

ENTERTAINMENT

# Breckenridge crowd whoops it up

## Desert Rose steals show at festival

By Rick Ansonge  
Gazette Telegraph

Survival books say that the desert rose plant can be crushed and sprinkled into shallow pools, where it stuns the fish and makes them easy to catch.

On Saturday night, the Desert Rose Band was true to its namesake, turning in a country-rock set that stunned the several thousand music lovers who turned out for the first Breckenridge Country and Bluegrass Festival.

Led by Chris Hillman, formerly of the Byrds and the Flying Burrito Brothers, and Herb Petersen, formerly of the Dillards, the rhinestone cowboys of the Desert Rose Band performed most of the cuts from their first MCA album, including Colorado songwriter Michael Woody's "He's Back and I'm Blue."

Woody, a former member of the Too High Band (which, by all accounts, was), is now a clean-living resident of Nashville.

Other Desert Rose Band selections included the rollicking "One Step Forward," and a bluegrass-tinged version of "Time Between," which Hillman first recorded with the Byrds on the 1967 album "Younger Than Yesterday."

The band also performed a generous sampling of selections from its new MCA album, "Running," which is due out later this month.

Unlike the first album, which mostly explored personal relationships, the new one is a bit broader in scope. "Our Songs," for instance, addresses the gulf between '60s idealism and '80s materialism.

"Words like 'condo' and 'shopping mall' don't trip off my tongue lightly," Hillman said before launching into the song. True to his '60s roots, he urged festival-goers to "vote Democratic" in the coming elections.

Other highlights of the set

Photos by Rick Ansonge/Gazette Telegraph



Chris Hillman of the Desert Rose Band does guitar-pickin' at the Breckenridge Country and Bluegrass Festival.

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included "For the Rich Man," a song about migrant farm workers; and "Hello Trouble," an updated Buck Owens hit.

The sound, punctuated by an electric 12-string guitar and laced together with a pedal-steel guitar, was reminiscent of the Byrds' classic "Sweetheart of the Rodeo" album. But it had a freshness all its own.

Of course, the Desert Rose Band wasn't the whole show at the base of Peak 8, which offered a panoramic view of the Continental Divide.

Other entertainers included the New Grass Revival, whose blend of bluegrass, country, rock and jazz probably make it the single most accessible bluegrass band to listeners weaned on Top 40 radio; the Tony Rice Unit, which performed a tight, crowd-pleasing acoustic set; and Patty Loveless, a country newcomer whose rich voice



Patty Loveless

sounds like it was distilled from a vat containing equal parts Loretta Lynn and Paulette Carlson of Highway 101.

Earlier in the day, the crowd also warmed to the sounds of Bill and Bonnie Hearne, Southern Exposure and Riders in the Sky.

The Riders, who specialize in campy versions of old cowboy favorites such as "Don't Fence Me In," appeared in outfits that would make Gene Autry blush. Fiddle player Woody Paul, for instance, wore a shiny blue shirt that looked like it was made from the same material used to line the booths of '50s-style diners.

But at least the musical material seemed genuine. The Riders are a deliberate throwback to the days of the "Country Classics" TV show, when Little Jimmy Dickens, Minnie Pearl and dozens of other cornball characters twanged their way into the hearts of middle America.

High points included a sing-along of "I'm Going to Leave Old Texas Now" (sung with a chorus of about 15 children who proved amazingly adept at staying on pitch), plus an assortment of yodels, rope tricks and "varmint dances."

The latter featured Fred Labour's impressions of a three-toed sloth, a garden slug and an armadillo.

Near the end of the set, leader Doug Green saw some thunderheads approaching and asked the audience, "Are there mudslides in Colorado?"

Fortunately, there were no mudslides, but there was plenty of rain, just as there was at the Telluride and Winter Park festivals earlier this summer.

Maybe the drought-stricken areas of the country ought to stage more bluegrass festivals. In Colorado, at least, it seems to work better than cloud-seeding.

But the soggy weather didn't dampen anyone's spirits. The organizers announced that next year's festival would be expanded to two days, prompting a chorus of whoops, whistles and "yee-hahs" that echoed down the slopes.