

Dead Rock West  
'More Love'  
(Bio)

“These are difficult days and we need more and more love,” says Frank Lee Drennen, songwriter, guitarist, and singer with Cindy Wasserman in the band Dead Rock West.

*More Love*, the pair's fourth album and first for Omnivore Recordings, was made under the California sun with producer John Doe and a studio full of special guests, yet Frank and Cindy's wraparound vocals remain the focal point over the course of its 12 heartstrong songs.

“Frank played me the song 'More Love,' and I was so blown away, I thought, that's it!” says Cindy. “It became the inspiration for the harmonies and the song ideas for the entire record.”

The album was recorded, mixed, and mastered in LA by Grammy-winner Dave Way, with David J. Carpenter on bass, D.J. Bonebrake on drums, multi-instrumentalist Geoff Pearlman, keyboardist Phil Parlapiano, special guests Elliot Easton and Greg Leisz on guitars, and Mike Bolger on horns.

“This was a group effort; band, singers, engineer, producer all equal, all working toward a common, honest goal,” says Doe. “All of us in a room making real music, from the heart, from intuition, from aching and wanting, from beauty and the desert.”

From the opening love-affirming title song and throughout its passionate performances (including a surprising country-soul finale, Sam Cooke's “Bring It On Home To Me”), love is the tie that binds, though Frank counters, “For me, it's totally a non-concept album.” But whether it's their honeyed voices rubbing against the hard won guitar strums as on “Boundless Fearless Love,” or the whispers between lines of “Radio Silence,” the duo have an undeniably entwined singing style. Locked in, like all great vocal duos, their sound was characterized by the *Los Angeles Times* as “bent notes in tandem, musically summoning a flawless union.” (July 17, 2015)

“They are a modern day Gram and Emmylou singing songs that Otis and Carla would sing,” says Doe. “Somehow Cindy and Frank connect the dots

between '70s country and '60s soul music."

The jingle jangle of the Byrds and the lyrical economy of Buddy Holly, Merle Haggard and Lou Reed inform Frank's writing style while Cindy loves American classics, from anonymous down home singers to the more sophisticated song styles of Smokey Robinson and vocal teams like Marvin Gaye and Tammi Terrell. When paired with Doe and their family of collaborators, the result is positively transcendent and soul-stirring rock magic— the golden harmonies, the unbroken melodies that sound like love in action and that could only have been made in California.

Frank and Cindy's shared love of country, rock, and soul singing and songwriting has only grown deeper through their ongoing collaborations with three California songmen: Doe (of X, the Knitters, and the John Doe Band) Dave Alvin (of the Blasters and the Guilty Men and Women) and Peter Case (formerly of the Nerves and the Plimsouls and producer/arranger of Dead Rock West's second album, *Bright Morning Stars*).

"We call them the Holy Trinity," says Cindy who sings on the road and in the studio with Doe, while Frank claims an early encounter with Case guided him toward finding his own spiritual style of secular songwriting.

"Peter's songs embraced regular people in common circumstances, yet they were personal, heartfelt, and deeply spiritual," says Frank.

"Each one of them hits a spot where it's so exciting," says Cindy. "They're all so different but the thread that connects them is they are amazing writers, such wordsmiths, and that they came from punk rock and turned that energy into incredible artistry." Call them mentors or big brothers, "That they've taken us as their own is like a dream," says Cindy.

The dream started for Frank and Cindy on the Southern California club scene. Debuting in 2007 with the independent *Honey and Salt*, they followed with the aforementioned California spirituals collection, *Bright Morning Stars*, then received critical raves for 2015's *It's Everly Time!*, an homage to pioneering rock vocalists and songwriters, the Everly Brothers.

With *More Love*, Dead Rock West returns to original music with an indie/Americana bent. Pulling the songs together with a method he borrowed from songwriting legend, Guy Clark, Frank says, "I don't care how many years it takes me, I just wait until I have ten songs I want to put on a record." As they developed the repertoire, "Cindy and I deconstructed the songs," he explains. Switching roles as written in the verses and choruses, "There's something about

that dynamic that allows for a deeper contrast than when you hear the traditional male/female parts sung," says Frank.

The added dimensions of road and recording experience contributed to the making of *More Love* as did an appreciation of the brevity and preciousness of life itself. Between records, both band members lost close family members – Frank's mother Nelda Gunn-Drennen and Cindy's brother, Rob Wasserman, the noted bassist. Music became a lifeline during the grieving spell.

"I just wouldn't be doing this if it weren't for Rob, honestly I wouldn't," says Cindy whose brother introduced her to his collaborators like Lou Reed, Brian Wilson, and Stéphane Grappelli (who played with guitarist, Django Reinhardt). All these encounters made their imprints on Dead Rock West's own commitment to excellence, and to love, at all costs.

"*More Love* is heart and soul from two deeply original singers and songwriters," says Doe, a true believer who's been witness to Dead Rock West's process as it continues to unfold.

"As Willie Dixon said to me when I was blessed to meet him some years ago," says Cindy. "Happy or sad songs, they are all about love--more love."

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