



Rocklahoma started out as a vacation for Tulsa's Down for Five, but it ended up a concert gig for the band. Starting at left, the band is tuning up and getting ready for the show and at right, their 30 minutes in the spotlight is over.

# Down is on its way up

## Local heavy-metal band gets its big break on Rocklahoma stage

By **MATT ELLIOTT**  
World Scene Writer

PRYOR — It's 9:38 a.m. on Saturday at Rocklahoma, and the heat is waving up from the concrete backstage as Down for Five's Syke Mochek unloads his beat-up white van.

Down for Five, a Tulsa metal band, is one of a few Oklahoma acts that played the main stage. They won a contest through [www.jpotmusic.com](http://www.jpotmusic.com). It's been a vacation for the group, but not exactly a luxurious one.

Janna Jordan, the group's blond speed-demon guitar player, is bent over a guitar tuning up in the wings of the stage. Scott Squires, the bassist, helps get the band's gear organized and drummer Carl Lowe sits in a white lawn chair putting batteries into his metronome.

"I slept in my front seat this time," he said. "It wasn't too bad."

Squires and Jordan had a trailer. Mochek slept in his van. They'd planned on being at the show anyway to catch their heroes. Then they won the contest.

"I was really looking forward to meeting some of the Ratt guys and Poison," Squires said. "But unfortunately we didn't get to."

It's really hot. The rains that came with the start of the festival on Thursday cleared by Friday, and temperatures skyrocketed. Everybody is sunburned and sweaty. Mud and grass still caked blackboots and flecks their leather pants.

"It's nice," Mochek said. "It's not raining. The sun's shining. It's a nice, sunny day for rock 'n' roll."

The stage dwarfs the band. It is a massive metal frame with a concrete floor littered with cords, multicolored gaffer tape, and a few guitar picks left over from Poison's show Friday night. Amps are stacked in back and drums line the wall, what Jordan called a "heavy metal assembly line."

"I heard bass lines to '80's songs until 5 a.m.," Jordan said.

Mochek is shaking off the night's revelries with the Gypsy Pistolero, who performed Thursday but stuck around for the party. Oddly enough, the guys in the band kept telling him to get to bed.

Down for Five isn't glam rock. Its members wear a lot of black and leather on stage. And despite the heat, Squires said his white face paint and black lipstick aren't waterproof.

"The girls like it when it runs," he said.

Their set approaches, and Rocklahoma is sparsely attended this early in the day. The band is starting to get worried.

"We've had a lot of people say they are before to come see us. That's going to be stayed up until 4 a.m. drunk," Squires said. Mochek later moseyed off to get into his stage clothes.

Bang Tango shuffles in from the back of the stage, and it's more hurry-up-and-wait for Down for Five.

Lowe is still working on his metronome, which he wires to his in-ear monitor, to help him keep time during songs.

A mercifully cool breeze blows across the stage. One of the band's roadies, Ben "Shock" Romanello, munches on a bowl of bacon.

Mochek returns leathered up and eye-lined. He busts out a video camera and everybody makes one last check of their gear — they'll only have a few minutes to set up, and each minute they go over takes away from their brief time on the stage. Former Guns N' Roses



Photos by STEPHEN HOLMAN / Tulsa World

Tulsa's Down for Five performs late Saturday morning at Rocklahoma. The band was playing the festival after winning a contest through [www.jpotmusic.com](http://www.jpotmusic.com).

online

Watch two audio slide shows from this year's Rocklahoma. In the first, Scene Writer Matt Elliott talks about how well the featured '80s acts sounded. In the other, he went backstage with Tulsa's Down for Five and reports what it was like for the band to play its biggest show.

[www.tulsaworld.com/webextra](http://www.tulsaworld.com/webextra)

drummer Steven Adler ambles by, and Lowe says that he's starting to get nervous. Both Squires and the drummer pose for smiling, arms-over-shoulders pictures with Adler.

Thirty-Six Inches is done and off the stage. It's go time. Mochek and his mates rush around carrying gear into place, amps are built up, racks of effects pedals are hurriedly put into place on the floor, and the first power chords of their Rocklahoma show time ring out during a brief soundcheck.

A set list on a white piece of paper is taped to the front of a speaker monitor. It reads "Caricature," "You Lie in Wait," "Punch the Sky," "Rise," "Suicide Solution," and "Darkest Hour."

Lowe is incredibly nervous. He sits behind a drum kit that isn't his own, and it's autographed by everyone from Ratt to L.A. Guns.

The roadies try to set up the band's 15-foot-tall banners with a glowing green skull in the middle, but the wind picks up and threatens to blow them over in the gig's first mishap.

Now the zero hour comes as the announcer says the words everybody's been waiting for: "Tulsa's own, Down for Five!"

Syke yanks the microphone off its metal chain stand with the horned skull welded to the front and yells "Rocklahoma!"

Lowe and the band hammer into "Caricature," and the band's huge sound threatens to punch the air out of the audience. Down for Five shows itself as the most bottom-heavy, melodic and dark band of the festival. They've got harmonies in their choruses, something that comes from Mochek's Queensryche influence. And despite his smoking habit, he can sing clearly with a surprising range.

A look to the audience shows a few heads are bobbing, some people hold up Down for Five signs.

Squires hops around on stage, Jordan bangs her head, and her blond hair flying. Mochek seems surprised by how much room he has to move around on the stage.

"Thank you," he said, two songs into the set. "Thank you very much indeed. Are you guys having a good time out there?"

The band's new song, the anthem "Punch the Sky," about 1,000 fists in the air during a rock show, would've gotten the 30,000 people at the festival later in the night on their feet.

A cover of Ozzy Osbourne's "Suicide Solution," the singer's song about killing himself with alcohol, was a perfect choice for the booze-swimming festival. Mochek even sounded a little like Osbourne in his prime.

When the song ended, it was Jordan's cue to shine. The feedback from her amps cut through the air, and she started a shredding guitar solo that would've started

a tornado had there been a funnel cloud in the sky.

Smoke machines billowed white clouds as she punished her old duct-taped Ibanez, standing with her legs apart and hunched over the instrument.

The band closes with "Darkest Hour," and its nearly 30-minute shot at a big-time gig is over almost as quickly as it started. Jordan, Squires and Mochek run down to the lip of the stage and clap hands with their fans who made the trip from Tulsa.

Now comes the rush to get everything off the stage for Bang Tango, who is offstage waiting.

The problems in the set come out as the band hurries its gear aside.

"I was having some bad problems back there," said Lowe, who said his metronome cut out and he couldn't hear the band. That is murder for a drummer, who is the glue that keeps the band in time.

"I couldn't hear anything," Jordan said.

"I was getting cramps from sweating," Squires said. "I couldn't do all the Bob Daisley (Osbourne's bassist on "Suicide Solution") basslines, so I just kept it simple."

Jordan said the stage was a huge change for them, as the band is used to playing bars in which they can't even move around.

Later, Lowe gets his picture taken with Vince Neil, who has wandered

backstage.

The group starts rolling its stuff out the back of the stage, the sun beating down as they roll past a crowd that has formed around Neil, Adler and DJ Eddie Trunk, who emceed the festival.

Then, disaster for any touring band strikes: The van won't start. They wait around for someone to bring them a jumper, but that doesn't fix it. The battery's out, and their van is stuck behind the stage and it needs to be moved immediately.

Mochek leaves the van and heads over to sign autographs at the merchandise booth in the grass next to the stage. A crowd of teenagers quickly forms around Mochek and soon he's got CDs to sign.

A.J. Lewis, a 16-year-old from Eufaula, said, "These guys are awesome. I've always been into metal music, and they're pretty metal. And the guitar player, she's amazing."

Bandmembers fix the van's battery and drive off.

Later, the whole band has a live interview with 97.5 FM KMOD's program director, Don Cristi, at a booth the band's fans have assembled.

The usual volley of canned radio interview questions followed, but nothing was asked about the band's album out last year, "Time Has Come."

"We had a great show," Mochek tells Cristi during the interview. To the crowd

assembled, he said, "You guys are (expletive) awesome," dropping an F-bomb on live radio.

To say he was apologetic is an understatement, but the impromptu signing session that came afterwards with the fans outside temporarily washed that away. Mochek signed everything from CDs to a woman's body.

In all, it was a day the band hoped would bring them closer to making a living with this thing called rock 'n' roll. It didn't seem to get them much closer.

While they appreciated the chance to play, few people attended the show and the band didn't get as many interviews from media as they were told they would receive.

But they added that one spot on their resume — they played the massive four-day festival called Rocklahoma. For 30 minutes, their band shook the arena like it had sold a million albums and flew in on a private jet.

"I was surprised that it went as good as it did," Lowe said.

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