



PROFILES

THE BRUTAL TRUTH

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From left: John Connolly,
Morgan Rose, Vince
Hornsby, Lajon Witherspoon,
and Clint Lowery



JEREMY ADAMO



Sevendust

DESPITE FINANCIAL SETBACKS AND PERSONAL DIFFICULTIES, THEY STILL LEAVE THEIR COMPETITORS IN THE DUST

MORGAN ROSE IS EXCITED. The Sevendust drummer is speaking with *Revolver* a few hours before boarding a plane to Australia, where his band will be opening a string of shows for Ozzy Osbourne. Though it's been four years since the Atlanta, Georgia-based five-piece have performed in the Land Down Under, and several more since they've shared a stage with Osbourne, there's another reason why Rose is anticipating the jaunt: "Sharon is going to be there," he says.

As for why Rose is more eager to meet with Mrs. Osbourne than Ozzy himself, he explains, "We've been trying to get on Ozzfest since we last did the festival, which was a decade ago. And I want to find out what has kept us off it all this time.

"Of course," he adds, "a lot of fucked-up things have happened with us over the years. The list of reasons could be pretty long."

And so goes the story of Sevendust, a band that at one time seemed poised to ascend to the very top of the hard-rock heap. Their 1997 self-titled debut combined thick, downtuned guitar riffs, deep grooves, and the soulful vocals of Lajon Witherspoon (offset by Rose's raw-throated screams) for a sound that was truly new—rather than just "nu"—metal. Eleven years and five studio albums later, however, Sevendust are recognized less for their distinctive style than for a slew of personal and professional tragedies, which include everything from drug addiction, incarceration, and the sudden deaths of family members to bad label deals, shady business associates, and near bankruptcy.

But those days of turmoil are now largely behind the band, with much of the resulting angst having been purged on their 2007 disc, the dark and aggressive *Alpha*. As such, Sevendust—which also includes guitarists John Connolly and Clint Lowery and bassist Vince Hornsby—were collectively in a better place when they wrote and recorded their new and seventh full-length, *Chapter VII: Hope & Sorrow*. "It was a more relaxed vibe," says Witherspoon of the recent sessions. "And as a result there's such a broad range of styles on the album—it's a wide-open space. I've probably said this a million times, but it feels like a whole new beginning for this band."

And yet, the more things change, the more they stay the same. While discussing the upcoming Ozzy shows with Rose, *Revolver* mentions to the drummer that, even if his talk with Sharon Osbourne in Australia proves fruitful, rumors abound that the festival may unfortunately be nearing the end of its run.

"That's true, but what are you gonna do?" Rose laughs. "I guess that's just par for the course with this band!" **CONTINUED** ►►

REVOLVER Your last album, *Alpha*, was released only a year ago. How does *Chapter VII: Hope & Sorrow* differ from its predecessor?

MORGAN ROSE It's not quite as pissed off. I hate to admit it, but more than anything else, *Alpha* was an album about me. I was going through a real rough time, and the only way I seemed to be able to function was to write about it. So I conveyed those words to Lajon, and he got it across on the record. I was lucky that he was open to doing that. This time was different, though it was actually a lot more challenging. I found that lyrically it was harder to write about the good things in life than to just spill my guts on paper about all the shit I've been bitching about for so long.

LAJON WITHERSPOON The songs on the album are still pretty aggressive, but we also weren't afraid to tap into...not our softer side, but our more musical side. Plus, we were able to bring in some friends to help us out. We have three special guests on this record, which is great.

No doubt the guest that will raise the most eyebrows is former American Idol contestant Chris Daughtry, who contributes vocals to the song "The Past." How did he get involved with you guys?

WITHERSPOON Chris has been a fan of the band for a long time. Years ago he actually paid \$100 to see us open for Creed—we didn't have enough clout back then to put him on the list! But we used to get messages from his camp that he wanted to meet us, and eventually we got together and hit it off really well. He's a wonderful guy and a great singer. As for any backlash we might get for working with him, we're too old and have been doing this for too long to worry about trying to please anyone. I'm 35 years old, I have one daughter and another one on the way. I'm not gonna stress that kind of stuff.

ROSE The minute that we discussed having Chris on the record I said, "We're gonna get fucking crucified for this before anybody hears one lick of the song." But for anyone who thinks we're selling out, it's like, "Selling out to fucking who?" If people have a problem with it, I mean, they're all just gonna download the fucking thing for free anyway, so what's the hangup?

The other guests on the record are Alter Bridge guitarist Mark Tremonti and singer Myles Kennedy, who appear, respectively, on the songs "Hope" and "Sorrow." You took those two songs together for the album title. Why?

WITHERSPOON It wasn't so much because of the songs themselves—we just thought the words were very fitting. That's the story of our life as a band, really. We've gone through a lot of bad stuff, but there's always been hope at the end. For us that hope is the knowledge that we continue to be able to share our beautiful music with the beautiful people that have grown with us over the years.

The "bad stuff" you've experienced as a band has been pretty well chronicled. At one point you guys were close to bankruptcy as a result of bad business dealings.

ROSE In terms of the business end of the band, I believe it was [Staind singer] Aaron Lewis who first brought it to my attention a few years back. Every time I would talk to him he'd be like, "Man, it's ridiculous what's

happened to you guys." And I'd be like, "What's happened to us? We have three gold records, we're making good money, we're touring the world, we've got homes and cars, what's the problem?" And then I saw the size of his house and the model of his car and I got it. I understood what he meant when he said things like, "Dude, everybody that's opened for you on tour can fit your house inside their garage!" But to tell you the truth, as a band it really didn't bother us too much at first. But then we started watching all these other groups pass us by and realized we had some bad representation and bad business people around us, and it just became this thing.

WITHERSPOON It took us years to get our shit in order. Because at the beginning we were just artists, you know? We weren't businessmen. You throw a band out on the road, give them their first tour bus, and tell them they're gonna be away from home for a year, and that's all they're gonna concern themselves with. But it caught up to us, and eventually we had to start thinking about where millions of dollars were going. At the end of a tour people around us were buying big houses, and we each had, like, a T-shirt and a Chic-o-stick!

Speaking of tours, you were initially slated to be part of this summer's Rockstar Energy Mayhem festival, but recently pulled out.

ROSE We would've loved to be on that tour, but plain and simple, we couldn't afford to do it. I'm not going to say how much money we were offered, but at the end of the day the numbers didn't make any sense. It was like, "If we borrow Machine Head's gear for every show, ride in a car with no crew guys, and don't bring any suitcases because they won't fit in the car anyway, we may be able to pay our bills at the end of this. But probably not." So that was the bottom line. We would've lost our houses. And I'm not letting my kid and my wife live on the street just so I can go do some shows.

WITHERSPOON I don't want to sit here and say, "If they had given us more money we would've been able to do it," but that's the damn ticket right there! If they had given us more money, we would have been able to do it.

And now you're going out on your own headlining club tour with Saliva.

ROSE It's definitely a left-turn from what we were supposed to be doing, but at the same time, we've always been all about left turns.

WITHERSPOON The bottom line is that as long as we're able to affect people by showing up and whipping their asses onstage with great music, we'll be there. There's a strong live community and a hardcore crowd that comes out to see us no matter what else is going on. And we'll keep playing shows and making albums as long as the people want us to.

Given what you've experienced throughout your career, do you feel at all like elder statesmen of this generation of metal bands?

WITHERSPOON A little bit, and that's OK. I kinda like being the old guy, because you know what? We're still cool. We get up there and do our thing. We don't have a gimmick, we don't have a pose. We're just a bunch of guys who like to jam heavy and play some rock and roll. We got soul, man! **RICHARD BIENSTOCK**

