

Sevendust

By Bear Frazer / Photography By Mitchell Davis

The sky is cloudy and a storm is brewing, but that doesn't affect Lajon Witherspoon's vibe. On this breezy afternoon in the country, just a few miles outside of Atlanta, Georgia, the dynamic vocalist of Sevendust is standing on his deck with Presley, his three-year old French bulldog who has one blue eye and one brown eye. As the odd couple stands on the patio, they gaze at their neighbor's beautiful property and obtain some sort of serenity.

"The lady's probably about 80-something and she is widowed, but she is so cool. I wake up every morning and look in her backyard. She has a memorial to her husband and he was a soldier. It's like presidential. It's this beautiful backyard and what's inside of it is a heart with a little gate," Witherspoon says. "She sits in it with a little bird feeder, but outside of that is this big flag in memory of her husband and all the soldiers, and it's really cool to look back there every day. In a sense, she inspires me to be strong, just seeing her everyday by herself and taking care of business. And, this guy in this rock band lives behind her, but we hang out and talk. It's pretty awesome."

The widow with the memorial in her beautiful backyard also made Witherspoon reflect on his life and musical career. That scenario allowed him to get deeper than ever with his lyrical content on his group's latest studio release *Chapter VII: Hope & Sorrow*.





extremely heavy composition that has a 90's vibe happening with lyricism of defending false ideals. That brutal resonance carries over to "Walk Away," which has elements of hardcore and finds Witherspoon moving on with his life whereas others aren't looking to improve their character. "Lifeless" is true modern rock in all of its essence and places the guys trying to help those drowning in a shallow pool of self-pity, whereas the vengeful "Scapegoat" reverses the roles.

While there are many pulsating tracks like "Fear," "Enough" and "Inside" that have the ever-so-enjoyable trademark Sevendust sound, the guys appear at their most diverse during "Prodigal Son," where hints of '70's rock and a Jimi Hendrix aura supercedes the music.

Just to spice up the pot a bit more, Sevendust supplies a couple of interesting collaborations of *Chapter VII: Hope & Sorrow* like they did in their earlier days.

You guys have a record with Chris Daughtry entitled "The Past." How did this situation come about?

A lot of people may hate on it, but I can't. Chris Daughtry is an incredible kid. He's a big fan of the band and actually paid 80 dollars to see us open for Creed and didn't even like Creed. I think the avenues he was able to take with *American Idol* was incredible and he sold over millions of albums in his own right. We were able to sit down and do a song. We can sing his ass off and we had a great time, more so hanging out and understanding each other.

Speaking of collaborations, you coincidentally have records with the guys from Alter Bridge, notably Mark Tremonti on "Hope" and Myles Kennedy for "Sorrow." With that being said, which band do you prefer? Alter Bridge or Creed?

Wow ... man ... shit ... ok, let me tell you why.

That's a hard question. When you hear a good Creed song from back in the day, it still makes you bob a little bit. They were definitely doing something cool, but Alter Bridge, definitely. Yeah, Alter Bridge. You might laugh at me, but I can still jam to a Creed song if it pops on the radio in the car. I ain't one to turn it off. If "Arms Wide Open" comes on, I might listen to it. Don't hate.

"With Arms Wide Open ... under the sunlight."

See! I like the way you sing that. That's awesome! Everyone remembers those songs, but Alter Bridge, definitely. They're innovative and Myles can sing his ass off. Scott Stapp can still sing though, but those guys are just great guys and I love hanging out with them. Hey, I just like music. I can't hate on anyone. I'll say this: I think you could have the worst voice in the world, but as long as you have convictions and mean it, then I'm with it.

That's what Sevendust is doing. This summer, the melodic hard rockers will be headlining the second stage of the first annual Rockstar Energy Mayhem Festival. Other artists slated for the tour are Slipknot, Disturbed, Dragonforce, Mastadon, Airbourne and Five Finger Death Punch.

Although the alternative metal entourage is enthusiastic about appearing on the tour and playing music from *Chapter VII: Hope & Sorrow* in front of live audiences, there is another reason why they are thrilled. "Shoot, I'm excited about not headlining the whole damn show so we can actually hang out and watch other bands. Damn, can somebody else have some fun? Shit! 'Can a brother get a drink at 7:30? Oh, appreciate it cause we already played. Let's do this!'" Witherspoon says with a chuckle. "But it's going to be exciting because we haven't been involved in a summer tour for a while. It's going to be fun to go out there and play a forty

minute set, rock out there and jam. Slipknot and Disturbed are good buddies, and Mastadon are homies from our hometown. It's gonna be fun and I'm very excited to see what type of energy this tour is going to create. I'm looking to have a good time and getting this music out to the people. They might think we're old, but we'll show them how the old-school do it. We old-school. We'll show them how the old-school do it!"

Sevendust may be supplying their vintage flavor, but everything will wrap full circle when the festival lands in Atlanta, Georgia, except this time, they will be receiving the love they never really felt from their hometown community. Instead of local newspapers and radio stations dropping rumors of playing with headlining bands, the metal titans will be one of the main attractions and that means the world to the guys who have represented their city hard for so long.

"It's like I say with anything: if you've been with Sevendust ... I don't like to say 'fan.' If you've been a family with us, you kinda grew up with us, and I think Atlanta was able to grow up with us. Regardless if you see us in the paper or hear us on the radio, you've still grown up with us because we've come back. And I don't even like to say we have 'concerts.' I say we have big family reunions everywhere we go now. It's such an incredible thing to be able to rock out and see this cat that used to come to the shows when he was 18 or 17, and now he has his kid with him and the wife. It's different," Witherspoon explains. "It's so fulfilling as far as all the heartache we've gone through, the disappointments and the people that have ripped us off, but when you see things like that, you remember it's magical and a blessing to be able to continue doing the music. It's so overwhelming for me at times, I get real emotional because I don't think anyone in their right mind couldn't get emotional after so many years of this beautiful adoring feeling you were able to create and give back. It's cool." 