

By Nici de Wet

Pictures: Martin de Kock

**Y**OU can feel the nervous energy emanating from the four guys seated on the couch – all they want to do is go out there and play. But there are 30 minutes to go to show time so they crack open another beer.

We're backstage with local rock gods Seether – in Cape Town on the first night of their eagerly awaited countrywide tour – and the guys are pumped. "It's very emotional performing back home. I love it," says lead vocalist Shaun Welgemoed (or Shaun Morgan as he's now known). As we chat the roar of the crowd grows louder – fans are keen to see their music idols.

It has been two years since the internationally acclaimed band wowed audiences on their home turf – the last time was at My Coke Fest 2006 when they shared the stage with Metallica and Collective Soul. Now after touring overseas they're treating local followers to their first SA tour.

Shaun and fellow band members Dale Stewart, John Humphrey and Troy McLawhorn were nominated in three categories at the South African Music Awards (SAMAs) this year and clinched the Best Rock Album honours for their latest album, *Finding Beauty in Negative Spaces*, beating off tough competition that included the Springbok Nude Girls.

The guys couldn't attend the ceremony as they were touring overseas but as a gesture of thanks they headed home this month to play for fans. "It's long overdue. We've been wanting to give something back and now we're finally doing it with our own tour," Shaun says.

He speaks with an American accent – something he has perfected since moving to the USA in 2002. "They can't understand you otherwise – that's why I had to change my surname (Morgan is his grandmother's maiden name). They used to pronounce Welgemoed as Wedgiemold or Wackamole."

# From LA, LIVE AND LOUD

We're interrupted by a record company exec carrying a bronze trophy – it's their SAMA. This is the first time the guys have seen the coveted award and they take turns holding it. Ever the pranksters, they pull funny faces as they pose with it but it's clear they're pretty chuffed.

So where will it take pride of place? "I'm going to give it to my parents," Shaun says. "My folks have a room full of our discs and stuff at home – they'll be very proud."

In typical rock-star fashion

they haven't slept much over the past few days. They flew into the Mother City this morning from the UK where they've just completed a sold-out European tour. But these dudes aren't tired. "It's an adrenaline rush," Shaun says. "We just really enjoy what we do. It's such a fun career."

And one that has brought them fame and fortune too.

Since moving to America and changing their name from Saron Gas to Seether they've captured the attention of music-lovers around the world with their

edgy sound and meaningful lyrics.

Their debut album, *Disclaimer*, went gold in America and its follow-up, *Disclaimer 2*, reached platinum status there thanks largely to the tearjerking power ballad *Broken*, featuring Evanescence's lead singer and Shaun's ex-girlfriend Amy Lee.

They went platinum again in the US with their third offering, *Karma and Effect*, and *Finding Beauty in Negative Spaces* looks set to continue the trend. The first two singles, *Fake It and*

SA ROCK  
OUTFIT  
SEETHER COME  
HOME FROM  
THE USA TO SET  
LOCAL STAGES  
ALIGHT



LEFT: The band with their 2008 SAMA for Best Rock Album. From left are bassist Dale Stewart, drummer John Humphrey, guitarist Troy McLawhorn and singer Shaun Morgan.

You're Sober is believed to be about Shaun) but, hey, that's her prerogative."

As always he found solace in songwriting and *Finding Beauty in Negative Spaces* is widely regarded as one of their finest albums. "Music is the only thing that makes me feel normal. I used to get violent when I couldn't play."

They've shared the stage with some of the biggest names in rock – what have been his highlights? "Definitely opening for Metallica in SA and supporting Audioslave on their US tour."

He has only praise for *Stealing Love Jones*, who supported them on their SA tour. "They sound a lot like the American band the Yeah Yeah Yeahs. I love strong female-fronted bands such as L7 and PJ Harvey."

Home these days is a pad in Venice Beach, a quirky LA suburb favoured by artists. But after five years in the city he's ready to leave. "It's an empty, soulless place. I'm thinking of moving to Europe. It's also closer to SA."

In what little free time he has ("the record company keeps us very busy") he likes to fly home to visit friends and family.

The rest of the time he has his head down as he writes songs about issues that annoy and affect him deeply. And he'll be doing it for a long time.

"Music is my life – and there's always enough around to piss me off," he says.

Spoken like a true rock star. □

MAIN PICTURE: Shaun Morgan, lead singer of internationally acclaimed band Seether, rocks at Grand West Casino, Cape Town, on the first leg of their South African tour. BELOW RIGHT: With his tattoos and scraggly hair Shaun is a typical grunge rocker.

*Rise above This*, have topped local and US charts and the album has just gone gold in SA.

"*Fake It and Remedy* (their No 1 hit off *Karma and Effect*) are my favourite songs to play live," Shaun says. "Fake It is inspired by the shallowness of Hollywood and the people in it. Living in LA I see it every day, even down to the waitress who serves you with a bleeding lip from a Botox injection."

In the flesh the 30-year-old frontman is both rebel (he sports a lip ring and loads of tattoos on his arms) and nice guy. His face lights up when he talks about seven-year-old Jade, his daughter from a previous relationship who lives with her mother in Joburg. "She SMSed me today to wish me happy Father's Day," he says proudly. "I can't wait to see her."

He wrote *Broken* for her, he reveals. "I originally didn't want the song to be played but the

record company insisted on it."

His voice gives no hint of his trademark gravelly scream which is unleashed minutes later on stage to thunderous applause. In no time he's drenched in sweat as the crowd goes crazy. Seether have come home!

MUSIC has always been in Shaun's blood. But while he can play to his heart's content today, as a teenager growing up in Pietermaritzburg it was a different story.

"I ran away from home when I was 17 because my dad would not let me play in a band. He didn't think music was a proper career," he says chuckling. "I ended up not speaking to my parents for three years."

That's water under the bridge now. "We're very close. In fact I often think if my dad had supported me back then perhaps I wouldn't have been so driven to succeed."

He's looking forward to spending a week off after the tour with his family who include younger sister Lucy (16).

What does she think of having such a famous big bro? "I try to boost her social standing," he jokes. "I drop her off at school and hang my tattooed arms out the window."

Tragically he lost his brother, Eugene, to suicide last year. At the time of his death the 25-year-old was working as a bass technician for Seether while they were on tour in America. Deeply troubled, he leapt off a building – devastating his family and the band. In a moving tribute Shaun dedicated *Finding Beauty in Negative Spaces* and *Rise above This* to him.

The album title comes from Shaun surviving major lows over the past few years. In 2006, tired from months on the road and reeling after his public split from Amy Lee, he started drinking heavily. It soon spiralled out of control and in August that year he entered rehab.

"It was the rest I needed but the irony about rehab is you sit around with a bunch of losers telling you how to live your life," he says wryly.

His split from Amy was clearly bitter and they still don't speak to each other. "She went on to write horrible things about me (Evanescence's hit *Call Me When*

'Music is the only thing  
that makes me feel normal'

