**DEATH CAB FOR CUTIE – ASPHALT MEADOWS**

When the writing of *Asphalt Meadows* began in the early part of the pandemic, Death Cab for Cutie wasn't sure how to make a record. Singer/songwriter Ben Gibbard, bassist Nick Harmer, drummer Jason McGerr, guitarist/keyboardist Dave Depper, and keyboardist/guitarist Zac Rae lived in four different cities. Being in the studio together wasn't an option. Though Gibbard started writing songs at the end of their last tour, he felt like he was hitting a wall after being trapped in his home studio for months. So he hatched a plan to shake things up.

"A work week is Monday through Friday and there are five members of the band," Gibbard explains. "So on Monday, someone put together a piece of music and shared it. And then the next person took it, with the order decided randomly. On your day, you had complete editorial control."

At the end of each week, they finished a rough song mix. Sometimes, songs were transformed entirely, with a key change or altogether different tempo. "After we started, we had a lot of success," Gibbard says.

While not all of the songs on *Asphalt Meadows came* from these sessions, over half of them did. Songs Gibbard presented as demos also went through the process, allowing everyone to figure their parts out before going into the studio with producer John Congleton (St. Vincent, Angel Olsen, Explosions in the Sky).

Harmer calls the experience of writing this way incredibly inspiring. "Having exactly one day to work on each track allowed me to not overthink things," he says. "I had to come up with something compelling and get it completed or the whole process would break down."

"I believe everybody started finding ideas and performances that might not have happened if we'd been in the same room writing," McGerr adds.

The first track released off the album, "Roman Candles," was inspired by a drum part from the '70s Krautrock act Faust and Gibbard's desire to write something for the record that was short, loud, and thrashy. "The lyrics were cobbled from a couple of different songs dealing with my general sense of existential dread and anxiety, the feeling that the fabric that weaves a functioning society together was crumbling during the pandemic," he says.

"Here to Forever" was built on the idea of looking at the past without idealized nostalgia and evolves into a soul-searching song about wanting spiritual clarity. "Foxglove Through the Clearcut" finds Gibbard delivering spoken word verses and an ever-growing drum bridge by McGerr that pushes the music forward into a chorus of beautiful harmonies.

Friendship is the inspiration for "Wheat Like Waves." Spending time with Torquil Campbell of Stars at Niagara-on-the-Lake in Canada while listening to Prefab Sprout prompted Gibbard to write about an adult male friendship that has spanned years.

Rae recalls working collaboratively with McGerr on "Fragments From the Decade." "We had gone into a studio and played drums and keys duets for a few hours," Rae says. After editing and sharing, what came back from Gibbard in the next 24 hours was very nearly the final song. "Not everything was that fast or easy, but a lot of what made it on the record certainly was."

"Rand McNally" is a poignant track about building a legacy. "This is my life's work," Gibbard says. "When members leave bands, they're often seminal members. That fans continue to support them is a testament to how important the music is to them. I wanted to write something to and for everyone who has been in this band, who helped make it what it is, to say I'm not going to let the light fade." Depper was the second person to pick the track up and immediately knew it was special. "I felt drawn to playing acoustic piano on this track, something I'd normally never do because Zac is 4000X the piano player that I am. But given the space and solitude that this process allowed, I confidently contributed a piano track and melodic line that I'm really proud of." Depper felt “don’t let the light fade” had a hymnal quality and decided to use it as a reprise. “I didn't want the song to end yet,” Depper says. “So I was inspired to create a coda to the song based on that line, with layers of harmonies joining in with each refrain.”

The final track, "I'll Never Give Up on You," stands out in its round-robin writing style for Rae. "The song came to me as a groovy, single chord idea, and I added some fairly strange, almost jazzy piano voicings over it. I don't know that we would have settled on that if we had been all together in the room."

So it was that after nearly 25 years as a band, this unconventional recording process managed to push the veteran rockers in entirely new and unexpected directions creatively. And ironically, the isolated circumstances in which it began led to the creation of Death Cab for Cutie’s most collaborative album to date.

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