write what you want, only what you do not want in your life. Take your time and write everything. Write on the front and the back of the parchment. Write on top of what you have written if you run out of room. No one is ever going to read it. It does not have to be legible. Now say, "The words written on this paper are words of sorrow, words of pain." Read the words aloud. Then put the parchment to the flame of the candle, saying, "As these words burn, these sorrows burn out of me and _____ (the other person's name). So mote it be!" Make sure that the parchment burns up entirely.
Allow the candle to burn itself out. Take the personal item of the other individual, the parchment's ashes, a hair from your head, and anything that remains of the candle, and place them in the bag or cloth and tie it up. Throw it into a river or bury it off your property, saying, "Sorrow gone. Magick done. So mote it be." Begin your new life without pain. —Lady Star.

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writer/comedian, Dave Barry. His musical group, including the talents of fellow author Steven King tours with Cher and other internationally successful artists, but is the most normal person, and very inspiring.

"We've been very fortunate in working with famous people who are pretty cool, not jerks," Kasper said. His philosophy is that there are different levels of stardom and recognition the public elevate public figures to and where these people elevate themselves to in their own minds.

Some people who are seen every night on television and recognized worldwide, such as Blender's fan and *Tonight Show* host Jay Leno, can still walk around on the street without being mobbed by fans or the abhorred paparazzi.

"It's a little harder for stars like Madonna or [the artist formerly known as] Prince, who just don't blend in," Kasper said. The Blenders see themselves as lucky members of the first category who can still enjoy the normalcy and privacy that exists in their lives.

The group has, however, rubbed shoulders with some of the hottest voices and most experienced producers in the music industry on their rise to success. "Star parties," or tours generally arranged by radio stations that bring together a large mass of musicians and other individuals emulating star power have provided opportunities for the Blenders to hang out with and learn from artists like 98 Degrees, LFO, the Mo'Nifs, Mulberry Lane and Savage Garden.

LABEL RELATIONS, CAREER MANAGEMENT, AND BOY BANDS

The decade of boy bands, lawsuits and record label mergers has packed some interesting hurdles and twists into the Blenders' experience with the music industry.

After a three-year deal with Orchard Lane Music, a small Minneapolis-based label financed by the Musicland corporation, and an on-again-off-again association with the Primarily A Cappella organization out of San Anselmo, CA, the Blenders signed their contract with Universal Records in late 1996. Since then, the label has undergone major changes, merging in 1998 with the Polygram conglomerate to form Universal Music Group, the world's largest record company. The unified powerhouse followed that shocking announcement with their plans to cut any group or musician signed to a Universal Music Group label that had not sold at least 200,000 copies of their most recently released album.

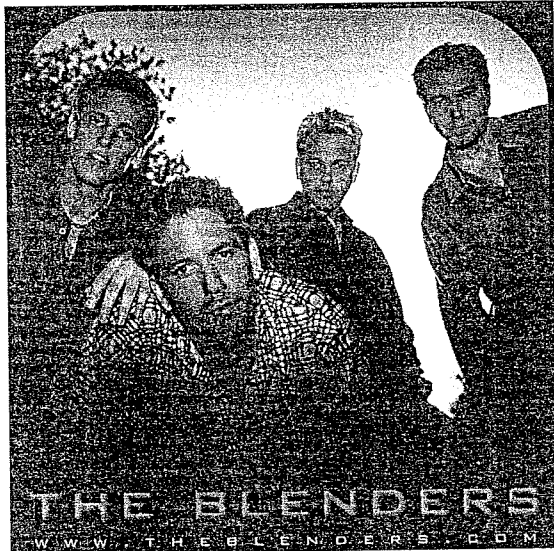
With sales of each of their albums only in the "tens of thousands," the Blenders faced the ax, but pulled through. The package they, as a group, presented showed enough promise for the label to justify hanging on to them.

"[Universal has] laid off 7,000 people, but we are still hanging in there," Lance reported shortly after the merger.

Despite their good fortune, the Blenders did still undergo moderate fall-out resulting from the staffing cuts, changes and general reorganization taking place at their label. Marc Nathan, the Artist & Repertoire representative for the Blenders at Universal, left the organization. Kasper says that Nathan's excitement about the group was the driving force in the backing efforts provided by Universal. Since

his departure, Universal's contributions have mainly been distribution and name recognition.

"It's great if [your label] chooses to concentrate on you," Kasper said. "If they don't get excited, you're screwed. How do you compete with 'the machine'?"



Universal's efforts did acquire a Number One hit for the Blenders in 1998. The single "I am in Love with the McDonald's Girl," originally recorded by Barenaked Ladies, topped the charts at No. 1 in Norway. It also scored some major radio airplay for the Blenders, and was in the rotation of over 30 pop stations around the country. Similar radio coverage is a goal for the songs on the new CD.

"Getting a radio hit is such a key element," Kasper said. "That's one of the successes we'd like from this album." He did express a slight concern he has about obtaining such a goal though.

"Some groups get a hit right away, and then are locked into performing it all the time. I'm glad we haven't been limited by that...But now we're at a point where a hit would be so fulfilling."

Universal Records selected about half of the songs on *Loveland*, which the Blenders arranged along with the material they selected for the album. *Loveland* features only one entirely a cappella song, a remake of "Together," and contains guest performances by rapper Tony M., Dave Barry on guitar and Scott Pearson on drums. During the creation process of the CD, the Blenders have compiled "practically enough material for a whole other album," so depending on the success of this album and future developments, Kasper advises fans not to rule anything out.

Loveland, released on the Blender's Cowtown Records and distributed by OarFin under exclusive license from Universal Records, is a compromise between the freedom, challenge, and innovation of releasing an album independently and the ease, financial support, and built-in networks a CD released on a major record label basks in. The sales and penetration success of *Loveland* will play a significant role in determining the group's future relationship with Universal Records. If

a decision is reached that Universal Records is not the label for the Blenders, Kasper assured that "there are several other labels interested in signing us."

Even with the abundance of boy bands sharing the spotlight of the music industry, it is somewhat surprising that some of the most

well-known, competing musical groups have been signed to the same record label. Universal, for instance, is home to the Blenders and two other somewhat older boy bands: Boys II Men and 98 Degrees. This phenomenon sometimes spawns fighting and threats, such as the threat by the Backstreet Boys to leave Jive Records when the company signed N' Sync. In the Blender's case, the situation is more of an opportunity for the group to interact with other musical acts they respect. Kasper says he prefers the more adult contemporary sounds of 98 Degrees, Semisonic and the Backstreet Boys rather than the younger pop sounds of N' Sync and Britney Spears.

The vocal stylings of the more mature vocal groups, Kasper feels, have been instrumental in bridging the gap between the love ballads of Boyz II Men to a new, fresh sound in the music produced by men's vocal groups.

"I respect the Backstreet Boys and 98 Degrees for all the hard work and time they've put in," Kasper said. However, "groups like 98 Degrees have the most parallels to the Blenders. We are more vocal, where most of the boy bands are more dance-oriented." The two groups also share the bond of being self-created, not manufactured in any way.

"We know, and those who work with us know, that we are real, not cut from some mold," Kasper said. "The Blenders is about the vocals and the music, not the existence of a band."

MAINTAINING CONTROL

The Blenders are also about the energy, effort and hard work that remain an integral part of their hands-on approach to managing every aspect of their career. Having a constant awareness of all the efforts being put forth on their behalf, the Blenders lead or work closely with the professionals hired to help them succeed.

One of Allan Rust's major contributions to the group, besides his musical talents, has been the colorful, imaginative graphic design that has become an integral part of recent Blenders packaging. This has helped the Blenders maintain

control of their image as it is portrayed in the media and on their products.

"When someone else is controlling your image, it's a scary thing. We like a lot of control, and are lucky to get that from Universal," Kasper said. There are a lot of other groups that don't have the opportunity or the respect from their labels to control that influential aspect of marketing.

Darren Rust is the main Blender in charge of each CD's electronic production. A music industry student of Moorhead State University, his education on CD production quickly turned from classes and textbooks to experiential learning once the Blenders began recording.

Now, Rust is in on all production action, including mixing and mastering, related to the Blenders music. Kasper is also producing other artist's music and handling a majority of the group's media relations. All four Blenders have been involved in writing and arranging the music they perform, but a large number of Darren Rust, Levi Seacer Jr. collaborations appear on *Loveland*.

GROWING UP

Now entering their fifteenth year of working together, and approaching their thirties, the Blenders are a little worried that they might be getting too old to compete in the pop genre.

"We probably can't do this forever," Kasper stated. The thought is not too distressing for the group's member, though. The experience and relationships they have picked up over the years have solidified into what are sure to be healthy, successful careers in the entertainment industry for each Blender.

In the meantime, Lance, Kasper and the Rust brothers are enjoying what they have now: international success, challenging creative undertakings, a new top quality musical release, *Loveland*, and hometown audiences who snatch up tickets to their concerts in about one day.

