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## **DeSoL fuses Latin Rhythms with Rock Music**

by Alan Sculley

In 2000, after several years of forming rock bands around the Asbury Park, N.J., area and seeing those bands fail to get anywhere, a friend of Albie Monterrosa felt the singer/songwriter needed a vacation.

Monterrosa didn't want to go — even though his friend was paying for a flight to the Caribbean Islands.

"I wasn't even going to go on that trip because I'm a workaholic kind of guy and I need to write songs or rehearse with the band or find a band," Monterrosa said. "Since I had no band, I was like, I need to stay in New York and New Jersey and work."

The friend didn't take no for an answer.

It turned out that the trip to the Caribbean Islands was the best thing Monterrosa could have done for his music career.

While on the island, he met a Puerto Rican woman from New Jersey who was playing Latin rhythms on congas on the beach. Monterrosa started jamming with the woman.

The son of El Salvadoran immigrants, Monterrosa suddenly realized what he wanted to do with his music — fuse the rock music he'd been playing with the Latin rhythms that had always been part of his life, but had been an element he had up to then avoided using in his music.

"It's funny because inspiration at times comes in like lightning bolts, and sometimes it doesn't, and I've had many of both," Monterrosa said. "That day was a lightning bolt. And I tell everybody I went to bed that night listening to the ocean and just like I couldn't even sleep. I was ready to do it. I wanted to leave already. I didn't want to be there. I wanted to come to Jersey and find out, you know, who my partners were going to be."

Five years later, Monterrosa is living his dream, singing in DeSoL, the Latin-accented rock band that grew directly out of his musical experiences on that island vacation he didn't even want to take.

Following his trip, Monterrosa immediately put out word that he was looking for musicians interested in playing in a Latin-flavored band. One name — Armando Cabrera — surfaced early on.

Cabrera, at the time, was facing some changes in his situation. A native of Cuba, he had been working as an engineer with AT&T, earning a good living for his wife and four kids. But rumors of layoffs at the company had been surfacing, so Cabrera had started to wonder if a job change was in his future.

An experienced percussionist who had learned a wide range of Afro-Cuban instruments, Cabrera invited Monterrosa over to his house for an initial jam session. It wasn't long before Cabrera had decided he wanted to join Monterrosa in chasing the idea of having a Latin-influenced rock band.

Monterrosa and Cabrera went through a number of musicians in forming DeSol before finding the other musicians who are in today's lineup – guitarist Rich Soto, bassist Chris Guice, keyboardist Andy Letke, drummer George Saccal and percussionist James Guerrero.

The band gained an important early ally in Franke Previte, a songwriter who won an Oscar for the song "(I've Had) The Time of My Life," which was featured in the movie "Dirty Dancing."

Previte was given an early demo by DeSol and was so taken, he agreed to manage the band and shop the demo to record labels.

The band — whose collision of Latin rock sound was hardly a sure bet for commercial success — was not an easy sell. A number of labels brushed off the band before Curb Records decided to take a chance on DeSol.

The label has just released the group's self-titled debut CD, although DeSol has been touring for some time now, winning converts with their spirited live shows.

The CD, meanwhile, offers a good sense of DeSol's appeal, as songs easily blend pop appeal and festive rhythms. Songs like "Blanco Y Negro" and "My Affection" recall the Santana/Rob Thomas collaboration, "Smooth," with their hook-filled melodies and decidedly Latin grooves. Just as infectious are "Chango," a tune with a some fiery guitar and an attention-getting organ riff, and "Bandleader," one of the CD's most festive tunes.

Monterrosa is committed to making DeSol a long-running band, but he thinks the band's CD is arriving at a good time.

"We're on a wave with a lot of other acts, like Los Lonely Boys, Ozomatli. There's a Latino thing that is just starting to happen," he said. "The late '90s were the Ricky Martins and Enrique Inglesias. That was a big deal. But we're not that. We're a rock band, and now there are a lot of rock Latino bands that are on a wave, and we didn't want to be behind the wave. We wanted to be on the wave."

DeSol plays Sept. 8 at Off Broadway. Tickets for the 9:30 p.m. show cost \$8.