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PECOS LIFESTYLES & ENTERTAINMENT MAGAZINE

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Nosotros Plays AMoCA





Courtesy Photo

Nosotros Plays AMoCA

Rey Berrones
Vision Editor

Do you like rock, Latin or jazz music? How about heavy metal, R&B, salsa or flamenco? If you are a fan of any of those genres, you owe it to yourself to check out New Mexico's own Nosotros.

While many bands might be called original, genre busting, and difficult to clas-

sify, Nosotros clearly earned all of those titles by exploring each individual band member's musical background and reinterpreting it through a full Latin band.

According to Dennis Jasso, Nosotros drummer, "All of us come from a background where Latin music isn't our main influence or what we were brought up on."

Jasso's roots are from rock drumming, and while he was primarily influenced by bands like Led Zeppelin and Rush, it does not stop him from laying into a Latin

groove that is appropriate for the Nosotros sound. "I had a huge respect for the complexity of Latin rhythm, I wanted to show my appreciation of the music by learning the traditional rhythms, but being who I am, I didn't want to be such a stickler to the rules. I feel like I hit the drums like a rock drummer. I feel the energy that I put into my playing is definitely the rock music," Jasso said.

As for the other influences of the band, Jasso continued, "Our bass player grew up on R&B. You can totally hear it, but for some reason,

he makes it fit into a Latin groove. David Diaz was really into jazz, but because we were in Las Cruces, we were always in touch with the Latin music, and it is almost unexplainable how it all came about that we were all playing Latin music."

"For the heavy metal guys, the speed helped them cross over. For me, it was the groove and the feel of Latin, and the feeling that made you want to get up and dance. We have all found a way to bring our influences in to the Latin beat, and that is one of the unique things about Nosotros, because we are able to call ourselves a Latin band, but you can't put a label on us past that. We've been called Latin-rock, we've been called salsa, we've been called Latin-jazz, we've been called flamenco, but ultimately it is hard to put a label on it."

This makes the band a little more versatile than most because they end up with fans and gigs outside of the Latin music realm, like the Teluride Jazz Festival. According to Jasso, "We can squeeze into other genres, because although it is a jazz festival, somehow we end up fitting in with it."

However, it wasn't always like this, and as many Nosotros fans can tell you, following the band is more like watching an evolution of sound while the members explore different genres and bring them back into the Latin world.

Nosotros has been one of my favorite bands since they started in 1994, yet they are the only Latin band that has music that I feel speaks to

me. To understand that, let me go through the band's history from the viewpoint of a fan.

Back in the mid-90s I was in El Paso at a heavy metal concert featuring the aggressive music of Embalmed. It was at that show where someone told me that if I liked this sort of sound, that I should check out Nosotros. I was doubtful, but later on, I saw their self-produced cassette sitting next to the Embalmed EP at Hubbard's music and decided to give it a listen.

While normally I didn't get into that sort of music because, by then, I was under the impression that Latin music consisted of accordians and tubas played by a house band at a wedding. The music of Nosotros was vastly different.

At the time, Nosotros was a guitar trio playing flamenco music. However, this wasn't what I, or any of my peers were used to, because while it was Latin music at its core, it had the sensibility and vocabulary of much of the heavy music that was well represented in the underground scene.

Heavy metal gallops, time changes, shredding guitar licks and phrasing that I was used to hearing in thrash metal, but adapted and interpreted in a Latin style. The music reached out as if to say, "I understand what it is about metal music that connects with your emotions, and I'm going to give you more of it."

I wasn't alone. Nosotros

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Nosotros

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quickly became a must-see act in Las Cruces, and ended up putting out two albums, "Palomo" and "Pico." If you like heavy metal, I can't recommend "Palomo" enough. It is, at its core, a great showcase of heavy metal chops in a Latin music format.

Over the course of the early years of the band, they played lots of live shows and started evolving as a band. 1999 was a big turning point for the band. It was then that Nosotros guitarist Jeff Watkins passed away.

"Around that time, or just before Jeff passed away, they added Felipe Ruibal. And I think that was the biggest change, because Nosotros started off as an instrumental guitar trio, and what Felipe brought to the group was vocals. And that was the beginning of the

new chapter of Nosotros," said Jasso.

"A little bit after the band lost Jeff, is when it started to go through changes. The first change was the addition of Shane Derk who is still with the band now. He took the place of Jeff, if that is even possible..."

"...David Diaz started sitting with the band and jumping into more gigs with his saxophone. He had a jazz trio called Quantum Jazz, and the bass player and myself were part of Quantum Jazz. As David started playing more and more with Nosotros, he became more and more part of the band, and started putting in his own influence. One of the things he talked the guys into was bringing myself and Justin, the bass player at the time, into Nosotros. That kind of brought Nosotros into a more full band with drums, bass, horns, guitars and vocals."

From the fans' point of

view it was almost as if every new interaction of Nosotros had a new level of complexity and emotional connection with the listeners, and they would take these musical and emotional cues from the musical backgrounds of the new members of the band. So, while Diaz was playing Latin music with Nosotros, his emotional connection with his audience came from the world of jazz. Along with this came new phrasing, ideas and ultimately fresh and new music.

Every time they added another layer of musical style, they got more fans. By 2001 they were selling out their shows and decided to relocate from Las Cruces to Albuquerque. They put out a self-titled album in 2004, and "Llena La Alma" in 2008. As if to continue the tradition, each of these albums has been musical growth for not only the band, but to those who have followed the band over the years.

In April of 2009, Diaz

passed away. The music continues with what Jasso calls, "The Generations of Nosotros" on the new album "Ver El Sol."

"The opening track is unique in that David Diaz, who passed away a few years ago, wrote the opening track. We had done a very rough recording of it three or four years ago, and we were able to salvage his vocal track and his saxophone track. We dropped it in with the three generations of singers. Nosotros has had three singers, and all three singers are on this opening track along with Dave's saxophone playing, and so it is somewhat of a tribute to the history of Nosotros. It is really great, and it is nice to hear Dave's voice. And hear him with the new line-up. A couple of the guys that are in the band now have never played with Dave and didn't really know him. So, it was great to hear what he would sound like with the present band," said Jasso.

For new fans, the newest

album is a complex collection of musical styles that make you want to dance and connects with your emotions. For fans that have followed them through the years, you can still hear the speed metal flourishes on the Cuban tres that give Nosotros the sound that feels like home. Jasso and the rest of the band are grateful to their fans and said, "It is amazing how many people have followed Nosotros for that long, and it is really great. It is that kind of support that has kept the band going for as long as it has."

Nosotros will be playing the Xcellent Music Series at the Anderson Museum on July 27 at 7 p.m. This is a free concert with Pecos Flavors Winery serving. They will also be playing the Teluride Jazz Festival on the first weekend of August. For more information on Nosotros, to hear their music, or to find out their complete show schedule, visit nosotrosmusic.net.



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