

Date: Friday, November 16, 2007
 Location: ALBUQUERQUE, NM
 Circulation (DMA): 105,966 (46)
 Type (Frequency): Newspaper (D)
 Page: F18
 Keyword: Down

Cleaned-up singer leads band's new renaissance

Down finds way out of abyss

BY RON GONZALES
FOR THE JOURNAL

A picture of Down lead singer Philip Anselmo back in 2002, the same year of the band's last album, would have been one of a heavy-lidded, bloated and drug-addled man, whose career low had not yet hit.

That may have been his appearance on VH1's "Behind the Music" special on his former band Pantera some years later, where Anselmo seemed to be barely able to stay awake during interviews. As it turned out, years of thrashing on stage with Pantera left Anselmo's back in serious pain, and after turning to narcotic painkillers for relief, he was also saddled with a chemical addiction.

He fought through and beat the dependency, just as he and his Down bandmates were about to reconvene to record their new album "Down III—Over the Under," and it's already being heralded as a modern metal classic. Meanwhile, Anselmo says he is experiencing life and music with a heretofore unknown mental clarity, and he documents this in "The Path," one of the tracks on "Down III."

"When you have a problem, first of all you have to see the problem before you can try to take it on," he told *Revolver*

magazine recently. "So, to use an analogy, I've been up that mountain, and then you have to climb back down the mountain."

While the earliest Down songs were torn out of the Sabbath bible, latter-day Down has seen the band experiment with organ-inflected psychedelia and boogie rock sounds common to Southern metal bands Eyehategod, Corrosion of Conformity and Crowbar, all of whom have contributed a member to Down.

Anselmo's voice, now unfettered from the ravages of substance abuse, is the band's real secret weapon, though. He can be growling one minute ("Three Suns and One Star") and smooth crooning the next ("Mourn" and "His Majesty the Desert"), while being supplemented by the band's bludgeoning groove. Besides that, he now commandeers the Down ship totally sober in the live setting, where he can finally see the grins on his fans' faces, a luxury he's never been afforded.

"I can see every face now," he said. "Now I see every eye, every crease; I don't care where you're at, I will find you. Man, the overwhelming emotion of playing live is the best high known."

Down's Sunday night appearance at the Sunshine Theater



WITH THE RECOVERY OF ITS LEAD SINGER FROM SUBSTANCE ABUSE, DOWN IS BACK WITH A NEW ALBUM.

Downtown is being dubbed "An Evening with *Down*," meaning that the band will play an entire two-hour set, with no support bands opening the show.

Down

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WHEN: 8:30 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 18

WHERE: Sunshine Theater, 120 Central SW

HOW MUCH: Advance tickets are \$25 and are available through Ticketmaster outlets, 883-7800, or online at www.ticketmaster.com