



Sevendust

Sevendust returns with new CD, 'Alpha'

By ALAN SCULLEY
For the Mail Call

At one point during a recent telephone interview, Sevendust singer Lajon Witherspoon paused to reflect on the continued popularity of the band.

"It's been such a blessing to still be able to go to these towns and sell out places," he said. "I really feel like if they (fans) had been with us since the first album and they're here now on the sixth album, that they've grown up with us. It's a very strange feeling to have a kid come up to me and say (Sevendust was) my first show, I was 16 or even younger. They make me feel old now when they say that. But to still be rocking with us this many years later and bringing their kids and stuff, it's crazy."

This wasn't the sound of a rock star bragging about his popularity or fame. Witherspoon sounded more like a survivor grateful just to still be in the rock and roll game.

Certainly there have been times in recent years when the band's ability to persevere has been sorely tested. For Sevendust, which formed in 1995 in Atlanta, a career that had started with considerable promise — the band's second CD, "Home," included two popular mainstream rock tracks, "Bitch" and "Back" and seemed to have the band poised for a commercial breakthrough — stalled out just a few years later.

In a bid to create a more commercially accessible sound, Sevendust softened its metal-tinged sound, particularly on its fourth CD, the 2003 release, "Seasons," at the behest of its record label, TVT Records. The move failed, and when TVT mentioned the idea of reshaping the group's sound in the direction of bands like the Strokes and White Stripes, the members of Sevendust knew TVT was more interested in trends than the integrity of the band's music.

The label situation, though, was only one of several major issues facing Sevendust, and the band spent 2004 not only getting out of its deal with TVT, but changing management and revamping a touring setup that had seen the band lose money on its tours despite drawing good crowds.

A significant disruption was created by the departure at the end of 2003 of guitarist Clint Lowery, who had been a main music writer in the group. That void was filled when former Snot guitarist Sonny Mayo, a longtime friend of the band, came on board.

The stresses of those situations carried into the music on the 2005 CD, "Next."

The CD, which marked a return to the band's heavier beginnings, served as a suit-

able soundtrack to songs that dealt with the difficulties Sevendust had faced.

Unfortunately, the arrival of "Next" did not mark an end to the problems for the band, which includes Witherspoon, Mayo, drummer Morgan Rose, guitarist John Connolly and bassist Vince Hornsby. After recording the CD, Sevendust signed with a start-up label, Winedark Records, which boasted major label distribution through Universal Music, only to see things fall apart soon after "Next" was released.

Witherspoon offered only a vague insight into what happened with Winedark.

"I actually have no idea what happened," he said. "They folded on us or something. I don't like to talk about it too much. Really I don't know what happened with it. It just fell through."

Rather than feeling defeated, though, Sevendust had an entirely different reaction to its misfortunes.

"I'll tell you what, that made us stronger because a lot of people thought the band would fold and they're losing it now," Witherspoon said. "Not at all, that made us work harder."

So Sevendust is back with a new CD, "Alpha," released this month. The new CD picks right up where "Next" left off.

Like that previous album, "Alpha" once again emphasizes the heavy and harsh side of Sevendust's sound. Lyrically, it promises to be just as agitated as "Next," as the band's disappointments and struggles once again fueled the lyrics.

"Alpha" was created while Sevendust once again was without a record deal. But once more a label opportunity surfaced — and it's one that would seem to carry fewer question marks than the Winedark deal. For "Alpha," Sevendust signed with the Asylum Records, part of the Warner Music Group — which distributes CDs on Warner Bros., Reprise, Atlantic Records, to name a few.

After having seen the "Next" CD get short circuited, Witherspoon is excited about giving "Alpha" a full promotional cycle on tour. One thing missing, though, has been the acoustic segment that has been part of recent Sevendust tours.

"I think for the first run, you will not see an acoustic instrument within a thousand miles of us," he said. "We're just ready to get out there and rip it up."

Sevendust plays today — March 15 — at Pop's, 1401 Mississippi Ave., Sauget. Tickets for the show, which also features Diecast, Red and Invitro, cost \$20 in advance and \$23 at the door. Doors open at 6 p.m.

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