



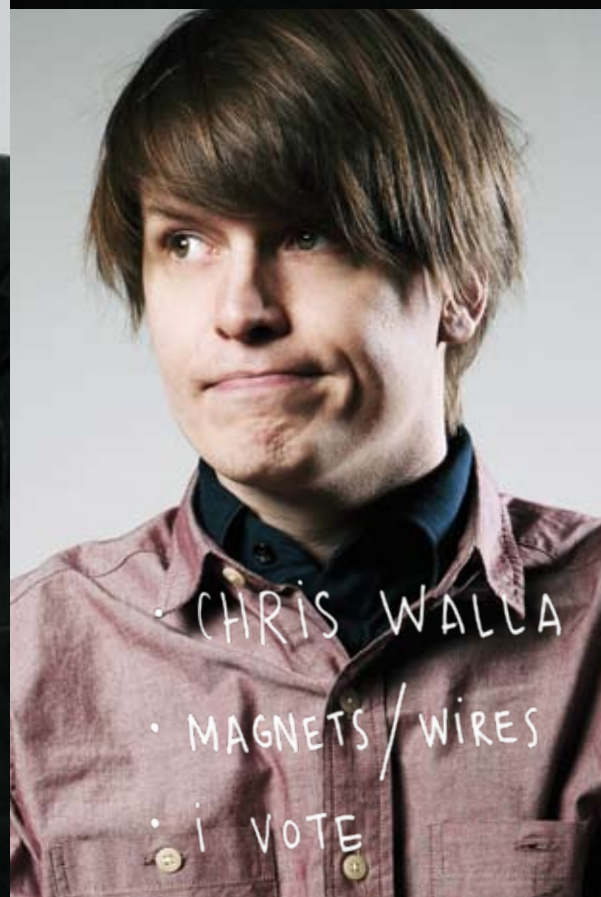
Ben Gibbard
singer/guitarist
I wonder...



JASON MCGERR
- "THE DRUMMER"
A BOAN WORK-A-HOLIC
FUELED BY COFFEE WHO
THINKS LIKE MACGYVER



Nick Harmer
BASS PLAYER
"I WORRY."



CHRIS WALLA
MAGNETS/WIRES
I VOTE

DEATH CAB FOR CUTIE

BROOD-ROCKERS LET LOOSE ON
THEIR LATEST CREATION
BY BRYAN BORZYKOWSKI
PHOTOGRAPHS BY JASON ODELL



It's been three years since Death Cab For Cutie made the jump from their indie label, Barsuk, to major label juggernaut Atlantic Records. So far the experience has been pretty good, says Ben Gibbard, the Seattle-based band's lead singer, but it hasn't been perfect.

"It was astounding to me that I had to find out that we went platinum from my dad," he says, half-joking. "In this day and age, you'd think I'd get a singing telegram from Atlantic."

Gibbard's dad learned the news from an online *Billboard* story and sent the link to his son. There was no call from the label, no massive blowout bash, just a simple email from pops announcing that this one-time indie band was a million-record-selling act. "It's surreal," says Gibbard, on the phone from LA. "When we started this band a little over 10 years ago, we thought it was so incredibly smaller and more humble than what we've been able to achieve. I never thought this would be remotely possible."

With their hit record *Plans* now behind them, Death Cab is about to embark on the next part of the major label odyssey. Their sixth disc, *Narrow Stairs*, hits record stores in mid-May, and already the buzz is palpable. The focus of all the online chatter has so far rested on one song, the album's first single, "I Will Possess Your Heart," and its eight-and-a-half-minute length.

"I think that's certainly our longest tune to date," Gibbard says, understating just how different the song is from their usual four-minute fare. Despite its duration, the track isn't a Phish-like jam or a Pink Floyd-inspired psychedelic journey full of solos – it's, well, exactly what you'd expect from the introspective Death Cab: brooding bass lines and melancholy riffs with chiming piano lines and Gibbard's clean, but sombre voice. The main difference is simply the four-minute instrumental groove that builds up the song before the vocals kick in.

"We didn't set out with the intention of 'let's make a really long song that'll blow people's minds,'" explains Gibbard, adding that the group actually had to cut 40 seconds from the track. "I hope it translates to people. I hope by the time the vocals start, people are really moving with the song, and not thinking: 'Let's get on with it guys.'"

If the song does its job and the masses shell out for *Narrow Stairs*, listeners will be treated to a slightly rougher Death Cab. While every song has classic DCFC elements, the band has thrown in some distorted blasts and more guitar work, creating a rockier feel than usual. Gibbard chalks up the musical

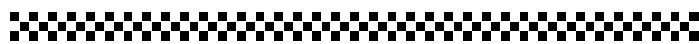
change to the songwriting process, which he describes as more "performance based" rather than a "construction project" like *Plans*. What he means is that the group's last record was done piece by piece – bass, then guitar, then vocals. But this time around the band, consisting of Gibbard, guitarist Chris Walla, bassist Nick Harmer and drummer Jason McGerr, jammed and worked through the songs together, recording as a four-piece to create *Stairs'* cohesive, unified feel.

Another reason for the album's looseness is that the band has finally gotten comfortable being on a major label. After singing to Atlantic for *Plans*, they downplayed the move, promising that nothing had changed and that they had complete creative control. Many critics and fans were concerned that Death Cab's music would be forever altered, and while that wasn't the case, Gibbard admits the band was more affected by the switch than they let on.

"With *Plans*, the transition from indie to major was a lot more present in our decision-making than we gave it credit for," he says. "We [took the attitude] that signing didn't matter, and that it was just like any record we'd ever made. But no, it wasn't like any other record we've ever made."

Because of that pressure, however subconscious, the new disc's looser feel is what Gibbard says is "a direct reaction to the fact that transitioning from Barsuk to Atlantic is most likely the hardest thing we'll ever have to do."

But now that the move is in the past, the band is focused on what they do best – selling copious amounts of records. They also want to extinguish any lingering concerns that they've sold out. "I hope people hear the record," Gibbard says, "and whether they like it or not, any rumours that our band is now concerned with remaining commercial will be put to rest." ●



OUTSIDE THE 'CAB

DEATH CAB FOR CUTIE IS A TIGHT UNIT, BUT THE GUYS AREN'T ATTACHED AT THE HIPS. IN FACT, THEY'RE ALL SOLID MUSICIANS AND PRODUCERS ON THEIR OWN. HERE'S WHAT EACH OF THEM DO WHEN THEY'RE NOT TEARING UP THE CHARTS TOGETHER.

CHRIS WALLA

Death Cab's guitarist by day also has a budding solo career. He recently released his debut disc, *Field Manual*, sans his popular bandmates.

BEN GIBBARD

Ever heard of Postal Service? Sure you have. The band sold more than half a million copies of their debut *Give Up*. Gibbard says to expect a follow-up, just not anytime soon.

JASON MCGERR

When he's not pounding Death Cab's drums, he's running his own state-of-the-art studio. He's twisted the knobs for Smoosh and Pearl Jam's Matt Cameron.

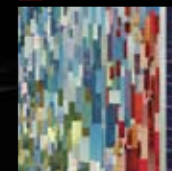
NICK HARMER

Besides hammering out the low bass notes for DCFC, Harmer has played with other Seattle-area acts including the now defunct, but still awesome, Juno.



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