

sticking it out

> Sevendust stays true to hard-rocking roots

BY ALAN SCULLEY

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

"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 (the 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 over the past few years when Sevendust's ability to persevere has been severely 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" — 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



One of Sevendust's former record labels suggested that the band adopt a sound like the Strokes and White Stripes. Seriously, could you picture these guys wearing girl jeans and scarves?

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.

The stresses of those situations carried into the music on the 2005 album, "Next." The CD, which marked a return to the band's heavier beginnings, served as a suitable soundtrack to songs that dealt with the difficulties Sevendust had faced.

After recording the CD, Sevendust signed with a startup label, Winedark Records, which boasted major label distribution through Universal Music, only to see things fall apart soon after "Next" was released.

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 "Alpha," an album that was released in March. It picks up where "Next" left off.

For "Alpha," Sevendust signed with Asylum Records, part of the Warner Music Group. In December, the label will also release "Retrospective 2," which will feature songs from "Next" and "Alpha," three unreleased tracks, six live cuts and a DVD with two hours of footage.

The current tour, which stops at the Checkered Flag in Appleton on Sunday, figures to highlight both "Alpha" and "Retrospective 2," while also touching on songs from the band's earlier albums.

"We're going to try to do something from all the catalog," Witherspoon said. "So it will definitely be a nice show."

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