

## STREET SCENE

## Deathcab for Cutie takes snapshots of sound



STEPHANIE A. CASOLA

Ben Gibbard wants to take you backpacking. And when the lead singer for Seattle's Deathcab for Cutie extends an invitation — particularly one with stops at a Concoy Island

**Deathcab for Cutie's Ben Gibbard feels *The Photo Album* is the band's best work yet. Showing strength in melody and that dreamy lyrical quality, it's an easy one to appreciate.**

carousel, a Los Angeles airport and a European

adventure — you just can't refuse. Pack a camera and grab a copy of the band's latest CD.

The unforgettably-named West Coast quartet just released their third full-length effort, *The Photo Album*, on Barsuk Records — striking a balance between the sheer pop of its debut *Something About Airplanes* (1998) and the more solemn-sounding *We Have The Facts and We're Voting Yes* (2000). The 10 songs on *The Photo Album* offer pop-infused, poetic snapshots from Gibbard's wandering mind and all sound influenced by his recent travels.

He begins these tales from the comfort of his front porch, surprised by the girl he thought had gotten away. From there, hope, heartbreak and even reflections on death follow. Wherever Gibbard goes, it feels you're right there beside him. Band members Chris Walla, Nick Harmer and Michael Schorr make the ride that much more memorable.

I spoke to Gibbard recently, while he was working at a friend's store in Seattle. From Rudy's Vintage, where he claimed to be "rocking out to the new American Analog Set," Gib-

bard reflects on the short history of how this all began.

"We were going to school up in Bellingham, an hour and a half north of Seattle," he begins. "I was in a band at the time, of no real importance. Chris just moved to town. I ended up recording eight songs."

So he brought in a few friends to work on his material and soon enough, Deathcab for Cutie came into being. Timing seemed perfect. "I graduated in 1998 and the record came out in August," said Gibbard. There was no confusion about what to do after college.

Garnering attention and surviving a line-up change, the band moved onward, showing strength in their songs.

"Every song comes from a different place," said Gibbard. Many are based on places he's been and people he's known. Some sound more like daydream than reality. He wrote the opening track into one night. "I thought it would be a good way to end the record, or a good way to begin the record." With the first quick breath and notes that draw you in, it's decided, he was right.

On *Information Travels Faster*, Gibbard returns to his European travels and an American girl he met on the way. "She was this really weird character," he said. "She went to graduate

school for poetry. I asked her 'What do you feel you accomplished?' She said, 'I learned to look at my own writing objectively.'" He turns his disbelief, and this personal story, into engaging, music that trickles right along.

The band is working on a video, or more likely a short film, featuring the song and another, *I am a Kaleidoscope*.

On a darker note, Gibbard wrote the sad tale *Styrofoam Plates* based on the story of a close friend who grew up in the shadow of an absent, alcoholic father. "His dad passed away and it was a really weird affair," said Gibbard. The song deals with closure and resentment, whether or not to forgive a man for all the pain he caused, simply because he died.

Gibbard feels *The Photo Album* is the band's best work yet. Showing strength in melody and that dreamy lyrical quality, it's an easy one to appreciate.

And when he's not playing music, Gibbard can be found golfing or riding his bike around Seattle. He's looking forward to returning to Michigan on his tour. He plans to stay with family who live in the Ann Arbor area. "I love Ann Arbor. We stay with cousins and their wives." He was packing already, a week before the band was scheduled to leave. Talk about being pre-



Deathcab for Cutie

pared.

When Deathcab return next week, look for a tour-only EP containing three songs which almost appeared on *The Photo Album*: a Bjork cover and two new songs — *Stability* and *20th*

Century Travelers.

Don't miss this *Photo op*. Deathcab for Cutie performs with friends The Prom, Red Shirt Brigade, Saturday, Oct. 20, Magic Stick, Detroit. Call (313) 833-9700.

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