

# DON'T CALL IT A COMEBACK

CREATIVE LOAFING

ATLANTA, GA  
WEEKLY 180,000  
MAR 14 2007

## Sevendust

w/ Die Cast. \$22.50. 7 p.m. Sat., March 10. The Tabernacle, 152 Luckie St. 404-659-9022.

**T**hough platinum sales have evaded Sevendust in the decade since its first album was released, the band has certainly succeeded at putting a new twist on an age-old cliché. As the saying goes, what doesn't kill you makes you stronger. But, as Sevendust proves, it might also leave you a bit bitter.

Throughout the nu-metal '90s and the early millennium, the hard-rock quintet appeared on the verge of blowing up but instead wound up being the stepping stone for other bands to reach greater glory. This was once a point of contention for the band. While not quite resentful of the many groups that once opened for them and went on to achieve platinum success ahead of them (Incubus, Limp Bizkit, Staind, Nickelback, Godsmack, Drowning Pool, Disturbed), Sevendust was admittedly frustrated. But the members were also brash young men then, fresh off Ozzfest, boasting their second gold record and full of bravado.

"We were definitely working it," says an older, wiser Lajon Witherspoon, the group's lead singer. "Then I look back and I'm like — where are those bands at now?"

Witherspoon, whose melodic vocals are a counterpoint for Sevendust's churning riffage, is speaking by phone from snowy South Bend, Ind. It's not one of your bigger markets, but that's part of how Sevendust has built such a sturdy audience — through nonstop touring.

Prior to the release of 2005's *Next*, the band even went around the country hosting listening parties and Texas hold'em poker games, with proceeds going to the victims of Hurricane Katrina.

"I don't know how to play poker," Witherspoon admits, "but it was something that was incredible — the reason we were doing it. And on top of it, you got to hear the new album, hang out with the guys and meet a lot of really cool people."

That humble attitude has shepherded the band through a half-dozen years of turmoil following its 2001 release, *Animosity*. While Sevendust produced its third straight gold album, its sales failed to improve on the second release, *Home*. The band's record company, T.V.T., noting the hard-rock genre's flagging influence, pressured Sevendust for a change in direction, suggesting something like the Strokes.

"We told them, 'We're not the Sevendust,'" Witherspoon jokes in hindsight. He does acknowledge, however, that producer Butch Walker was brought in for 2003's *Seasons* to switch things up. "We grew and we tried different avenues with music, but ultimately it's always been Sevendust. Even if there was a producer that came in and put his touch on it, it was still us."

The more melodic approach to *Seasons* produced the band's highest-ever chart position (No. 14), and included the hits "Enemy," "Broken Down" and "Face to Face,"



# Bitter pill makes Sevendust better

BY CHRIS PARKER

yet again failed to go platinum. With a half-dozen dates left on the *Seasons* tour, guitarist Clint Lowery quit to join his brother's band, Dark New Day. More upheaval followed as Sevendust separated from its booking and management companies (hinting disreputable behavior). Finally, when T.V.T., through a presumed oversight, failed to exercise a clause in its contract, Sevendust was a free agent again.

"You spend half your life trying to get on a label, and the other half trying to get off it," drummer Morgan Rose told a reporter at the time.

It held the promise of a new beginning. Longtime friend Sonny Mayo, who the band knew from his days with Snot, joined as the new guitarist and Sevendust set about recording *Next*. They felt re-energized, Witherspoon explains. "Like when you get a new girlfriend. Her voice sounds different and you like it," he says. "Sonny came in with this great energy. It was exciting. And he brought in a different flavor that we like."

The band formed a partnership with Winedark Records, which had a distribution deal with Universal. The album debuted strong, and had already produced two singles ("Failure," "Ugly") when, suddenly, the money ran out. Sevendust was forced to end its relationship with Winedark, and the album's momentum came to a screeching halt.

"It was too good to be true," says Witherspoon. "You met the cat with all the money. Everybody was happy. It was great. They're like, 'Here ya go.' ... Then 'See ya!' Like, 'What the hell just happened?'"

What happened is everyone went home, which — like much of Sevendust's career — proved as fortuitous as it was discouraging. "We were able to go home and be there, and take the time for our families, wives and girlfriends," says Witherspoon. "So everything happens for a reason."

Things have already begun to turn around. The band signed a deal with Warner, which will distribute the new album, *Alpha*, that came out Tuesday, March 6. Like the current tour — which features an extensive bit of back catalog — the new album represents a return to the band's roots, with a crunchy, heavy sound that belies guitarists Mayo and John Connolly's love of Slayer and old Metallica.

"We went to the old RTM studios that we started at. We got down and dirty, right there in Midtown Atlanta. We actually ran into Clint there, and I hadn't seen him since he had left. This was while we were writing *Alpha*," says Witherspoon. "It was the craziest thing. It was cool. Wow. A lot of things have come full circle."

Whereas they might've felt bitter once, they now feel blessed to have been in the game so long with band members who are like brothers. And they're still chasing that platinum album, which still feels just one good break away.

"We go through so many trials and tribulations within life, and [this is] no different," Witherspoon says, regarding all the label woes and flirtations with major success. "[But] it's exciting to where now it feels like a new beginning — even though we're old as hell."

MUSIC@CREATIVELOAFING.COM

STILL STANDING: Sevendust