

DEATH CAB FOR CUTIE

POP CULTURE'S PLAYMATES

The Seattle foursome are more than just a rock band, they play one on TV too

by Bryan Borzykowski

During my journalism career, I've never told an interviewee what I would write about them. When I spoke to Death Cab For Cutie, though, I couldn't resist.

"I'm going to start my article talking about *The O.C.*," I said, half expecting Ben Gibbard to ream me out for not focusing on their new album, *Plans*. Surprisingly, Death Cab's singer and songwriter didn't seem to mind.

"*The O.C.* is an easy thing to go to when it comes to our band," he says warmly. "That's become part of our story whether or not we like it. It's a way to start a conversation about our band."

He's right. It's the perfect place to start an article about Death Cab For Cutie. Sure, they recently released their first major label album, but who wants to read about that when they can read about Seth Cohen's favourite Seattle band.

"You know, we had nothing to do with that," says Gibbard. "Obviously, it worked out to everyone's benefit, so I'm not complaining. But, as to how this started? Your guess is as good as mine."

Gibbard's not completely flabbergasted by the attention he's getting from the hit teen drama. He's come up with a theory why Death Cab and bands like The Arcade Fire are getting their due.

"I'm 29 and I feel there are people who grew up in the same generation as I did, who went to college at the same time, and were involved in music. Now, people from our generation are starting to come to power in certain avenues of entertainment," he says. "Who hasn't always said, 'Man if I directed a movie I would totally put Slint into it?' Well, there are people who can actually do that right now."

Chris Walla, Death Cab's guitarist and *Plans*' producer, has another hypothesis. "The playing field has been totally leveled by the internet," he says. "People used to talk about the golden age of TV. Well, I really feel this is the golden age of the internet. It's lawless. The anarchy is really powerful and really empowering."

While the internet and *The O.C.* have definitely contributed to Death Cab's success, it would be doing disservice to Gibbard's place in pop culture if there was no mention of *Garden State*.

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Gibbard's song (via The Postal Service) "Such Great Heights" was covered by Iron & Wine on the movie's ubiquitous soundtrack and helped The Postal Service sell over 500,000 copies of their last record.

With his hands securely in pop culture's pocket, Gibbard's having trouble figuring out which show or album has pushed them into technicolour cool.

"It's really impossible to qualify where everything comes from," he says. "We've been a band for a long time and every record has been better than the one before it. *The O.C.* came along, but so did *Garden State*. It's dangerous when people start talking about these things as if they are the sole reason that certain bands, like ourselves, have gotten to where we are."

He's right again. Death Cab aren't popular because of television, but they're also selling hundreds of thousands of records because they create music that's accessible to both indie rockers and mainstream listeners. Their haunting melodies, gloomy lyrics about death and aging, and Gibbard's soothing voice are part of the reason why Atlantic snagged them from longtime home Barsuk Records. Luckily, Walla and Gibbard are happy at their new residence.

"The experience has been pretty great, spectacular actually," says Walla. "The big difference is that Barsuk weren't able to drum up support. It was getting harder and harder to get people to the music."

"The reason we signed to Atlantic is that they would just leave us alone and let us make the record we want to make," adds Gibbard. "We had no interference at any point making this record."

Music and Seth Cohen aside, Death Cab's enduring quality is their independence. While some might argue Death Cab have sold out, Gibbard says it was their choice to sign to a major, and make no apologies about using *The O.C.* and *Garden State* to market themselves.

"MTV and most big radio stations don't play rock music anymore. It's either really aggressive, awful music or hip-hop and R&B. We have to take different avenues to promote ourselves if we're not given the opportunity to do it through the traditional channels." **C**

Orange Canada

Death Cab For Cutie might be the most name-dropped band on *The O.C.* but they aren't the only hipster-friendly rockers to benefit from an appearance on the Fox show. Here are a few Canadian artists who can thank Seth Cohen for their new harem of screaming teens.



AC NEWMAN

Rufus Wainwright "California" — episode 2, season 1

AC Newman "On The Table" — episode 3, season 2

Feist "Let It Die" — episode 5, season 2

Ron Sexsmith "Maybe This Christmas" — episode 6, season 2

Sam Roberts "No Sleep" — episode 13, season 2



PHOTO BY AUTUMN DEWILDE

[L-R] Chris Walla, Ben Gibbard, Nick Harmer, Jason McGerr