

# CALENDAR

ORANGE COUNTY  
Los Angeles Times

## Desert Rose Hoping to Bloom Again With New Album

■ **Country music:** The band, which plays Crazy Horse tonight, has some new members and a new outlook.

By RICHARD CROMELIN  
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

The Desert Rose Band will release its sixth album, "Life Goes On," in September and the group's leader, Chris Hillman, has one simple hope for it. "I want to get us back into the majors," he said during a recent interview. "We were relegated to the minor leagues."

Actually, it was worse than that: Hillman and his partner Herb Pederson seriously considered disbanding the group in the wake of its previous album, 1991's "True Love." It was a commercial dud and an artistic letdown, marred by compromises the band made with its record company, MCA.

"I made one of the most monumental blunders anybody can make," Hillman said. "I stopped listening to my intuitive voice, the voice that says: 'Don't do that, don't write that.' I was seduced by the business side of it with all this stuff, 'Let's do this song with Alison'—what's her name? Alison Krauss. I hated that song. I was doing every stupid thing, like a 20-year-old kid thinking 'Gee, they're gonna really get behind it.' I fooled

myself."

Desert Rose, which established itself in the country market in 1987 with its first album, also went through a major personnel change after "True Love" with the departure of guitarist John Jorgenson and drummer Steve Duncan.

Jorgenson's first replacement, bluesy young guitarist Jeff Ross, now has been replaced by Jim Monohan, who Hillman encountered in local bands around his own home in Ventura County. New drummer Tim Grogan remains in place, and Hillman insists the DRB—which plays the Crazy Horse in Santa Ana tonight—is ready to rebound.

"There have been people who have miraculously come back from the dead," he noted. "John Anderson is better now than ever. Sawyer Brown has come from being a ditty show band into doing some interesting material. I think Desert Rose can come back, too."

"I think we did a really good record. We went back with our original producers, and it's far more Desert Rose-sounding than any of the other records."

Ironically, he views the current boom in popularity of country music as a danger rather than an advantage.

"It's a volatile business right now," said the singer and songwriter, whose perspective covers 30 years in music, including storied stints with the Byrds in the '60s and the country-rock pioneering Flying Burrito Brothers in the early '70s.

"It's becoming so disposable," he said. "I think that the shelf-life of an artist is cut in half right now. I think record companies might tend to look at an artist, and if he's not gonna do big business out of the box sometimes they let him go a little too quickly rather than developing that artist, as in the old days."

"What was once a very artistic business has somehow become a commodities business," he said. "I don't mean to be bitter. I'm lucky we're still working, I'm lucky we're still in the ballgame. But I still think this is 'Urban Cowboy II.'"

"I'm not putting it down," Hillman said. "We're dealing with a very safe alternative for people age 30 to 55, whether you're out there dating or you're single or whatever, it's a very safe thing. The music's a little safer than rap and heavy metal and it's a good place to go and dance and all the rest of that stuff."

"But I think it is superficial. I don't hear the interesting country radio I heard in the late '80s. Rosanne Cash, I don't hear her on the radio. . . . I just heard a little more substance in the songs on country radio back then. Now it's this huge giant thing and Nashville is cranking them out. It's not doing much for me right now."

■ *The Desert Rose Band plays tonight at 7 and 10 at the Crazy Horse Steak House, 1580 Brookhollow Drive, Santa Ana. \$27.50. (714) 549-1512.*

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