

The Star - Ledger

Friday, November 5, 2004

Crossing borders with deSol

Asbury Park band branching out from Shore rock scene

LATIN

deSol

Where and when: 8 p.m. Friday as part of the Halloween Jamboree at the Stone Pony, 913 Ocean Ave., Asbury Park; 8 p.m. Saturday with The Wailers at B.B. King Blues Club, 237 W. 42nd St., New York

How much: \$10 in Asbury Park, call (732) 502-0600; \$20 in advance, \$25 day of show in New York, call (212) 358-1633. Tickets available at Ticketmaster for both shows, (201) 507-8900 or visit www.ticketmaster.com.

BY ENRIQUE LAVIN
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

Around the time the latest Latin music boom peaked in the United States, Asbury Park's deSol was carving a little niche in the Jersey Shore rock scene with a familiar brand of Latin pop/rock.

By blending rootsy rock and traditional Latin dance rhythms (think Miami Sound Machine with Carlos Santana on the guitar), deSol's sound seemed like an inevitability — reflecting the state's (and the country's) shifting demographics, which tell us that Latinos make up about 13 percent of the population.

"We're crossing so many borders," says Salvadoran-American Abie Monterrosa, the band's frontman. "I started in the Anglo scene (playing with local band the Homegrown's); now it's amazing for them to be so embracing of our music."

Singing mostly English lyrics that deal with festive themes, peppered with catchy Spanish phrases, deSol (which means "of the sun") has been garnering fans from Anglo and Hispanic audiences locally since early 2000. That was enough to land a record deal with Curb Records, which released deSol's eponymous debut album in August.

The group — completed by percussionists Armando Cabrera and James Guerrero, lead guitarist Rich Soto, bassist Chris Guice, keyboardist Andy Letke and drummer George Saccal — has been touring most of the summer. Now preparing to visit Mexico City, where the seven-piece band will open for R.E.M., deSol plays Friday night at the Stone Pony's Halloween Jamboree. On Saturday at 8 p.m., it opens for The Wailers at the B.B. King Blues Club in New York.

"I like to keep my lyrics positive, I try to find solutions, something that's empowering," says Monterrosa, 30, who was born and raised in Queens, moving to the Jersey Shore in the early '90s. "I draw from Marley and Lennon. I've started to look at the bigger picture. People are killing themselves around the world, but the sun always comes out and the universe always keeps expanding."

Monterrosa's interest in his Latin roots came relatively recently, he says. Though his parents, who immi-



SCOTT LITUCHY

grated to the United States from El Salvador in the 1960s, had listened to traditional Mexican artists like Vicente Fernández or salsa ambassadors the Fania All-Stars, he was making music inspired by his childhood heroes: Elton John, Billy Joel, the Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin and the Beatles. It wasn't until after a 1999 trip to the Virgin Islands that he fused the two worlds.

"That trip turned my head around. I wanted to put a Latin band together," he says. "I wanted to integrate my roots into my music, *el sabor* of Latin culture."

Cuban-born percussionist Cabrera turned Monterrosa on to Ruben Blades and Tito Rodríguez. Later, he'd translate at least some of his songs completely into Spanish, including a Latin-pride anthem, "Spanish Radio (America, Mi Radio)."

"I give thanks to my ancestors in our music and rhythms," Monterrosa says. "Conga rhythms were used in rituals; it's nice to have them in my music for new audiences to listen to them."

Gathered outside their studio in Asbury Park, "the hotdog house," are the members of deSol, clockwise from top left, Abie Monterrosa, Andy Letke, Rich Soto, Armando Cabrera, Chris Guice, George Saccal and James Guerrero.