

## Desert Rose Band

The Desert Rose Band introduced a new sound to country music in 1987 with a unique blend of sterling musicianship and impeccable three-part harmony. Using their wide background in traditional country and bluegrass music as a base, they took off in a new direction, with mature, introspective lyrics. Their success on radio and on the road, as evidenced by five #1 singles and Touring Band of the Year honors for the past three years from the Academy of Country Music, has inspired a new wave of self-contained country bands. Still the Desert Rose Band—Chris Hillman, Herb Pedersen, John Jorgenson, Steve Duncan, Bill Bryson and new member Tom Brumley—stands apart from all other acts in country music. The difference lies in their fierce commitment to the art form that is country music.

"I love traditional country music," said bandleader Hillman, who writes most of Desert Rose's material and who received a special citation from BMI in 1988 for 21 years of songwriting and chart success: "I want to see the form continue to redefine and grow."

For their new Curb/MCA album, *True Love*, the Desert Rose Band worked for the first time with producer Tony Brown, whose most recent successes include Vince Gill, Reba McEntire and Patty Loveless. To say that the collaboration was a success would be an understatement. "I'll be honest," Hillman said. "I've never had a more pleasurable time in the studio in 25 years. I can only measure it on this level: I enjoyed getting up in the morning. I couldn't wait to get down to the studio, which was a 60-mile drive in L.A. traffic."

Hillman credits Brown with pushing the band to not only redefine country music but to redefine their own sound. "Tony challenged us. He made us work a little more. He simplified our sound. He redefined what Desert Rose was and is, and what kind of music Desert Rose is based on and built on—the traditional music and the bluegrass that is such a big part of our sound, along with all those elements of '60s rock and other things that we've absorbed by osmosis over the last 25 years. Tony brought that out of us. On this project we went to the essence of Desert Rose."

In what has become a Desert Rose Band tradition, *True Love*, balances elements of traditional country music with bold new ideas. The songs are about mature, adult relationships—the heart of country music. The feelings come from the heart, but the attitude is one of introspection rather than overt display. The first single, co-written by Hillman and Jack Tempchin, the man responsible for the Eagles' 1973 hit "Peaceful Easy Feeling," which is still a country radio favorite, illustrates this unique combination of elements with a thoughtful truism expressed as a traditional country hook line: "You Can Go Home (but you can't go back)."

The overriding feeling throughout *True Love* is a positive combination of hope and determination. "It Takes A Believer" is a case in point. The song is a testament to the power and the precious value of love. The title cut carries the same message. "True Love" is basically

saying that without a true love there's not anything worth living for," Hillman said. "That's basically it." Beyond that explanation, Hillman prefers to let the listeners decide what the songs mean.

The musical performances of the Desert Rose Band play a subtle but crucial role on *True Love*. In "Twilight Is Gone," the changes in a relationship that occur after the initial fire has died down are expressed in a quiet ballad. In "No One Else" a similar situation evokes totally different feelings, thanks to an up tempo band treatment. A wide variety of musical textures throughout the album enhance the songs. In "A Matter Of Time" the music takes on a hard edge to match the determination of the singer to not take "no" for an answer. The beautiful Peter Rowan ballad "Undying Love" features a guest duet performance by bluegrass star Alison Krauss. "Behind These Walls" explores communication problems over a hint of a mariachi beat. A low-register guitar lick underscores the troubled feelings of those who lose love's "Glory And Power." A shade of rhythm and blues flavors "Shades Of Blue." "True Love" moves along at a bluegrass pace, which makes the message infectious and also gives the bandmembers a chance to cut loose on some fancy picking.

Chris Hillman is, of course, one of the most important figures in the history of country rock, progressive country, or whatever term applies to those who have injected new ideas into country music through the last quarter century. Born in southern California, he cut his teeth on bluegrass music in a band with Rex and Vern Gosdin. He was a founding member of the Byrds and later the Flying Burrito Brothers, the two groups primarily responsible for introducing country music to the wider audience of rock and roll. As an original Byrd, he was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1991. After stints with Manassas, the Souther-Hillman-Furay Band, a pair of solo albums and a Byrds reunion, he took a turn back to his roots in acoustic music with two albums on the Sugar Hill label, the second of which was titled *Desert Rose*.

Multi-instrumentalist Herb Pedersen also played an important role in the expansion of country music. In addition to his solo work, his long list of studio credits includes harmony vocals on many of Linda Ronstadt's country/pop hits. He also arranged the vocals on the Ronstadt-Emmylou Harris-Dolly Parton *Trio* album.

Guitarist John Jorgenson brought to the group a wide musical experience that included the Benny Goodman band, the Windham Hill Extravaganza and the Rose Maddox band. Bassist Bill Bryson and drummer Steve Duncan have impeccable country and bluegrass credentials ranging from Buck Owens to Rick Nelson to the Bluegrass Cardinals. Pedal steel guitarist Tom Brumley has recently replaced original bandmember Jay Dee Maness. (*True Love* was recorded in the interim, and Nashville session man Paul Franklin plays on the album.) "Jay Dee just didn't want to tour anymore," Hillman explained. "We replaced him with an equally legendary guy, Tom Brumley. Tom, as everybody knows, was in Buck Owens and the Buckaroos and in Rick

Nelson's bands, and he's just a great steel player. He was perfect to come in, and Jay Dee's still our pal."

The origins of the Desert Rose Band date back to 1985 when Jorgenson and Bryson joined Hillman's acoustic quartet. Hillman and Pedersen guested on a bluegrass album by Dan Fogelberg and then joined Fogelberg on a tour. In the fall of 1985, Hillman was invited to play the L.A. Street Scene festival, and he added Duncan and Maness to the band. The one-time performance was so much fun that Hillman began booking the band into clubs around Los Angeles. A performance at the Palomino in February of 1986 resulted in a record contract.

The Desert Rose Band's debut album immediately established them as a group of extraordinary musicians. Their first two singles, a remake of Johnnie and Jack's "Ashes of Love" and the new "Love Reunited," illustrated the group's unique combination of old and new. Two more singles, "One Step Forward" and "He's Back and I'm Blue," hit #1.

The second album, *Running*, stretched the boundaries of country music in several directions, with virtuoso musical performances by the individual band members and pointed social commentary in the song lyrics. Two more #1 singles—"Summer Wind" and "I Still Believe in You"—along with the #2 "She Don't Love Nobody" served notice to the country music industry that Desert Rose had become a major musical force commercially as well as artistically.

The hits continued with three Top 10's from *Pages of Life*. A *Dozen Roses/Greatest Hits* took a retrospective look back at the band's success, with a compilation of ten hits, and also continued to move forward with two new singles.

With the release of *True Love*, the Desert Rose Band continues to push country music onward and outward, setting a new tradition—a Desert Rose Band tradition for fresh, new, exciting country music.

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