

# ONSTAGE



## DOWN

**N**ew York, NY — Down's success rests as much on the unexpected as it does upon the esteemed shoulders of its five members. There is no timeline for the band, just the knowledge that when Philip Anselmo, Pepper Keenan, Kirk Windstein, Jimmy Bower and Rex Brown enter the studio or take the stage, the results will be as spectacular as the event is special. 1995's *Nola*, 2002's *II: A Bustle In Your Hedgerow* and the tours in support of each album fostered this expectation.

After Down's run on Ozzfest 2002, Phil and Jimmy committed to Superjoint Ritual, Pepper and Kirk returned to Corrosion Of Conformity and Crowbar, respectively, and Rex went back to doing whatever it is he does on his down time. Then, on December 8, 2004, Dimelbag Darrell was murdered... Phil made his posthumous peace (or tried to anyway) and went underground, possibly for good. At that point a new record or tour from Down seemed like a pipedream.

Fast forward past Hurricane Katrina's devastation of the band's beloved New Orleans, Phil's well-documented back surgery and newfound sobriety, and now, "in the year of VII," we were graced first with a tour, then new album *III: Over The Under* and then another tour. To quote a terribly-titled indie rock record of the same year, "Go go go go go!"

The March 31, 2007 Roseland Ballroom gig felt like a gift. Phil looked good and sounded even better. The band was tight, the set list rocked — Down was back. In a sense, the expectations for *III: Over The Under* were greater than ever. But on that evening, new song "I Scream" didn't leave a good first impression, feeling uninspired and somewhat lacking the oomph and originality of the older material. I prepared myself for possible disappointment, wondered if Nola's finest would be able to add another distinguished chapter to its catalog.

October 25, I'm back at Roseland with a stomach full of suds asking everyone I know, and as the night wears on several people I don't know, including members of Down (sorry

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Jimmy and Pepper), "what's your favorite Down record?" Jimmy said *Nola*, Pepper said *III*. Offhandedly, my vote is *II* and most of the other participants in my spontaneous, non-scientific poll echoed Jimmy's preference. My all-night fixation on this question had to do with proving that the new record, while good, just doesn't stack up against the other two. Similarly, neither did the second show of the year — and not because the band was lacking in any way. Few acts can captivate a crowd for an entire two-hour, 19-song set. Down absolutely did just that. The fans were rabid; the energy a happy medium between Slayer and Clutch, despite a weaker set list.

Drawing predominantly from the first and last albums, Down opened with mid-tempo crawler "The Path," setting the tone for a night that included the similarly paced "Mourn," slow-builders "Lies" and "Learn From This Mistake" and mellow trip "Jail." Leaving out some of their heavy best ("There's Something On My Side," "Pillamyd," "Rehab"), the set highlights were "Lifer," "Temptation's Wings," "Beneath The Tides" and "On March The Saints." Sometime during the next four songs they lost me, then "Stone The Crow" kicked in. Leading into an extended jam of "Bury Me In Smoke" with "Nothing In Return (Walk Away)" coda and instrument switching, including some Phil guitar time, the set closed on a crowd-pleasing moment.

Final verdict: *III: Over The Under* is Down's best produced record. All the instruments sound bolder, the guitars are steeped in warm tone and Phil's vocals are carefully arranged. A more deliberate and structured songwriting approach surrenders the go-with-the-flow vibe oozing from *II*'s 28-day sessions, and the first-time inspiration behind *Nola* is long gone — although Phil's blog credits the young British lads of Witchcraft as the musical impetus behind Down's rebirth. Yesterday does mean shit, unlike the words Phil penned in 2006 for Pentera's swansong. And the Down standing before us has been through tons of it, rising over the under to play another day. B.R.G.E.S. 'til the end. Whether it's for better or worse is up to you. ([www.down-nola.com](http://www.down-nola.com)) — Words by Natasha Padilla; Images by Liz Ciavarella.

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