

MORGAN ROSE

ON THE ATTACK

The surprising thing about Morgan Rose — the savagely physical, nose-pierced, tatted-up, cornrow-wearing drummer for Sevendust — is how mellow he is. “What’s up buddy,” he says with genuine warmth as he sprawls in the back of a bus heading into Indianapolis for tonight’s performance. ■ With Sevendust’s ripping new album, *Cold Day Memory*, dropping in just over a month and the band already deep into a preliminary tour, a little prerelease

PHOTOS BY JEREMY ADAMO

BY ANDREW LENTZ

drummagazine.com June 2010 DRUM! 43

Page 2 of 6

Morgan Rose

hype would not be out of order. But business as usual is not this Georgia boy's style. Instead he's talking about last summer when he filled in for Tommy Lee at the tail end of Crüefest. "Tommy would sit off the side of the stage with a microphone and would just basically count off when the changes were coming," he recalls with a sly grin. "And of course, you know, there's 20,000 people out there. Sucks! But I got through it. It's just something that after it was all over with, you know, it changed me and it gave me a lot of confidence."

SECRETS OF HIS SUCCESS

In addition to a warm personality, Rose's appeal stems from a lack of ego. Dude is literally unaware of how influential he is among today's extreme drummers. Countless players profiled in these pages cite him as an inspiration — one drummer even turning him into a verb: "Gotta Morgan Rose that sh...!"

Rose's strategy is simple: Avoid any drummer who might influence him in the weeks leading up to cutting an album. "There's enough in my noggin as it is not to need to lean on somebody's groove. So if anything I'll listen to stuff that has nothing to do with our style at all, whether it's Depeche Mode or Nine Inch Nails or something that doesn't rhythmically match up to us."

With his maniacal stage presence, Rose has always been a player who was as entertaining to watch as he was to bob your head to. Power-wise, he has few peers. Given the strain of violently pounding for the last 16 years, it's no shocker that Morgan has his share of upper-limb injuries. To all drummers reading this, do not follow Rose's example of playing through the pain. The chiropractors have basically written him

off at this point. Surgery on his right shoulder is inevitable, he says, but he's going to put it off as long as possible. "It's just something that at times will flare up and then I've just got to deal with it or get another shot. There's some ligament issues in a finger in my right hand. I have no idea where that came from. I took a cortisone shot for that last year and it fixed it up perfect. I haven't had a problem with it since."

Quick as his hands and feet are, he doesn't align himself with the new crop of speed demons. "I admire the fact that they can do it, but I don't think I'm ready to commit a bunch of my time to do something that it seems like so many other dudes are so great at."

BAND OF BROTHERS

The big news in the Sevendust camp is that original guitarist Clint Lowry is back in after a five-year hiatus, and it feels like family again. Rose is in many ways the de facto leader of the band, writing much of the music and lyrics since the beginning. His contribution to songwriting only increased after Lowry's departure, but with the guitarist back in the fold, Rose had less music and lyrical responsibility. "It was cool to be able to not have to carry a lot of weight there," he explains. "He took over a lot of that and it was really good."

The ironic thing was that the increased time and energy Rose was able to devote to his drum parts backfired. Musicians often get overly creative in the studio only to regret it later, and *Cold Day Memory* was Rose's turn to do that. "You figure you know what you're doing but I was writing drum parts that I really didn't know how to play. Some of it I was just like, I wish I wouldn't have written that."

Executing the album's odd accents, sextuplet fills, and full-kit

DRUMS: Pearl Masterworks (Arctic White)

- 1 22" x 18" Bass Drum
- 2 14" x 5" Morgan Rose Signature Snare
- 3 10" x 9" Tom
- 4 12" x 10" Tom
- 5 16" x 16" Floor Tom
- 6 18" x 16" Floor Tom
- 7 6" x 18" Rocket Tom
- 8 6" x 21" Rocket Tom
- 9 6" x 12" Rocket Tom
- 10 6" x 15" Rocket Tom
- 11 14" x 14" Floor Tom
- 12 10" x 4" Auxiliary Snare
- 13 20" x 18" Gong Bass

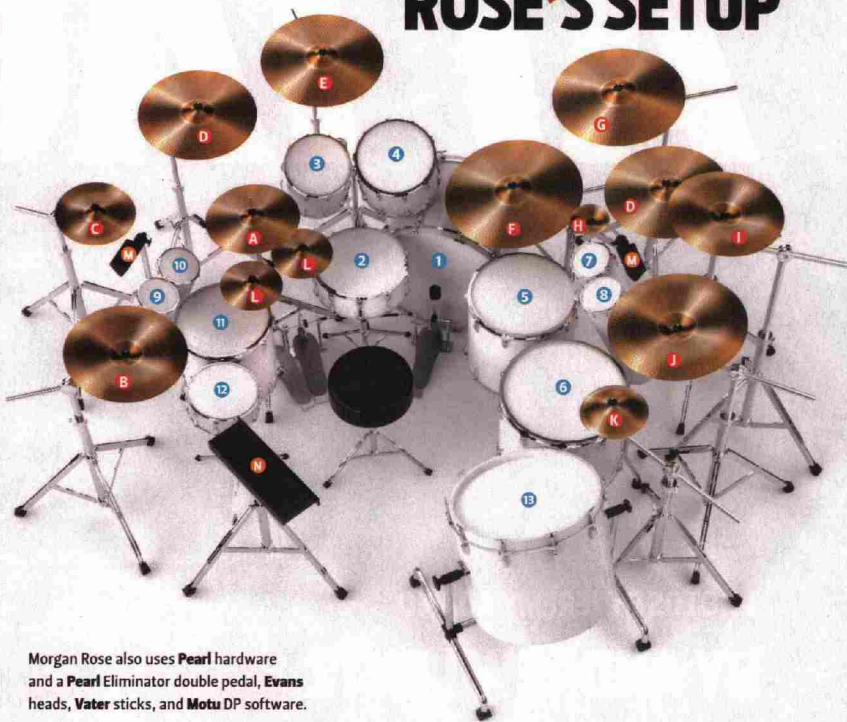
CYMBALS: Zildjian

- A 14.25" K Custom Hybrid Hats
- B 17" K Custom Hybrid China
- C 12" Sound Effects Oriental China Trash
- D 18" A Custom Crash
- E 19" A Custom Crash
- F 22" A Custom Ping Ride
- G 20" A Custom Rezo Crash
- H 6" Zil Bell
- I 14" Sound Effects Oriental China Trash
- J 19" K Custom Hybrid China
- K 9.5" Zil Bell
- L 9" K Custom Hybrid Splash

ELECTRONICS

- M Hart Dynamics Hammer
- N Alesis DM5 Module

ROSE'S SETUP



Morgan Rose also uses Pearl hardware and a Pearl Eliminator double pedal, Evans heads, Vater sticks, and Motu DP software.

punishment was no problem — the difficult thing was dialing back his customary intensity. “I can’t stand playing slow double bass patterns. I ran into that problem two or three times on a record where the pattern would be too fast for me to play with one foot and it was too slow to play with two. So that was probably the most frustrating part of it.”

The chorus on “Nowhere” is a perfect example of his “one foot or two?” dilemma. Taxing on the tibialis though it was, the greater consistency of single pedal won out. “I don’t want the left to even be used unless it’s really necessary, [laughs] just when it comes to groove stuff. There’s a handful of stuff that I’ve done over my career that doesn’t seem like it’s any big deal to me, but somebody will look and say ‘You’re doing that on one foot?’ And I’m like, ‘Yeah, of course.’”

It was a delicate either/or dance during tracking, but the problem has been compounded on the dates *Sevendust* has played so far. Certain parts he double pedaled in the studio feel clunky when replicated live. “I actually commented on that in the dressing room the other night. I said, ‘Either I’m going to get a really tired right leg on this song, or it’s going to be a train wreck up there,’ because if I have to play it with doubles, it’s going to feel like walking up steps or something, but maybe the adrenaline will be good and I’ll be able to do it one footed.”

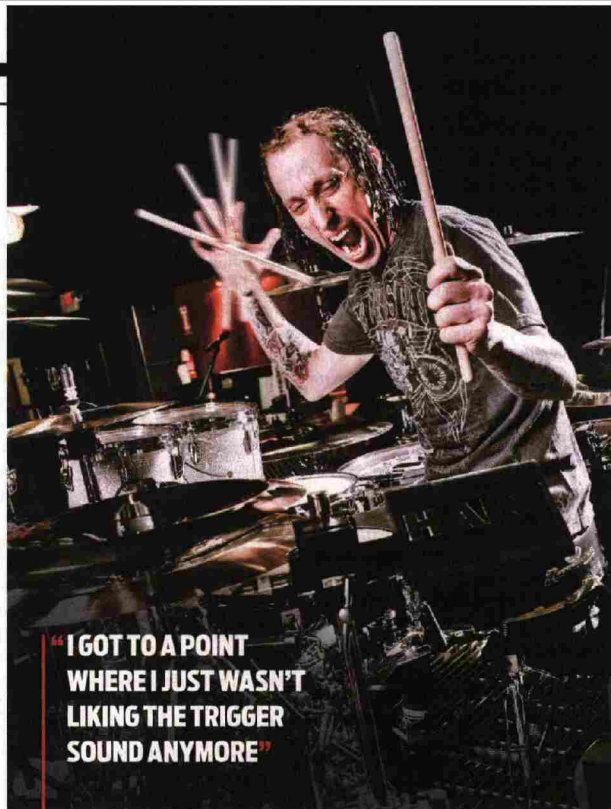
COLD COMFORT

Rose has traditionally contributed a disproportionate share of Sevendust’s vocals. It started in the band’s earliest days when the drummer would be bashing away during rehearsal and instead of trying to yell over the music, he grabbed a mike. He still does that, only on *Cold Day Memory* Lowery’s presence changed the dynamic. “The lower, screaming stuff, most of it is Clint. And then the high screaming stuff is me, and then Lajon [Witherspoon, lead singer] even picked up some really aggressive vocals. So it’s kind of hard to figure out who’s doing what sometimes if you are the listener, which I kind of like.”

A major factor in *Cold Day Memory*’s warm sound was the decision to record to 2” tape. “I didn’t think that it was worth doing it at first,” Rose admits. “I thought it was a waste of time.” Luckily, Grammy-nominated producer Johnny K (Staind, Disturbed, Three Doors Down), who recorded the album at his 40,000 sq. ft. vintage-console-studded Groovemaster Studios in Chicago, convinced him otherwise. K’s pedigree notwithstanding, it was a big leap for Sevendust to work with someone new. While the band was on tour with Disturbed in 2008, Rose and K bonded after a night at the blackjack table during a Vegas stop. “Sometimes the producer is a mediator and sometimes he’s hands on. Sometimes he’s a sonic guy,” he says without ever saying which category K falls into. “I think that Johnny was interesting. He was funny as hell, and ended up becoming one of our closest friends, so it was definitely a different feel to let someone else come in there and kind of take hold of the wheel.”

Because K was such a huge Sevendust fan, the band felt reassured that a hired gun was not going to try to change their sound. “I think that with newer bands he probably does do that,” Rose admits. “But with us he said, ‘I don’t want songs that are obvious songs to try to go out and make money. Let’s make it sound like Sevendust used to sound, which is, you know, a heavy, grooving, hook-oriented band with big choruses, and it came through on this record.’”

Rose’s daily approach in the studio varied. If a song was in the formative stages, he would have the full band coming through his in-ears, and hopefully by noon, get a serviceable track. Other times he cut out the



“I GOT TO A POINT WHERE I JUST WASN’T LIKING THE TRIGGER SOUND ANYMORE.”

other musicians completely and tracked the drums from memory if he felt the band was doing too many takes. “By the time you do that, you’re kind of feeling like you’re playing that damn *Dr. Feelgood* record,” he says referring to his flummoxed state on that first night of Crüfest. “You really don’t know what’s coming next because you changed it so many times, so fast. So I would not really even want to hear anybody else because, number one, they were in the same boat as me, so if they screwed up I’d follow that. The other thing was I wanted to concentrate. So there were certain songs that might not have had as much of a natural feel to them.”

Rose tracked *Cold Day Memory* with his own kit — not something to take for granted when working with a producer like Jonny K, who is known for a commercial metal sound. “I didn’t have to fight hard on that at all,” he recalls. On the other hand, Rose didn’t want to bring up a boatload of gear to Chicago, so he narrowed it down to one kit and he and K worked to get a great sound out of it. “There were plenty of drums to choose from [at Groovemaster] to mix and match if we wanted to, but the kit that I used, a blue Pearl Masterworks, just happened to sing.”

Even the click track, instead of a mundane tool, was rendered musical. “I’m not a big quarter-note cowbell guy, and I run it so loud that I prefer more of a loop. So we’ll sit in there and set it up to where it sounds like there’s something to groove to.”

A little sound replacement here and there, and before they knew it there were a dozen songs in the can. Big-time boardmen usually record and move on to the next project, but K offered to mix as well. Sevendust was hesitant because K had not mixed many records. It was a touchy subject because Rose thinks the mix on the previous Sevendust album, 2008’s *Chapter VII: Hope & Sorrow*, resulted in a less-aggressive sound, which pissed off a few fans. “People started thinking, ‘Damn, they got really soft on this,’ and I’m like, ‘Man, those grooves are still heavy. There is a lot more melody on there, but it’s still heavy. It’s just that we had a soft mix.’”

Working in K’s favor was that he knew every take like the back of his hand. Plus, the energy of those original sessions offered context

Morgan Rose

for an honest mix. "He nailed it," Rose says. "Our gut feeling was that he wasn't going to be able to mix the record the way we wanted and we were wrong."

Rose stopped using triggers with *Hope & Sorrow*, and their absence on the new record confirms it was a good move. During performances, the band's soundman, an ex-drummer, mikes all the crucial drums. Until recently, *Sevendust* triggered all the drums but had zero mikes. "Obviously, if you're not going to mike and the trigger goes down, you've lost that drum. I'm sure there's plenty of people that do both, but we weren't marrying the natural drum tone and the trigger tone. It was strictly a trigger sound. And I got to a point where I just wasn't liking it anymore. It didn't sound organic to me at all." The only exception is his 20" gong bass and the Hart Dynamics pads, which trigger 808-type effects. "I'm not going too crazy, he adds. "I'm just trying stuff out."

NO BED OF ROSES

The Sevendust story arc reads like the myth of Sisyphus. Every time the band crests the hill, unseen forces plunge them back down again. The band's first few releases were on TVT, a label that became known for breaking out rap superstars Lil' John and Ying Yang Twins. (Talk about the wrong place for a metal band.) While Sevendust has always been a touring machine, the band's first manager nearly bankrupted them. "We're like the poster child for the most naïve band on earth," he says, the tension rising in his voice for the first time.

Rose has had personal problems going back to 2000. After the breakup of first marriage to Rayna Foss, ex-bassist for Coal Chamber, he struggled to get custody of the couple's daughter, Kayla. Fast forward a few years, Rose got serious with Terri Harrison, a former

Playboy centerfold. The couple quickly married and had a son, Johnas, in 2008. "It wasn't a good marriage but it wasn't like I really thought, 'I'm going to be getting divorced in the next month or two,'" he says referring to the end of Sevendust's last tour when he learned of Harrison's extramarital activities.

In the wake of the divorce, Rose and Harrison remain friends. "I've moved on completely but it doesn't change the fact that it didn't happen in a very adult, respectful way." Rose handled the drama like a man, but says his pride took a shot. Falling into a deep funk, he stopped eating all together and at one point lost 25 pounds. "I was looking pretty rough." Maybe he was on the road too much; maybe he didn't pay enough attention; but he doesn't play the victim. "I am the quote-unquote 'rock star' with two failed marriages with two kids from two different women, and I'm the one waving my hand up in the air saying, 'Really, it wasn't my fault.'"

HOTLANTA NIGHTS

Whenever Sevendust practice before a tour, you can find them at The Tree, the go-to studio in Atlanta. "Almost every time I go up there, André from Outkast is there. You've got Elton John going in there, you've got Matchbox going in there. There's always somebody going in there to do something."

The South has a vibrant heavy music scene in general, but the whole Georgia psyche-doom thing is hella trendy now. There is Kylesa and Baroness holding it down in Savannah. Jucifer is repping the college town of Athens. Atlanta is home to Zoroaster and Mastodon. By contrast, Sevendust came up with once-promising rap-metal locals Stuck Mojo. "When we got back to Atlanta some-

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY



1997
Sevendust
SEVENDUST



1999
Home
SEVENDUST



2001
Animosity
SEVENDUST



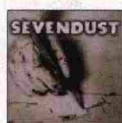
2003
Seasons
SEVENDUST



2005
Next
SEVENDUST



2007
Alpha
SEVENDUST



2008
Chapter VII: Hope & Sorrow
SEVENDUST



2010
Cold Day Memory
SEVENDUST

thing happened there. There wasn't a whole lot of camaraderie when it came to the hard-rock scene. There was some bitterness. There's a scene there and I know that it's a pretty good scene, but we're not a big part of it. We just kind of come home and wave to everybody and say, 'See you again in another two or three months because we've got to hit the road again.'

With a hard-hitting style and flair for showmanship, Rose seems a natural for a drumming DVD. He wonders aloud whether he should get advice from his buddy Ray Luzier, drummer for Korn. But the fact is he doesn't take the idea seriously. "People know me as being a pretty solid, real visual, aggressive player. And I don't really know how you translate that into a video to teach somebody how to do that. That's an extension of my personality more than anything."

Some drummers, no matter how good they are, just weren't meant to teach. Rose can read music but it's been so long since he had to do that school stuff. "It'd be real interesting to stick me in front of a chart and try to put something together," he chuckles. "I don't know, it would probably come out sounding cool because it would be wrong."

ANOTHER ONE BITES HIS DUST

So far on the current tour the only new tracks Sevendust are playing are "Unraveling" and "Forever Dead," but that will change once they hit Europe later in the year. If Rose considers *Cold Day Memory* the band's best work, convincing long-term fans — the ones who show up for "Black" and other hits — is another matter. He may not say so himself, but Sevendust's thrash-by-way-of-'90s-funk-metal heaviness is by now broad enough to be almost fail-safe.

But nothing is forever. Having just turned 41, spending most of the last decade and a half on the road, how much longer can he keep doing this? "Man, I really don't know how long we've got, you know? You ask me today and I can't give you an answer. That's because there was a packed house last night, and it's sold out tonight."

It would be insane to quit now. Never mind the new management and improved band financials. The important thing is that for the first time in five years Rose is having fun. "We've gotten to the point where we kind of shake our heads and say, 'I'm just going to go out there and do my job.'" ■■