

Eliot Sloan: Vocals, Piano
Jeff Pence: Guitars, Backing Vocals
Tony Clark: Bass
Bryan Billhimer: Guitars
Shaun Schaefer: Drums

“This CD marks a new chapter in the life of Blessid Union Of Souls and that’s what makes this so cool, getting to start over with a bit of a head start”, says lead vocalist Eliot Sloan, pointing to the fact that this is the Blessid’s first CD since 2001’s ‘The Singles’. Most of that is due to the band continuing to perform live, recurring airplay from some radio faithfuls but most of all.. The fans!

With two new members, new management and new energy, things have been clicking on all cylinders since recording of this CD commenced in late 2003. Bryan Billhimer and Shaun Schaefer have been longtime friends and band mates since junior high (one has never been in a band without the other). They joined the Blessid shortly after the departure of C.P. Roth and Eddie Hedges in 2002, and the new lineup immediately hit the road and began working on new material for this CD. What has emerged in the last 2 years is this 16-song collection of new material called ‘Perception’.

Working with different producers for the first time in their 10-year career to put together some of the band’s most innovative work, it was the relationship with longtime friend and producer Matt ‘Emosia’ Senatore that set the tone for this record in the 8 songs he produced. **“Matt always brings out the best in us when we record”** says Sloan.

“There’s never any pressure, never too much over-thinking. He just takes the song where it’s already going”. The CD’s first track ‘Could’ve Been With You’ was one of the first songs Matt insisted on recording. **“I heard the demo Eliot recorded and basically said ‘that’s a hit’,** says Senatore. **“Then I heard ‘I Still Believe In Love’ and said ‘that’s a smash’! These guys always had a knack for writing good pop songs and though I produce all genre’s of music I could always envision where this band is going with their music.”**

Recording their first studio album in four years, it was time to make some changes. So they acquired the guidance of manager, Tommy Quon, who was personally responsible for the 17 million records sold that launched the career of Vanilla Ice in the early 90’s as well as other acts on his Dallas based Ultrax Records Label and TQ Management. Says Quon; **“This was a situation where we needed each other. The guys were looking for new direction and I was looking for a new challenge so it was a perfect match. There’s so much untapped talent within the band and I felt like I could help them network with people outside their normal realm.”**

It was Quon who introduced Blessid to producers Rich E. Blaze (TLC, Ricky Martin, Diane Warren, Leann Rimes) who produced 3 songs on the CD, Eddie Head (Sony Recording Artist and 2002 Most Talented Teen Contest Winner, Cheyenne Kimball), who produced two tracks, country/contemporary Christian producer Andrew Frye (Charley Pride, Michael W. Smith, Ray Price), Jerome Harmon (Kirk Franklin) and Wayne Stalling (“Mutt” Lange, Chuckii Booker) who each produced one apiece.

“Tommy basically came in and said OK, let’s finish the record that you guys have already started and go from there, which is exactly what we wanted to hear” says bassist Tony Clark. “He heard some of the tracks that we had already done with Matt and a couple of ideas Eliot had done in pre-production and loved what he heard so the logical thing to do was complete the album”. Recording and writing in various locations was key in inspiring some of the songs. “I went out to L.A. to work with Blaze and he just knew where I was going with some of the lyrics,” says Sloan. “He reminds me of myself in a lot of ways so he was easy to write with.

“When we wrote ‘Wild Side Of Me’ all I had was a hook and he helped take it somewhere I wouldn’t have taken it by myself. The same with ‘Closer’ and ‘I Have Just Begun To Live’. There were places in my head that I *didn’t* want the song to go, I wanted a different perspective because sometimes you get bored with where a song goes in your own mind. It’s like you don’t know where it *should* go but you know where it *shouldn’t* and he knew exactly where to take it”.

The remaining production took place in Dallas where Blessid put their more aggressive ideas into the capable hands of Eddie Head with ‘A Thousand And One’ and ‘Redemption’. “Eddie gave those songs the edge it needed without overdoing it and without losing the feel I was hearing,” Sloan says of Head.

The 3 remaining ballads were also recorded in Dallas. ‘Let’s Get Out Of Here’ is actually a re-make of song previously released on Eliot Sloan’s solo EP ‘Words and Music’, and formerly titled ‘Decision’. Co-produced with Andrew Frye, this song deals with the sensitive subject of abortion. “Andrew heard the song and loved it immediately” says manager Quon. “Then after I told him what the song was about he took it personal as if he’d written it himself to make sure the production delivered every aspect of its powerful meaning”.

Quon then solicited the talents of longtime friend, Wayne Stalling, to produced ‘Better Side Of Me’. “I didn’t think too much about this song” admits Sloan, “...but it’s always been one of Tommy’s favorites. It went through various stages during production but after it was done I was pleased with it”.

The album closes with ‘I Was Never Here’, which was produced by Jerome Harmon and assisted by engineer Chris Godbey. “Those guys really brought this song home. I love the “lazy” feel of it and it’s totally different from the original demo”.

Adds Sloan...” I got the idea from a movie called ‘Clockwatchers’ with Parker Posey. She was this neurotic office assistant who, after she was fired, etched into her desk with a knife the words ‘I was never here’ and it just reminded me of a relationship that I was in a while back where the girl I was dating, after she dumped me, just moved on with her life so fast without missing a beat, like I had no emotional effect on her. You don’t forget that type of emotion, so what do I go and do? Write a song about it to remind me of it even more.”

That’s been pretty much the M.O with this band; writing about experiences derived from their own lives and of those around them to create something universal that everyone can

relate to. Since their platinum debut 'Home' (1995), their sophomore self-titled follow up (1997) and 1999's 'Walking Off The Buzz', which spawned the pop-culture hit 'Hey Leonardo (She Likes Me For Me)', Sloan and co-founder Jeff Pence have always managed to do that without really trying.

"We just write what we feel, that's all you can really do to stay true to yourself", quotes Pence. "Music is an accident and in approaching it that way, sometimes you do something that affects people's lives in a way you never imagined. That's the unexpected beauty of doing what we do."

That's what the band hopes for with 'Perception'. With simple, catchy pop melodies like 'She's The One' and 'Reminds Me Of You' to lyrically clever 'Bittersweet Sublime' and 'How Does It Feel Coming Down', to fun sing-a-longs like 'Say Hello To My Little Friend' (Yeah, they know it's from 'Scarface'), the band tries to reach a multitude of emotions in people which, says Sloan, is why there are so many songs on this album.

"It's hard to express all of your ideas, gather all your thoughts and beliefs, put them to words and music, and still feel like you've completed your best work because, with me, ideas are always flowing. So even with 16 songs on this record, I'm already in the mindset of writing and recording another one. It's like I say to myself, 'OK, this is great but I know we can do better on the next one'."

Not that the band is dissatisfied with what they've accomplished on this album. Just the opposite, actually, especially with newcomer Bryan Billhimer. **"This is a solid album altogether,"** says Billhimer who also serves as Emosia's chief engineer... **"And even before Shaun and I came on the scene they've been pretty consistent in giving fans a complete package of good songs, not just one or two radio hits and then a bunch of fillers."** Adds Sloan, **"We've always taken pride in that. That's probably the best compliment we've gotten from our fans, that they can listen to our CDs from start to finish without having to fast forward through a bunch of crap to get to the singles."**

Another one of their biggest compliments, says drummer Schaefer, is that, **"We sound as good or better than the record, so when Bryan and I joined the band our intention was carrying on that tradition. I had some big shoes to fill because (former drummer) Eddie was stellar and a good band is only as good as it's rhythm section so I had to take my skills to the next level at both ends, in the studio and live, with the emphasis on LIVE-not pre-recorded and lip-synched like some artists are known to do."** Adds bassist Clark, **"I hate that! When I go see a band I want to see them perform, not watch them pantomime to a DAT. That's what I grew up with and that's what this band is all about and at the end of the day I think fans appreciate that more."**

Now that 'Perception', a title that Clark came up with, is complete, Blessid gets to do just that, hit the road and perform live. **"It's really our first love",** says Pence. **"We love performing, it's a different experience every night. Different city, different people, different type of energy. You spend so much time in the studio recording and making a good sounding record that we get a little stir-crazy from being cooped-up in the studio for six months at a time because we're a family and we tend to get on each other's nerves after a**

while. We need that balance of being on the road and then back in the studio writing and recording.”

Adds Sloan, “That’s where the songs come from, being out on the road and meeting the people who have supported us for so long. The stage brings to fruition ideas you just can’t come up with locked in a studio. You have to see what moves people and be genuinely interested in what they have to say and in tune to what they are feeling because they’re the reason we’re doing this in the first place. You can’t lose sight of that no matter how many records you sell or how much money you make.”

With 2005 well in their sights, Blessid plans to make the most of the upcoming year. With Sloan, Pence and Emosia co-producing and writing for outside projects, as well as Billhimer and Schaefer pulling double-duty in another up and coming band, The Vinyltones, Blessid’s focus will be challenged but their goals not deterred. And while their success lies mainly here in the states, they plan to hit markets in Southeast Asia and Europe, where they have not been since touring with Mike and the Mechanics in 1996.

“Taking our music abroad has always been a vision of ours,” says Sloan. “We had a Certified Gold Single in Australia and never toured there. And in Indonesia, our first single (I Believe) went to number 1 so we know we have fans all over the world, which is very humbling to us. To know that songs we’ve created have a lasting effect on people’s lives worldwide is daunting.”

Keep checking in for updates and tours in your area, as Blessid is sure to have a show coming your way soon. Down to earth music from down to earth people, BUOS is sure to spread their positive music in a way no other band can.