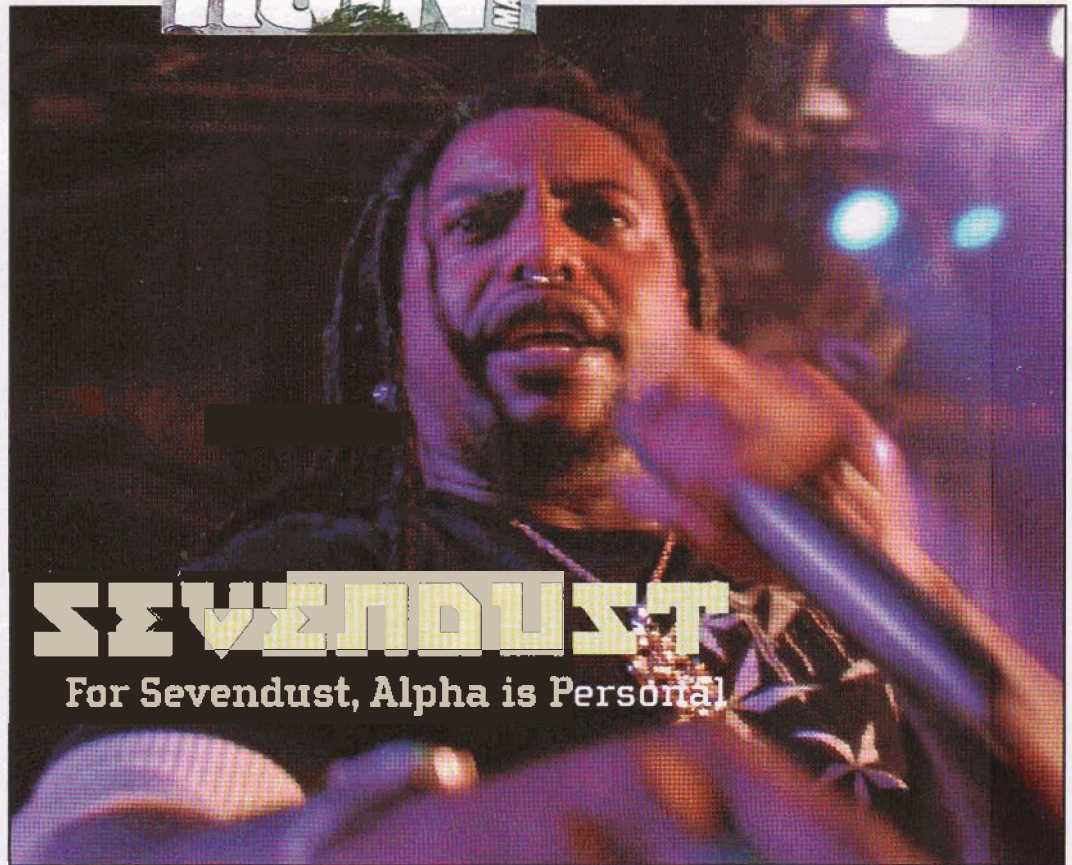


"I just sat down and there were no tears, no meltdown, nothing. Complete numbness. Armageddon was happening." Words like these can only begin to explain the flurry of personal issues plaguing Sevendust drummer Morgan Rose when the time came to write Sevendust's sixth record. "I was a mess," he recalls. "I didn't know what I was going to put down on paper." The result was *Alpha*, a "schizophrenic emotional rollercoaster" about realizing one is losing their mind and doing everything in their power to remain sane; it's what Rose calls "a full blown mental battle."

Although the writing and recording of *Alpha* was "spearheaded by drama and personal issues" explains Rose, much of the drama started over two years ago when Clint Lowery, Sevendust's original guitarist, left the band. Following Lowery's departure and their split withTVT records, Sevendust, under the impression they had regained their creative control, recorded *Next*. "We were completely gun shy about changing anything," admits Rose, "We still wouldn't let go of some of that commercial side that we had been pushed into over two records before. We didn't commit and that's when we really started to have issues."

While Sevendust created *Next* and turned to Wine Dark records to financially back the release, sales turned sour when only two hundred thousand copies of the record were printed. The majority of the printed records sold, but Wine Dark refused to print more. According to Rose, "we finished out our tour cycle on that record, stuck our tail between our legs and crawled back into the hole. The perception of our band was that we didn't sell any records. We sold ninety percent of the product that was on the market, but there was nothing to buy." With multimillions accumulated in album sales over the years, and at the time on a tour that was ninety five percent sold out across the country, Sevendust was now branded with the stigma of not selling records. As a result, the Georgian quintet was now poised to embark on a path similar to that forged with *Next*.

"We got out of [our deal with Wine Dark], looked at each other and thought 'what are we going to do?' We'd have to go out, put another record together and get another record deal, all with the perception that we didn't sell any records. We were definitely scared and nervous to say the least. Then of course the per-



sonal stuff kicks in." Whether it was divorce and custody battles, familial issues, battling potential alcoholism, the death of a loved one or the fear of facing jail time, these were the issues that led to "complete numbness" and the feeling that "Armageddon was happening." More so however, these personal matters added the necessary fuel to Sevendust's writing process that helped differentiate *Alpha* from Sevendust's previous release.

Although Rose has never turned to drugs to help medicate himself in any way, he does admit to turning to alcohol in ways he never had before. Referencing the 1987 movie *Less Than Zero* and using the analogy of Julian's need for help in the film, Rose looks to the line, "Do I look like I'm ready for homework?" as the best way to describe his thoughts and emotions when asked if he was ready to begin writing *Alpha*. "It's where I was mentally. I didn't know what I was going to put down on paper. I was a mess. I decided to go to the store, grab a spiral notebook and sit down with it." As the lyrics poured out of him, one additional obstacle Rose faced was remaining objective and writing lyrics that Lajon was able to sing and feel. According to Rose, writing in this way "is a fine line. I don't want to put

words in his mouth that don't match his feelings."

Conceptually each track on *Alpha* is related, and although Rose played a major role in writing the lyrics for *Alpha*, it wasn't solely his doing, and *Alpha* is not entirely his story. Just as Morgan faced many personal issues prior to the writing of *Alpha*, Sevendust's four other members did as well. It is an album about anyone that faces struggles and crossroads in their life. The title, for example, represents which part of your mind is its alpha side, which side of your brain is going to win its battles. It's a question that asks will "you melt down and deteriorate, or are you going to get yourself back above water?"

"I had nothing more to create on this thing, nothing more to do," insists Rose referring to the emotional purge associated with writing and completing *Alpha*. "I collapsed. I put my hands over my head and couldn't believe that it was over with." It is an image and a moment that burned itself in Rose's memory, and again, although not Rose's story, is also depicted (perhaps unintentionally) as the album art for *Alpha*.

As much as *Alpha* is a mental battle, it is also a rebirth for Rose and Sevendust. After struggling with previous labels, and prior to

joining forces with Warner Bros. and creating their own SevenBros. imprint, keeping the integrity and honesty involved with *Alpha* was most important to the band. One of the more difficult aspects selling the completed *Alpha* to interested labels was realizing they did not have many chances left writing records; the burden was on convincing executives that Sevendust meant what they said on *Alpha* and that "it was the most important record" for them.

By the time the journey was over and *Alpha* was released, some of the tougher challenges Sevendust had to face and conquer were definitively in the past. But there is always an epiphany and it doesn't always come at the obvious times. For Rose, the obstacles he faced were a test to discover what kind of man he'd be when everything was over. Rose points to the lyric, "Why me?" "As much as I gripe about having it rough, I don't deny that it's life. Everybody has it and everybody goes through different things," Rose openly admits. "I bet you on the percentage side I'm on the luckier side of life. I've gotten away with having a really good life and a lot of great people around me. I realized I have a lot more to be thankful for than I thought."

-Andrew Gargano