

December 7, 2011: A Night To Remember

With each progressing step forward, I could feel the sounds of wailing guitars racing through my body. My feet absorbed the bass vibrations as we nudged our way through the dense, sweaty group of fans at the Amsoil Arena in Duluth, Minnesota. Finally, we reached the front of the crowd. On stage ensued a visual spectacle: various lights that appeared to cover the entire color spectrum shined through the fog that filled the air. Overarching the stage hung a black and white sinister symbol; Avenged Sevenfold's self-proclaimed "Deathbat" stood tall. Unlike a traditional bat, a giant skull replaced the torso. As if this daunting image was not enough, bright, orange flames began erupting from the tips of its wings. I could feel the warmth of the blaze on my skin with each subsequent blast. The abrasive nature of fans shoving themselves in a mosh like animals frightened me at first, but, as I settled in, I began to embrace my intimidating surroundings.

My heartbeat felt at sync with the rhythm of our favorite songs as Gino, my 18 year old brother, began flaunting the sign that I made for him. It read "Syn, it's my dream to play lead on 'Unholy Confessions'" in metallic, silver lettering. Avenged Sevenfold has always been Gino's favorite band, and "Unholy Confessions" is undoubtedly his favorite song. Growing up, I would hear him playing it over and over again to the point where I was able to pick up on each chord. M. Shadows, the lead singer, noticed the sign first during a brief intermission (where he checked-in with his fans to see if everyone was enjoying their performance thus far). Immediately after the sign caught his attention, he motioned his band members over to his

discovery. Together they decided that if time permitted, they would allow Gino to come and play with them on stage.

The show went on. I kept looking at Gino. You could tell his focus was aimed towards this possible opportunity. His eyes were wandering as if he was trying to recall every note in the song. His fingers twitched as he tried to mimic the exact chord progressions while his feet tapped to a rhythm that differed from the performance in front of him. It was like he was at home, practicing in our echoey basement. He was totally zoned out. I let him be, I didn't want to break his concentration. I knew that if I distracted him, the chances of him being able to get back into that zone were slight. After all, we were at a rock concert. So, instead, I continued to enjoy the show.

I was having the time of my life--every song felt like a different experience. The transposing melodies and altering drum patterns were captivating. The venue was so loud that I could not hear the voices of those neighboring me, but the looks of hysteria on their faces said it all. Everyone's mouths were in unison, singing the lyrics like a well-trained choir. Headbanging and waving the "rock and roll" hand sign in the air were constant movements in this crazy, sweaty arena. Yet, the idea of everyone coming together to cause havoc intrigued me. It was controlled chaos. There were fans of all walks of life there in the crowded venue.

The end of the show was approaching and I could see Gino was beginning to believe that playing on stage with Avenged Sevenfold wouldn't pan out. But, during the final intermission, M. Shadows grabbed his microphone and told his security crew to escort Gino from the crowd. Without hesitation, Gino grabbed onto the railing and hopped over the fence that separated the stage from the crowd. The security guards backed off as if to say, "go ahead buddy". He then ran

on stage and stood there. Synyster Gates, the lead guitarist, waived Gino over to his guitar. Promptly, Gino rushed to the right side of the stage. As soon as he got settled in, the band wasted no time resuming the show. “You sure you got this?”, M. Shadows asked Gino. He immediately responded with an affirming head nod. “You think he’s nervous?”, M. Shadows gestured to the crowd, “You guys have his back though right?”. After a short, confirming roar from the crowd, the singer intensely shouted to the crowd, “Are you ready to do this?”, and pointed to the drummer who followed with four cymbal beats, “psh”, “psh”, “psh”, “psh”, to indicate the beginning of the song. On cue, Gino was ready to go.

Soon into the song, I could see that Gino was in his element. He looked so comfortable on stage; it looked like he had done this a thousand times before. He even added the proper “rock and roll” hand signs and headbanging while performing each note like a true rocker. About halfway into the song, Zacky Vengeance, the other guitarist, ran over to Gino and began to play with him side by side, just like he always does with Synyster Gates. Instantaneously, the spotlight shined on Gino and the whole crowd could see that he was a complete natural performer on stage. He hit every note and played the song in its entirety. After the song finished, M. Shadows, full of excitement, shouted, “What did you guys think? Pretty fucking good, right?”. The crowd exploded into screams and applause. M. Shadows, in a more settled tone, added, “That is a fucking cool cat under some pressure right there”.