

BAND OF ROSES Takes the Stage

CUE THE DRUMROLL FOR CHARLES SMITH'S LATEST CREATION

by Ruth Tobias



After managing indie bands on tour for years, Charles Smith achieved rock stardom in his own right back in 2001 with the release of his Walla Walla Valley Syrah. The self-taught winemaker has been producing chart-toppers ever since, including the cult-hit-for-cool-kids Kung Fu Girl Riesling. His deceptively simple style—clean and pure, lively yet poised—has proven as irresistible as it is unmistakable.

The purchase of the Charles Smith Wines Collection by Constellation Brands in 2016 did nothing to alter that aesthetic. “What I find so great about working with [Constellation] is that we don’t have to change the company that we are,” Smith says. “They get what I’m doing, and they allow me to keep making my wines the way I like while introducing them to new consumers by giving them the distribution they deserve.”

Case in point: Band of Roses Rosé. For Smith, the first new product to launch since the acquisition presents the “perfect complement” to the portfolio’s widely-recognizable reds and whites from Washington State. Just as The Velvet Devil Merlot, Boom Boom! Syrah, Chateau Smith Cabernet Sauvignon, Eve Chardonnay, and the aforementioned Kung Fu Girl Riesling have become household names for their “truth to typicity and their place



Former tour manager Charles Smith has been making wine under his namesake label for 17 years.

of origin,” Smith explains, Band of Roses has an equally vital story to tell about Washington Pinot Gris—and it’s a tale he believes consumers will be more than ready to hear this patio season.

This isn’t Smith’s first foray down the rosé path. As prolific as he is, however, he’d never worked with Pinot Gris, a variety he says “is plentiful in Washington State but underutilized.” Intrigued by the aromatics of the red-skinned white wine grape, Smith decided utilizing it would “give me a chance to put my own spin on this hot category”—one that could in turn give pink drinkers “a whole new way of enjoying rosé.”

Made with fruit sourced from four different vineyards in the Columbia and Yakima valleys, the 2017 Band of Roses should make for an auspicious debut: The vintage in Washington was a good one, marked by a late-season cooldown that encouraged even ripening while minimizing excess sugar development. Shipping began just after the time of this writing, but preliminary tasting notes for the wine—which saw 24–48 hours of skin contact before fermentation in stainless steel—indicate “a fresh, penetrating perfume, giving way to lilac, guava, tangerine, and passionfruit. . . delivered on a silky palate.” Smith himself describes it simply as “a cool wine.”

“It’s vibrant, it’s fresh, and it’s not only delicious and modern, but also affordable and accessible,” he adds.

That trademark appreciation of what’s “cool” is, as always, telegraphed by the comic book–bold black-and-white artwork on Smith’s labels. “Our goal is to communicate the language of wine to everyone, and we’ve found a lot of success doing this through our label designs,” he explains. “I use straightforward words and symbols that everyone can understand to help tell the unique story behind each wine and to describe what’s in the bottle.”

In this case, the sense that his Pinot Gris “truly marches to the beat of its own drum” led him back to his passion for music: “We all find our own rhythm in life,” he muses. “Some people prefer hip-hop, others prefer jazz, but the underlying love of music unites them—and the same is true for wine. Although people may have different preferences and discover wine through different experiences, their love of wine bands them together.”

To illustrate that sentiment, Smith and his longtime collaborator Rikke Korff—whom he met while managing concert tours in Europe—conceived the drum kit image that graces the bottle. The ultimate symbol of unity, though, could prove to be the SRP: At \$13, everybody can get into the swing of this Band. ■■



The new Band of Roses rosé joins the ranks of other Charles Smith Wines like Boom Boom! Syrah, Kung Fu Girl Riesling, Chateau Smith Cabernet Sauvignon, Eve Chardonnay, and The Velvet Devil Merlot.