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A few years ago, Asbury Park-based Albie Monterrosa took a break from his aspiring career as rock singer and traveled to the Virgin Islands. There he met a Latina percussionist (no, you don't know where this is going), and, after jamming with her for a while, realized that he could blend his rock influences with the sounds he'd grown up to as a son of Salvadoran immigrants in Hollis, Queens. "I realized I had to tweak things," he said, "by mixing Spanish into an American realm." After putting out the independently released *Spanish Radio*, they were eventually discovered by manager Franke Previte (also a songwriter, responsible for perpetrating "I've Had The Time of My Life" for the first *Dirty Dancing* movie), who secured them a record deal with Nashville-based Curb Records; their self-titled debut's scheduled for national release on July 26. While the band's sound can be described as heavily influenced by the likes of Santana and Maná, it's clear to the ear that they've also found something more personal. At their performances, they emanate a raw energy that quickly gets the audience moving: Guitarist Soto provides clever licks, while Monterrosa mixes English and Spanish in songs such as "Chica de Miami" (a hilarious tune in which the singer describes an affair with a girl down south), "Spin Around" (an early Monterrosa composition about life and death during an ordinary New York City day) and "Karma." The band plays homage to their Latin heritage in the Spanish-language "Cumbia Raza," one of the only songs with virtually no rock elements to it. The fact that both Monterrosa and percussionist James Guerrero grew up in what was arguably the birthplace of hip-hop shows when Guerrero spits his rap into "Spin Around" and "Paloma."

Mercury Lounge, 217 E. Houston St. (betw. Ludlow & Essex Sts.), 212-260-4700; 10, \$10

--- Ernest Barteldes