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## Monte Negro strives to break mold of bilingual alt-rock

August 28, 8:50 AM • Latin Music Examiner • Ian Malinow

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Mick Jagger said it in his song —old habits die hard.

One unaltered practice in the history of the recording music industry is the way bands and their music is categorized under one genre to make it easier for the record labels' marketing departments, and to some extent, to media outlets.

But many argue that today more than ever — in a music world steeped in multiculturalism, eclecticism and globalization — the idea of pinpointing a band's sound under a particular genre is as ludicrous as categorizing all contemporary Latin American rock groups under Latin rock — especially if the band alternates between Spanish and English lyrics on a single track.

"We're not Anglo or Latin rock . . . we do bilingual, alt-rock punctuated by world eclecticism," the 27-year-old Kinski Gallo, Monte Negro's frontman and vocalist, told the Latin Music Examiner on Wednesday during a one-on-one interview at a San Juan hotel.

"Music is universal and we must defy cultural barriers because ultimately, it's music. When I write lyrics I sometimes think in English and sometimes in Spanish, and that's a natural songwriting process for me," he mused.

The Mexico-born, Los Angeles-bred singer-songwriter is currently on the island along with bassist Rodax Rodríguez (26), drummer Xavier López (25) and guitarist Jason Li Ching (24) as part of a concert tour across the island.

This is not the first time the group visits Puerto Rico. In July of 2007, the band opened the Gwen Stefani show at the Puerto Rico Coliseum. At the time, the former Sony Music artists were promoting their debut album "Cicatriz," but they did not quite make a splash on the local music scene because reggaetón's popularity was at its peak and they mostly rocked in music festivals where reggaetón reigned supreme.

"Back then, we really weren't able to break through the reggaetón barrier and reach a local alt-rock audience, but we're now hopeful that we will soon," recalled the tattoo-sporting, bracelet-wearing Gallo, whose dark humor, carefree personality and existentialist ideals may remind some of a young Jim Morrison.

"We have matured a lot since our first album. We have traveled and discovered many new things, gone through some good and bad experiences and had our ups and downs. So our next album will be a reflection of all the things that have happened to us over the past two years," he added.

Essentially, Monte Negro's fusion sound is a smorgasbord of alt-rock, electronica, reggae, cumbia, R&B and old-school salsa. But if you delete the Latin rhythms off the brew (as it happens in some songs on its sampler "Fugitives of Pleasure/Pasajeros"), then the band's sound is a hybrid between UK post-punk/goth rock and New Wave. Think of The Cure without Robert Smith's voice, loaded with scynthing guitar riffs and blistering drum beats.

Lyrically, Monte Negro blasts fundamentalism, especially if it rips some of the joys of life like sex and alcohol, and all forms of extremist notions. But its poetic sensibilities also take the band on a journey of self-discovery and they also toy around with some philosophical questions about life and existentialism.

Following its Puerto Rico tour, Monte Negro — which plans to put out its new album sometime in the fall — will head to Mexico, where it will join Enanitos Verdes as its opening act on a multi-city concert tour.



Monte Negro

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