

Sevendust 'Driven' by new energy on 'Alpha'

Even though Atlanta-based band Sevendust recently released its sixth studio album, *Alpha*, its title fittingly signifies a new beginning for the group.

The band has always tried talking a fresh approach to songwriting and recording, but this time around, they tackled the new record with a ferocity and energy not found since their self-titled 1997 debut.

"It's a bit too soon, but I think the worst days are



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behind us," explained vocalist Lajon Witherspoon in an interview with the Tribune from a tour stop in Illinois. "There's definitely some dark days,

To hear an example of Sevendust's work visit www.myspace.com/sevendust.

but I think everything that's been put up against us has made us work harder and that's why we're still around."

Drummer and backup vocalist Morgan Rose was an integral part of the songwriting process on *"Alpha,"* after going through some harsh per-

sonal issues including the death of his grandfather, a divorce and the imprisonment of his father.

Rose's input on writing *Alpha* isn't new. Members of the band often share that duty, according to Witherspoon.

"I've always said it would be ridiculous for everything to come from, just my point of view. So we all write for Sevendust and that's a beautiful thing because if anyone knows

See SEVENDUST, 21



Members of Sevendust, left to right, are Vinnie Hornsby, Morgan Rose, Lajon Witherspoon, Sonny Mayo and John Connolly.

Sevendust: Like one big family

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each other, it's us," he said.

"Driven" is the album's first single. It was written about Rose's father and his incarceration, a situation that affected the entire band.

"We all dealt with that," Witherspoon explained. "We knew his father very well. He was like a dad to us and he still is."

After releasing an all-acoustic album in 2004, and the sub-par album "Next" in 2005, the band chose to return to the aggressive and heavy songwriting that they became famous for.

"We just sat down (and said) 'let's just make the heavy album,'" Witherspoon said. "Let's just do it. No holds barred. Let's just go for it and have a good time. That's how we were feeling."

"It's always in us. It's always there, but this time we made a conscious effort to just go for it."

Not everything on the record is heavy. The band took a step away from the norm to write and record a lengthy tune in "Burn," a song more than 10 minutes long and featuring everything from a piano to a rain stick.

"That's one of my favorite songs on the album. It was really exciting to be able to ... show a different side of Sevendust," Witherspoon said, adding an insight into the recording process with a flurry of laughter.

"(Guitarist) Sonny (Mayo)'s got

the egg. He was so serious, man. I was like 'good God, look out. He's going for it.' He had it directly in front of his nose at an arm's length away. We were getting down, man."

Sevendust headlined an infamously bad show at the Wilma Theater in Missoula in 2004, during which some fans were injured by electrical malfunctions and a scaffold was nearly pulled into the crowd.

Sevendust had to stop its performance three times because fans were breaking the ancient chair seats and throwing them onstage.

"Were they red chairs?" Witherspoon asked. "I do remember that. Somebody was talking about that the other day. I think John was talking about that."

"I remember loving the town and everything. We'd love to come back, man," Witherspoon said, adding that having a show like that motivates the band to return in order to give fans the show they paid for. "Those (shows) can leave a bad feeling because you feel like the people are not getting what they came to see. They didn't come to see the stage fall down and somebody get hurt and taken out and the show's stopped."

While there have been ups and downs along the way, the men of Sevendust aren't planning on hanging up their instruments any time soon.

"What would we be doing if

we weren't in Sevendust, man?" Witherspoon asked rhetorically. "It'd be weird right now. I think we just feel very blessed and we don't take this for granted. We respect each other as men, grown men."

Thinking back to when the band was starting out, Witherspoon reflected on how close they have become not only with each other but with Sevendust fans around the world.

"We started this band, not looking for a record deal. We liked each other and wanted to jam and have some beers. We're family. That's what keeps it together," he said. "I think all the people that have come out to our shows have kind of grown up with us. We don't have concerts anymore, we have family reunions."

"The bottom line is the people out there and the energy they get and what we get from each other that's what's important to me," he said. "I feel very successful within that."

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