

SOUNDS OF THE UNDERGROUND

July 14

Starland Ballroom Parking Lot Sayreville, NJ

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There are two ways to look at festivals like this: on the one hand, a lot of young/early bands get their 15 minutes of fame, and on the other, some really good bands only get 15 minutes.

Regardless, it's a good time and a good opportunity to see some good metal – and the occasional decapitated Elmo head flying around.

Speaking of good metal, it's great to see Darkest Hour – an aggressive, technically skilled band – getting their due. Unfortunately, the same wasn't true of Necro. One concertgoer's representative opinion was, "Take a black cap-wearing frontman rhyming over a hip-hop beat and you have half the hardcore bands since Biohazard."

There was some concern this year's SoTU wasn't "underground" enough, so I was curious to see the crowd reaction from some of the bigger name bands. All That Remains was a special guest this year, and they proved to be a crowd favorite. I expected a little more energy from the band itself, but few frontmen manage a crowd better than Phil. After a surprising crowd-induced encore of "For Salvation," he jumped off stage and hung with fans. Pure class.

Shadows Fall was up next. They're a great band, but their song selection for the recent Jägermeister tour was disappointing. Luckily, any concerns were immediately put to rest when they opened with "Failure Of The Devout." Their set was cut short as Jon Donais played sick as hell (with an IV), but they managed to blast through "Stepping Outside The Circle," "Burning The Lives," and the crazy, circle-pit-inspiring "Eternity Is Within."

Every Time I Die inspires love and hate in equal measure. Some formed a psychotic pit, while others stared into space. There must have been something going around, because ETID performed sick as well, finishing off their set with a crowd-wide beer chug before "The New Black."

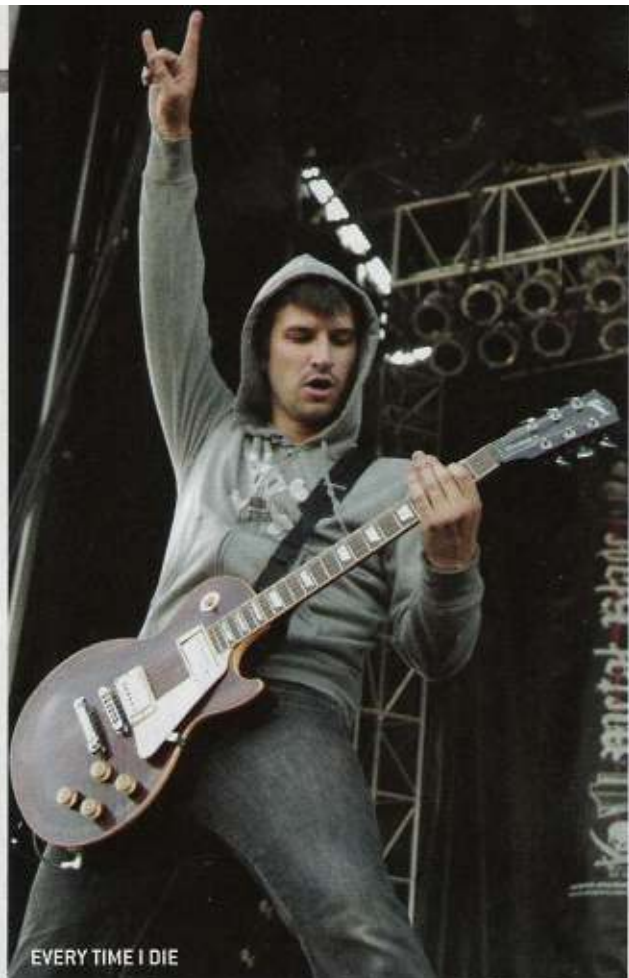
Another Jersey crowd favorite,

Chimaira, hit the stage, and their performances have been iffy and inconsistent in the past, but this was obviously their venue. They stuck to crowd favorites ("Nothing Remains," "Resurrection," "Pure Hatred"), and completely owned the place.

Testament partied like it was 1989. The classic lineup (with Mr. Paul Bostaph) tore through greats like "Into The Pit," "Over The Wall" and "Practice What You Preach."

Though looking like he'd have been more comfortable at a G3 show, it was fun seeing guitarist Alex Skolnick play newer stuff like "DNR." Unfortunately, Chuck Billy's vocals were too low at times.

There's usually not much new to say about GWAR. You know the drill – the wetter the better. But in addition to the usual penises, a mock killing of the Virginia Tech killer & Mr. Lordi's head on a stake were definite shocking crowd pleasers, making this year's SoTU set one to remember – as was the day as a whole. ☘



EVERY TIME I DIE



TESTAMENT



GWAR



SHADOWS FALL