

DOWNPLAY AIMS TO HIT IT BIG



PROVIDED PHOTO

KEEPING UP WITH DOWNPLAY

Editors Note: This is the first in an occasional series following Downplay, a band with local ties trying to make it big.

Adam Wagner
For The Post

Skeletonwitch may have been the last Athens-oriented band to break the Billboard charts, but alternative rock band Downplay could soon follow its metal-based brethren to fame.

A multitude of well-known labels have begun to pay attention to the Columbus-based band, which has become known in Athens for its performances during Spring Quarter's fests. When the band takes the stage Saturday at Newport Music Hall in Columbus, the audience will include the

vice presidents of Capitol Records and Epic Records, as well as A&R representatives from Atlantic Records and Mercury Records who specialize in finding new bands, said Dustin Bates, the band's lead vocalist.

Downplay has been together, in some variation, since 2004, when the band formed at Ohio University.

A reformation proved to be a necessity, however, when much of the band neared graduation. A major label scout saw the band play and told the members, "You guys are on your way to the country club life. It's not gonna work out," Bates said.

"There was an older lineup, and those guys had to step down because they weren't so committed," said Bobby Withers, an OU senior studying audio production who plays lead guitar for the band.

One of the original members is now a pilot, another is an engineer, and Bates is the only one still at the center of the project, writing all of the band's material.

"I'm not a control freak; it's just that I do it," Bates said. "(The other guys) don't write. When you let everyone write, it's

pure chaos. Sometimes it works awesome, but it's usually pure chaos."

Downplay — which released its last EP, *Rise. Fall. Repeat.*, last November — doesn't need any more chaos, as its members are scattered all over Ohio. Bates and guitarist Bobby Withers live in Athens, while bassist Ron DeChant and drummer Brian Patrick live in Cleveland, and guitarist Derek Snowden — formerly of the band Small Town Sleeper, which opened for Daughtry — is based in Dayton.

The band compensates for its geographic complications by making the most out of any form of practice they can — shows included.

"The good part about having really pro guys is they're really quick and they don't forget stuff, so we have to make the most out of our time," Bates said. "We just meet up in a central area, whether it's Columbus or Dayton, we always change it up, and we make the shows count."

The band has caught the eye of many record labels, to the point that they will now

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showcase for major labels this weekend. Saturday will not be the first time Downplay plays a major show at Newport, but they will be offering free admission to their fans from Athens.

Haffa's Records, 15 W. Union St., has 100 CDs, the sleeves of which serve as tickets to the show, to give to anyone who asks for them. Each shopper can take up to four CDs/tickets, which also feature one track from each of the six other bands on Saturday's lineup.

Playing a venue such as the Newport represents a challenge for a typically club-based musician like Withers,

who was used to playing 19 South and other Athens bars with Hennigan before he joined Downplay.

"Every little thing has to change. I had to get new gear," Withers said. "When you're in a band like Hennigan and your pedal board's falling apart, you don't really think about it. When you're in a band like this, your pedal board's a big deal."

From pedal boards to practices, everything is more serious for a band actively in the running for a label deal, as Downplay is. But as Withers said, "If ever I was a part of anything that was gonna blow up, it's gonna be this."

You're actually doing something that the industry is looking at. I've never re-

ally been a part of something like that," Patrick said. "I've played for a handful of bands over the past 5 or 7 years, but the people who've been looking at us, I've never been a part of that before. It's pretty significant. It's pretty amazing."

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WHAT: Downplay
WHERE: Newport Music Hall, 1722 N. High St., Columbus
WHEN: Doors open at 7 p.m. Saturday
ADMISSION: Free for OU students, \$5 presale, \$10 at the door