

A close-up photograph of a man with dark hair and a goatee, wearing a dark jacket over a blue and white striped shirt. He is playing an acoustic guitar and looking down at it with a focused expression. The background is a light, textured grey.

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SOL men

deSol brings
Latin/rock fusion
to the masses

page 27

10

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non-profit plan

12

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each other suck at singing

TUNES

PULSE



deSol also rises

Asbury Park band brings Latin
and rock fusion to the masses



By Lani Buess

Jumping on the coattails of such successful acts like Santana, Shakira and Los Lonely Boys, Asbury Park's deSol is hitting mainstream radio by offering a Latin-based percussive sound with original classic American rock and pop.

Although drawing on various cultural influences, deSol ultimately sticks to its roots.

Spirituality, Santeria, shamanism and the folk music of its ancestors are lyrical elements the band melds into its sound.

But, the band wasn't always so quick to pay homage to its lineage.

"For many years I didn't embrace

that," said 30-year-old lead singer Albie Monterrosa of Asbury Park. "I thought that was their music and this was my music, but it ends up that through deSol I can represent holistically who I am and what I've become—a first generation Latino in this country."

While raised on folk music of his El Salvadorian parents, influences like Jackson Browne, Elton John and Led Zeppelin had a greater impact on Monterrosa during his youth in Queens, N.Y. He initially focused on developing rock bands that didn't really stand apart. It wasn't until meeting a Puerto Rican female conga player that he understood the impact of his heritage and consequently found his

voice.

"As a spiritual being I was always in search of the reason and the big meaning," said Monterrosa. "I started to give thanks to my ancestors and through that I started realizing what I was missing in my life."

Monterrosa sought members to form a Latin band when he moved to Asbury Park in 1996.

Five years ago, deSol emerged on the scene.

Besides Monterrosa, the band consists of James Guerrero (vocals and percussion), Chris Gulce (bass), Jeremy Hoenig (drums), Andy Letke (piano and organ), Raysito Turull (timbales, congas and bongos) and Rich

Soto (electric guitar).

Letke is the only "white boy" in the band, having been born and bred in Indiana. Hoenig has a Middle Eastern background. The other remaining members are first generation Latinos, whose parents originated from Mexico, Spain, Puerto Rico and Peru.

"It was bad to be different at first and move to a white area, but then you put the music out there and say f**k it, I am who I am," Monterrosa said of his music, which is infused with electric guitar solos and conga, timbales and banjo beats.

But playing alongside cover bands, indie and rock acts in Jersey ended up being a godsend.

PULSE



Photo / Pierfrancesco Baccaro

deSol is from left, Jeremy "J-Ho" Hoenig (drums); Rich "Soto" Soto (electric guitar and vocals); Chris Guice (bass guitar and vocals); Albie Monterrosa (lead vocals and acoustic guitar); James Guerrero (congas, vocals and percussion); Andy Letke (piano and organ); Ray "Raysito" Turull (timbales and percussion).

"We took advantage of the cover scene because our music is very danceable," said Monterrosa. "We could play 95 percent originals in a two hour set and play a couple of Santana covers and get paid \$1,500 at the Jersey shore."

People soon took notice. Venues and artists began opening doors for the band in New Jersey, and around the world.

In 2004, deSol had its first huge gig opening for R.E.M. at Palacio de Los

Deportes in Mexico City, performing before 16,000 people.

deSol has since shared the stage with Big Boi of Outkast, Blues Traveler, Ozomatli, Cypress Hill and Los Lonely Boys. From March 17 to March 19, the seven-member band will be performing in Texas at South by Southwest festival. Additionally, the band is slated for a 26-city tour with The Wallers this spring.

deSol also earned acclaim in *The New York Times*, *Boston Globe* and the *New York Post* and appeared on nationally syndicated *The World Café* radio show. The guys even walked the red carpet at the Latin Grammys for two years running.

Two years ago, deSol signed with major record label Curb/Reprise Records. It was only last year that the band released its self-titled debut album. The CD is a revamped remake of the band's 2003 self-produced album called "Spanish Radio."

While selling well, the newer album didn't meet Monterrosa's musical standards.

"It ended up sounding like this polished piece of shit," he said of the pitfalls of signing with a commercial money-making major label.

But, Monterrosa believes the advantages of signing with Curb/Reprise outweighs the disadvantages.

"The positive was enough success that I'm a lot farther than I was a year and a half ago," he added. "The most important thing to any new artist is to build your audience."

The band is already working on its new album, which is expected to be less Spanish oriented and more rock-rooted. Monterrosa's not worried this time that the label will turn his music into something it's not.

"I'm a lot smarter now and I'm a big pain in the ass," he laughed.

At the essence, are the long-haired latino rockers just a latin rock band?

"We do represent the Latin rock thing absolutely, but do I see it that way? No, because I'm too close involved in it," Monterrosa said. "We are becoming more world music in a way, but at the end of the day our lyrics are of pop accessibility and so is the singing style. It's all very easy to digest."

Check deSol out for yourself at the Stone Pony in Asbury Park on March 24 at 8 p.m. For more information call (732) 502-0600. Or log onto the band's official Web site at desolmusic.com or at myspace.com/desolmusic.