

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

THE CHRONICLE

Funky Blues man Shannon merges best of both worlds on latest

By JERI YOUNG
THE CHRONICLE

Mem Shannon is not your father's blues singer.

A quick listen to his latest release "Spend Some Time With Me" proves that.

"I'm not your traditional blues guy," Shannon says with a chuckle. "I can funk with the best of them."

Though Shannon can pluck

other music has evolved but the blues. I just don't understand it man."

Shannon's battle to bring the blues into the 90s has been a lonely one. Since breaking onto the music scene with his 1995 classic "A Cab Driver's Blues," Shannon has become a one man army - melding blues, funk and country into a sound all his own.

"I really don't know what I

But the CD also is semi-autobiographical. Shannon writes frequently of his own struggle to establish himself as a legitimate artist - not just another blues singer.

In "Paying My Dues," he croons about the horrors of working with record labels. In "No Such Thing: My Humble Opinion: 2nd Movement," Shannon takes on his critics head-on declaring that in his

personal. "Not My Friend" is about love and friendship. It's personal though. I can't really go into detail but maybe in the future I'll be able to talk about it. I'm sure this person will recognize themselves in the song - if they have any intelligence.

"It helps to ease a tense situation. It's a way of venting. When the old blues artists wrote a song, they were writing about life and love and what they were going through. I'm doing the same things."

Shannon's life would make a great blues tune. For 15 years, the

New Orleans native worked as a cabbie to support his family. He wrote songs in his spare time and played side gigs with local bands to hone his skills as a singer and guitarist.

On his first CD, Shannon drew heavily on his days as a cab driver. Snatches of conversations with his passengers were an integral part of his first CD.

"I didn't know what I was getting into," Shannon says of his early cabbie days. "I made nine dollars the first night. Then it started to pick up and I created my routine. I worked the airport dur-

ing the day and the French Quarter at night. Driving a cab you see more than you could ever expect to see."

Shannon vows to continue on his crusade to update the blues, he says. After almost five years in the business - most of it spent touring small venues across the nation - he figures it's too late to turn back now.

"There are so many people out there doing it the same way," he said. "It's too late for me to sell myself out to make it. I just have to keep doing it like I been doing it."



Mem Shannon

with the best of them, the CD has more than a little bit of funk. It's natural, Shannon says wryly. Even the blues had to eventually evolve.

"Everybody's trying to do like all the guys did it back in the day and they're living in 1999," he said. "Back in 1952, when Muddy Waters bought a new guitar, he bought a brand new 1952 guitar. He bought the newest to make the best sounds. You have so many artists - blues artists - out there buying old amps and guitars trying to capture an old sound. Every

expected the business to be like," he said. "I didn't expect it to be like this. I just didn't think it would be this hard for me to do the music I love to do."

His newest CD features more of the same brand of pumped up blues. Shannon wails, cajoles and grooves into in the year 2000 with the same funk that's made him "semi-famous."

From the funk infused "Who Are They" - replete with enough of a brass section to blow away Earth Wind and Fire to the lyrically rich "Pray for the Children," Shannon pleases and tantalizes.

world "you can have all the funk you want."

"I don't put a song together for the hell of it," he said. "I put it together to tell a story - to get a message across. The blues should always tell a story. Somehow people lost the idea that the story was the key. I'm just telling the story the way I see it."

And for blues purists, Shannon also adds a few songs about unrequited love and friendship.

"There are some songs about women on there," he said with a chuckle. "Can't have the blues without love. A lot of the songs are

Celebrities tapped to sell prescription drugs

By PHIL GALEWITZ
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK - Former presidential nominee Bob Dole admits that he takes Viagra. The perfectly composed Joan Lunden suffers from itchy eyes and sneezing. Denver Broncos running back Terrell Davis fights migraine headaches.

No, these people aren't attending a self-help group for celebrities with ailments. They're helping drugmakers pitch their medications.

As competition in the drug industry intensifies and pressure mounts on companies to build profits, an increasing number of pharmaceutical firms are employing famous actors, politicians and sports stars to attract consumer and physician interest.

"The use of celebrities is the next big way to differentiate a drug," said Kelly Peters, senior marketing manager for IMS Health, a health information firm based in Plymouth Meeting, Pa.

Celebrity product endorsements are nothing new: "Seinfeld" co-star Julia Louis-Dreyfus touted hair color and Michael Jordan sells telephone service. But until last year, drugmakers did not use them to market to consumers because the industry's sole focus was on promoting their products to doctors who prescribe the medications.

The emergence of celebrity drug advertising - to patients and physicians - comes amid an explosion in consumer advertising since the Food and Drug Administration in August 1997 loosened restraints on television and radio commercials for prescription drugs.

Last July, Schering-Plough became the first pharmaceutical firm to use a celebrity in a direct-to-consumer national television campaign. It tapped Lunden, former "Good Morning, America"

anchor, to promote its prescription allergy pill, Claritin.

The company would not reveal how much she was paid, though analysts have speculated it's about \$1 million a year.

The payoff for Schering-Plough: The aggressive advertising campaign for Claritin helped worldwide sales soar by 35 percent last year to \$2.3 billion, including \$1.9 billion in U.S. sales.

"We saw this as the next step to reach out to consumers," said Schering-Plough spokesman Bob Consalvo.

Despite their increasing use, celebrities ads still represent only a tiny portion of the billions the industry spends on drug promotion each year. Drug companies still rely on thousands of sales agents to persuade doctors to use their drugs, said Ed Mathers, vice president consumer health-care marketing for Glaxo Wellcome.

But the use of celebrities shows how pharmaceutical firms have become more creative in their marketing. For example, Schering-Plough advertises Claritin on United Airlines baggage tags and Merck offers patients a money-back guarantee on its cholesterol-lowering drug Zocor.

Drug companies use different types of celebrity pitches to sell their products. In some instances, they use those who can give a first-hand testimonial to the effectiveness of the drug, as Lunden did with her hay fever treatment.

Other companies use public figures to raise awareness of an illness to spur visits to a doctor for treatment.

For instance, Pfizer, maker of Viagra - the only pill available for treatment of impotence - will launch an educational campaign on the disorder later this month featuring former Senate-Majority Leader Dole. Dole, who has acknowledged taking Viagra, won't mention it by name in the

ad. Yet in other instances, the celebrities are hired guns who use their reputation to pitch specific drugs.

Merck, the world's largest drug company, hired baseball star Cal Ripken to promote the company's Prinivil hypertension drug in ads that appear in medical magazines. Ripken, as the ads disclose, does not suffer from high blood pressure.

"Cal symbolizes hard work and a solid work ethic," said Merck spokesman John Bloomfield. "And Prinivil provides hard work ethic against a disease."

Mickey Smith, professor of pharmaceutical administration at the University of Mississippi, said the celebrity's believability is key to making such campaigns work.

"The ads have to make sense," he said.

Two celebrities who suffer from migraines are working with drugmakers to inform patients that new treatments are available. Actress Jennie Garth, of "Beverly Hills, 90210" fame, was hired by Glaxo Wellcome, which sells the leading migraine medication Imitrex. Novartis has contracted with Davis of the National Football League to talk to groups about his experience with its Migranol drug. Davis used the nasal spray during the 1998 Super Bowl, which the Broncos won and Davis was named Most Valuable Player.

Another example: Novartis Pharmaceuticals hired Maureen Reagan, daughter of former President Reagan, to increase public knowledge of Alzheimer's as it prepares to launch Exelon, a drug that delays the onset of the disease.

"We wanted a spokesperson to be someone with personal experience," said Novartis spokesman Harry Hohm.

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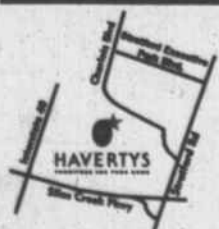
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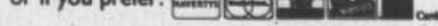
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