

DOWN

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TAKE THE "OVER"

BY DAVID VOLKER



Five years. That's 35 years to a dog... and maybe even longer in terms of rock and roll time. In an industry where change happens seemingly overnight, and bands come-and-go in the blink of a proverbial eye, five years is nothing short of a lifetime. Yet, somehow, some way, the members of Down have made a career—and quite a successful one at that—of routinely taking five years between their album releases... and living to tell about it. In fact, the lengthy time between disc appearances has only seemed to add another layer to the mystique that surrounds vocalist Philip Anselmo, guitarist Pepper Keenan, bassist Rex Brown, guitarist Kirk Windstein and drummer Jimmy Bower. But with the release of their long-awaited new disc, *Down III—Over The Under*, this Louisiana-based unit has proven that all the waiting has been well worth the effort. Down are back and they mean some serious heavy metal business. Recently we got together with Keenan to discuss the latest developments in the ever-fascinating world of Down.

Hit Parader: You guys tend to routinely take five years between albums. How long does it take for your chemistry to return after such a long sabbatical?

PK: Believe it or not, it doesn't take long at all. We all stay in touch even when we're not together as a band, and we share so many interests, that when we all get together the magic just happens. It doesn't take any time at all—it just pours out of us naturally, which is what makes Down so special to so many people... including us. But it wasn't our intention to have this album come out five years after our last one. We started working on this music two years ago, but along came hurricane Katrina and that threw all our lives into turmoil for a long, long time.

HP: A lot of the work for this album was done in and around a post-Katrina New Orleans. What was it like working there in that environment?

PK: Actually, we began work on this album before Katrina hit, and once it did it just played havoc with everyone's life. We were all separated for a number of months, and obviously the impact that the hurricane had on the entire area also had a major impact on us. We all love the area, and New Orleans in particular, but it was a little strange after the hurricane. In fact, I admit that after a while I had to escape to California just for a change of atmosphere. But the emotional impact that Katrina had on us is what inspired a lot of the music on this album.

HP: Are you ever surprised by the "legend" that has built up around Down over the last decade?

PK: I would say "amazed" is the right word. This band began so secretly—it was almost like it was our private party. Then our first tapes snuck out, and before we knew it there were thousands of fans waiting to hear our music. From there it's just grown over the years. I think our past associations—whether it's Pantera, C.O.C. or whatever—has only added to that feeling that there's something special going on here. Plus, we didn't tour that much in the beginning, so a lot of fans felt that their "secret" was safe. That's begun to change more recently, and we have no problem with more fans joining the party.

HP: What's the story behind the title *Over The Under*?

PK: Believe it or not, they're just words that sounded cool together and kind of summed up where we all are at this time. I wish there was something more mystical that I could tell you. We've come through a lot in both our personal and professional lives over the last few years, we've overcome a lot of stuff that would have pulled a lot of people under. And now we find



ALL PHOTOS: ANNAMARIA DISANTO

ourselves together in Down again—but this time it is different. This isn't a side-project any more. This isn't the band we come to when we're between other projects. This is our band now... the center of our lives. That's a big change.

HP: Is there one song on the album that stands out for you?

PK: Maybe *3 Suns and 1 Star*, which is something Phil wrote about his time in Pantera—with the star being (Dimebag) Darrell. It's a great song, and we use it to kick off the album. But there's so much information on this album—so much emotion, and so much power—that I just love everything we've put into it. This is by-far the best thing we've ever done as a band.

HP: We hear all of you are on health kicks... is that true? That would represent quite a change from the party-hearty lifestyle the band previously enjoyed.

PK: This is a bad day to ask me that because I've got a bit of a hangover, but I'd say that is generally true. Phil has really changed his life around; he works our all the time and is in great shape both physically and mentally. I like to run or bike whenever I can, through I haven't been quite as dedicated as I should be in recent days. But as we've gotten a bit older, we've learned the lesson that we can play better when we feel better.

HP: How does Down fit into the changing face of today's heavy metal scene?

PK: I think we do fit to some extent—at least to the extent that we *want* to fit. There are a lot of good, young bands around and there's a new generation of fans who seem to love heavy music. What's interesting for us is that we seem to appeal to heavy metal fans of all ages. When we toured opening for Heaven And Hell a few months ago, they seemed to draw in an older audience, and they loved us. When we go out on our own, we're pulling in a lot of people in their teens. I think the kind of music we play appeals to everyone who enjoys rockin' out.

HP: So are we all going to have to wait another five years to hear the next Down album?

PK: (Laughing) I think it's a very safe bet that you won't. This is where it's at for us right now. When we finish this Down tour—which may take us a while—we want to stay together and keep writing music. That's a different way of doing things for us, but that's what we really want. At this point in our lives,

nothing excites us more than getting together and playing this music.

