

Behind the mask: Clinic suits up for a rock event

Musicians aren't always born. Some are made.

Thinking back to my first guitar lesson at age 11, I remember one thing — holding the instrument wrong. It was a big, bumbling, borrowed acoustic. When my teacher asked if I was left-handed, my cheeks flushed cherry red.

I think Ade Blackburn could sympathize.

"Although my parents didn't actually play any instruments, we always listened to music around the house," said Blackburn, naming American pop icons Buddy Holly and Elvis Presley as family favorites.

It must've left a mark on the singer-guitarist for Liverpool's latest art-rock export, Clinic. "I started when I was 13, just trying to play guitar. It took me a long time to be able to learn. I'm definitely not a natural."

But that didn't stop him.

In 1997, Blackburn and keyboardist-guitarist Hartley connected with bassist Brian Campbell and drummer Carl Turney, grabbed some medical garb and took on the name Clinic.

It's now early in the band's U.S. and U.K. tour in support of its latest Domino release, *Walking With Thee*. Thanks to this record, an experimental hodge-podge of electronics, rock and pop, critics tried to pin labels onto the band, calling their sound anything from Brit pop to garage rock.

But Clinic defies most definitions.

"We didn't sort of have one particular style in mind," said Blackburn, calling from tour in San Francisco. What evolved was an unmistakable blend of '60s pop, '70s punk and early '80s new wave, topped off with drum machines.

"It's driven out of all kinds of different influences," said Black-



Listen carefully: Liverpool's foursome Clinic comes to Detroit Saturday. The band performs dressed like doctors but don't let the garb fool you. Singer Ade Blackburn assures his mask has a small hole cut in it so he can sing.

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*Ade Blackburn
Singer, Clinic*

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While working on *Walking With Thee*, the band listened to everything from Donna Summer to Captain Beefheart, Leonard Cohen to Soft Cell. "I really like Soft Cell," he admitted. "A lot of things from that time period are overlooked. What I really like is to go back to different eras where people haven't plundered quite as much."

Clinic might hail from England, but an opening slot on tour with Radiohead last year offered notoriety all around. "I felt

because we had a sort of sound of our own, I don't think it influenced us musically," said Blackburn. "Where it did influence us, I saw the way — considering how big the band is — they are really sort of down to Earth. Being in a band at that level, you can still be sort of nice people. And the music fares as well."

Touring with Radiohead didn't change their stage show antics either. Clinic tours to put on a show. They wear surgical masks and matching outfits. It's never a boring entrance.

"I think with gigs if there is a visual side it does feel like more of an event," Blackburn said. "We don't do loads and loads of songs. We keep it special and selective. It stops it from becoming routine."

Expect the unexpected when Clinic opens for Fila Brazillia, 8 p.m. Saturday, March 30, St. Andrews Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit. Call (313) 961-8961.

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