

***Thank You for Today***

*Thank You for Today* is the sound of Death Cab for Cutie both expanding and refining; a band twenty years into its evolution, still uncovering new curves in its signatures, new sonic corners to explore. The Seattle band’s ninth studio album, recorded in Los Angeles with producer Rich Costey in late 2017 and early 2018, stands alongside classic Death Cab for Cutie albums including their 1998 debut *Something About Airplanes* and 2003’s masterful *Transatlanticism* as a definitive collection -- ten tracks that are by turns beautiful and dynamic and darkly anthemic and bittersweet. “I realized early on in the process that I wanted to write a record that is very much who we are,” says singer and guitarist Ben Gibbard. “I wanted to go more inward, and create something more personal.” On songs such as the kinetic “Gold Rush,” “Northern Lights” and “You Moved Away,” Gibbard ruminates on the flux going on in his hometown, and weaves a thread throughout the album about how interconnected geography is with memory, and how hard it can be to hold onto places, and to people, too.

Since the band’s fifth studio album *Plans*, Gibbard has employed the practice of going to the studio almost daily, to work on songs, even when they weren’t coming easily. “At first, I’m just throwing stuff at the wall, meditating on a number of different subjects, just trying to get lucky,” he says. Before he knew it, Gibbard had amassed more than thirty song ideas, sketched out in demos he’d share with bassist Nick Harmer, drummer Jason McGerr, guitarist/keyboardist Dave Depper, and keyboardist/guitarist Zac Rae as well as Costey. “At one point I had written so much I thought we might have two records,” says Gibbard. “But we wanted it to be concise enough that you can listen all the way through and then want to put it on again immediately.”

“The thing about Ben and his writing that to me is most inspiring is that every day, he shows up and does the work,” says Harmer. “He’ll have discouraging days and uplifting days, but his sense of discipline and commitment to his craft is just unbelievable.” Early on, a few demos started raising their hands as favorites, says Harmer. The hypnagogic album opener, “I Dreamt We Spoke Again,” with its indelible chorus, a haunting doorbell chime, and a guitar line reminiscent of *Music For The Masses*-era Depeche Mode, stood out right away as what Harmer calls “one of those immediately captivating tracks.”

“Gold Rush,” on the other hand, was nearly an abandoned demo that Costey encouraged Gibbard to reapproach. The song, built around a propulsive sample from Yoko Ono’s epic 1972 track “Mind Train,” ended up becoming one of the album’s most exciting tunes -- “a requiem for a skyline” and to a city whose rapid-fire development has led to a sky peppered with cranes and scaffolding. “I’ve had this realization only recently that so many of my memories are tied to my geography,” says Gibbard, describing the inspiration for the tune. “And when that geography changes, it’s as if you’re not only coming to terms with the passage of time, but it’s as if you’re losing those people and that time in your life all over again. Cities are in constant flux, and I’m not claiming victimhood in this, but the speed at which Seattle is changing, and people of color and creative communities are being pushed out, is alarming.”

Expanding on that idea in “You Moved Away,” Gibbard addresses his friend, the artist Derek Erdman, who recently left Seattle to move back to his native Chicago. “He’s an agent provacateur who does playful, absurdist art,” Gibbard explains. “He represented a kind of irreverent, sardonic side of Seattle that is rapidly disappearing as the city gets too expensive. I used to walk by Derek’s apartment on my way to the grocery store, and I’d look up and see in his window all these pieces of art he’d made. And I walk by his apartment now and I get so sad.”

Another song anchored by familiar geography is the late-album winner “Northern Lights,” which references Dye’s Inlet, in Gibbard’s hometown. “I wanted to write a song that was like a John Hughes movie that takes place in my hometown,” he says, “about two people in this suburban wasteland with nothing to do who spend their time on this body of water, one pining for the other, yet both knowing that this place will be a temporary stop in a much longer life.”

Although Gibbard’s initial creative process for this album was much the same as it had been on other recent Death Cab for Cutie LPs, there was an important change when it came time to start pre-production and recording: the addition of new members Dave Depper and Zac Rae, both of whom contribute guitar and keys. In the wake of founding member Chris Walla’s departure in 2014, Death Cab for Cutie had recruited Depper and Rae to join the band as touring players for the shows supporting their 2015 album *Kintsugi*. After more than a year and a half of performances together, Gibbard, Harmer and McGerr felt confident enough in Depper and Rae’s creative instincts to invite them to contribute on the new LP, as well. Says Harmer: “The excitement and enthusiasm Dave and Zac had to be part of the process was just infectious. It helped add a playfulness that allowed us to take some risks and laugh if it didn’t work out and high-five if it did. There was a freedom in just playing with one another and letting these guys show us what they were capable of, and giving them room to create.”

“Not only do we love these guys, but it felt like it would be to our benefit to make the next record with them rather than as a three piece,” says Gibbard. “Dave and Zac bring such unbelievable skill sets to the band that we’ve never had.” He cites, for instance, the array of keyboards and synthesizers Rae had at his disposal, and his accompanying skills playing them, for “tiny melodies and ambient sounds” on “Summer Years” that he says give the song a weight and complexity that it wouldn’t have had otherwise. “There’s a nervousness about bringing new people into the creative process, especially if you have lost a seminal member of the band,” says Gibbard, “But Dave and Zac were fans of the band before they were members, so they have a unique perspective on the music that the other three of us can’t see.”

The five members of Death Cab spent several weeks with Costey in his Santa Monica recording studio last fall, recording basic tracks live and later fleshing out additional layers. When they first arrived, Costey had recently finished working with another band, and had adopted their habit of closing each session by saying “Thank you for today” to each of the musicians. “We started saying it to each other every day, no matter what kind of day it had been,” Harmer says. "Whether it had been frustrating or a really great day, we’d all shake each other’s hands and say ‘Thank you for today.’ As time went on, it really started to mean something to us. It’s almost like a Rorschach test, in that it’s an oddly adaptable statement. And when we were thinking about what to call the album, it just seemed to fit so perfectly.”