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Rocking on with a Latin soul

By **SETH ASHLEY** of the Tribune's staff

Published Thursday, September 1, 2005

The New Jersey shore is an unlikely place for the emergence of a hot new Latin rock band. But from the melting pot that is the Garden State, deSol has bubbled up with a fury.

"Things are good," deSol frontman Albie Monterrosa said. "I can't complain ever because we could be back in Jersey, playing at the local bars, doing cover songs and all that. But we chose not to do that. We chose to write our own music. We're blessed to be out here just playing in front of the world. And sure, we want to do so much more, but it's the little steps that bring us to our dreams."

Monterrosa's rock band with a Latin soul will bring its radio-friendly sound to a KBXR-sponsored Happy Hour show Wednesday at Mojo's. The band is touring to support its self-titled major-label debut on Curb Records, and it is poised to become a commercial success.

A native of Queens, N.Y., Monterrosa moved to New Jersey at age 21 and played in one rock band after another. Years later, during a time of uncertainty, a trip to the Virgin Islands gave him the idea to explore his roots in his music.

"It was at a time when I was at a crossroads," Monterrosa said, "and I wanted to find my next musical endeavor. Guys were quitting the business because they either got married or they got a real job. Or they were sick of being poor."

So Monterrosa took a break and went to visit a friend with a Caribbean villa. That's where he met a Puerto Rican girl named Wanda who played conga on the beach.

"She opened my eyes," Monterrosa said. "I brought out my guitar and started jamming with her, and she played the Afro-Cuban rhythms - a lot of what my parents listen to - and I went to bed that night not being able to sleep. The wind was rushing, and the water was hitting the rocks, and I was just empowered by nature. My soul opened up. Everything seemed different and better."

When Monterrosa got back home to Asbury Park, N.J., he put the word out that he was looking for players who were familiar with those rhythms he learned from Wanda on the beach. But he still wasn't sure exactly what he wanted his new band to sound like.

"When I had the idea to put a Latino band together, I didn't know how Spanish I wanted to go," he said. "I didn't know if I wanted to be a salsa band or a merengue band or whatever. What happened was totally the start of a brand-new spankin' thing."

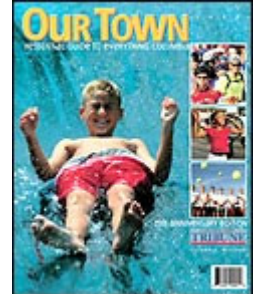
The first player Monterrosa worked with was Armando Cabrera, a percussionist born in Cuba and raised in Puerto Rico. The two played as a

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duo, and Cabrera taught Monterrosa about Latino rhythms.

"These rhythms have been used for centuries," Monterrosa said, "and I realized this wasn't something crazy in me. This was my spirit speaking to me, bringing me to the source - bringing the horse to the water - and I drank from the sea of ancestral knowledge."

Monterrosa also taught Cabrera a thing or two by introducing him to the rock bands Monterrosa had always loved.

"I turned him on to Zeppelin and the Stones, stuff he didn't grow up with," Monterrosa said. "It's scary that Armando didn't know who Charlie Watts is! But I don't know about a lot of the music he grew up with, so that was a good marriage right there."

As the two added other players, they explored old Cuban and merengue cover songs, but that didn't feel right to Monterrosa.

"I realized I couldn't be that because I wasn't that," he said. "I was first generation in this country."

The son of Salvadoran immigrants, Monterrosa grew up with his parents' Latin music, but he also was devoted to rock music. As a result, he decided to blend the two styles and work toward a sound more like that of Carlos Santana in his early days and, more recently, Los Lonely Boys.

"I realized I could get back to my roots," Monterrosa said. "I wanted to stir the pot. A lot of people on the Jersey shore, they sound the same, and it was a breath of fresh air I started seeing when we started playing our music and people started saying, 'Wow, this is something different.' Anywhere we played, we started seeing more and more people. And we said, 'We got something here, something that's special,' so we kept going."

Now 30, Monterrosa has led his seven-piece band all over the world, from a Mexico City gig with R.E.M. to the Lollapalooza and Austin City Limits festivals to tours with The Wailers and the Dirty Dozen Brass Band. For now, it's the band's live show that's fueling its popularity.

"We leave it all onstage," Monterrosa said. "We don't go up there to be depressed. We go up there to rejoice and have a good time, and people will gravitate toward that."

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DESOL

When: 5 p.m. Wednesday

Where: Mojo's, 1013 Park Ave.

With: BXR Happy Hour

How much: \$1.02

Contact: 874-1944
