

West Coast Performer

The Musician's Resource Magazine February 2001



Death

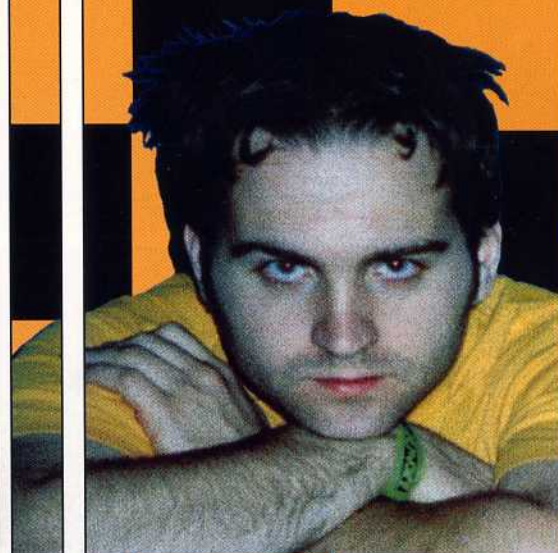


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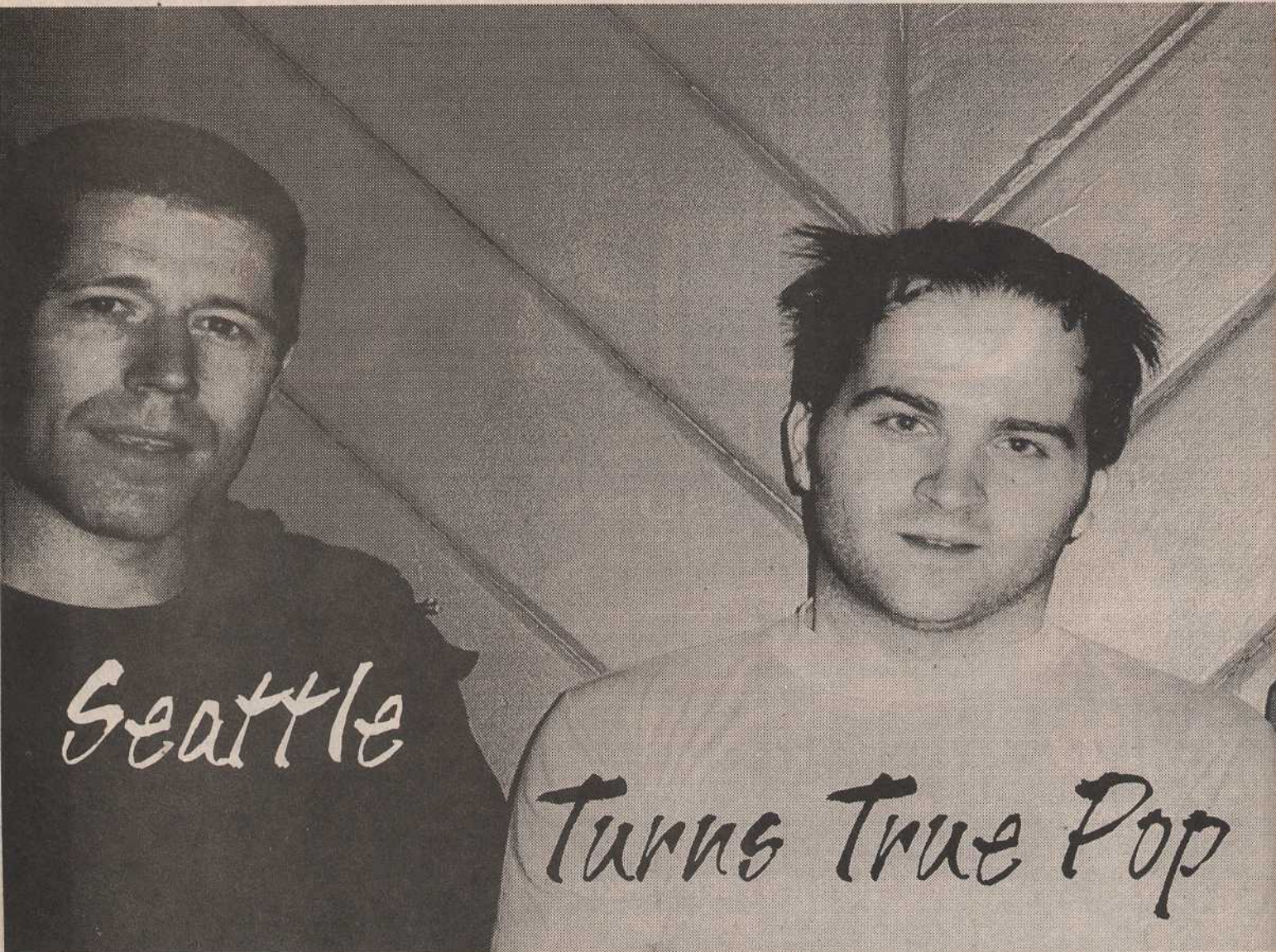
Cab



Cutie

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Death Cab



by Randy Howley
photos by Sarah Stenau

One of the most promising acts giving Seattle recent reason to boast is four-piece mood popsters, Death Cab For Cutie. In 1998 they debuted with an amazing modern pop album, *Something About Airplanes*, which immediately began drawing comparisons to the works of Northwest indie icons Elliot Smith and Built To Spill, among others.

After relocating south to Seattle, the buzz surrounding Death Cab was immediate. "The plan was always to move to the big city after college. It gave us more opportunities and exposure," says singer/guitarist Benjamin Gibbard, who began recording solo as All-Time Quarterback. Death Cab for Cutie began to take shape in 1997 with the help of some friends Gibbard met while attending Western Washington University in Bellingham. His roommate and best friend, Nicholas Harmer, played bass guitar, so half the rhythm section was set. Gibbard asked occasional music collaborator, guitarist/keyboardist Christopher Walla, along with his keen studio aptitude, to join and give the group some balance. Another friend, drummer Nathan Good, filled out the lineup that would release *Something About Airplanes* to much indie acclaim and ballyhoo.

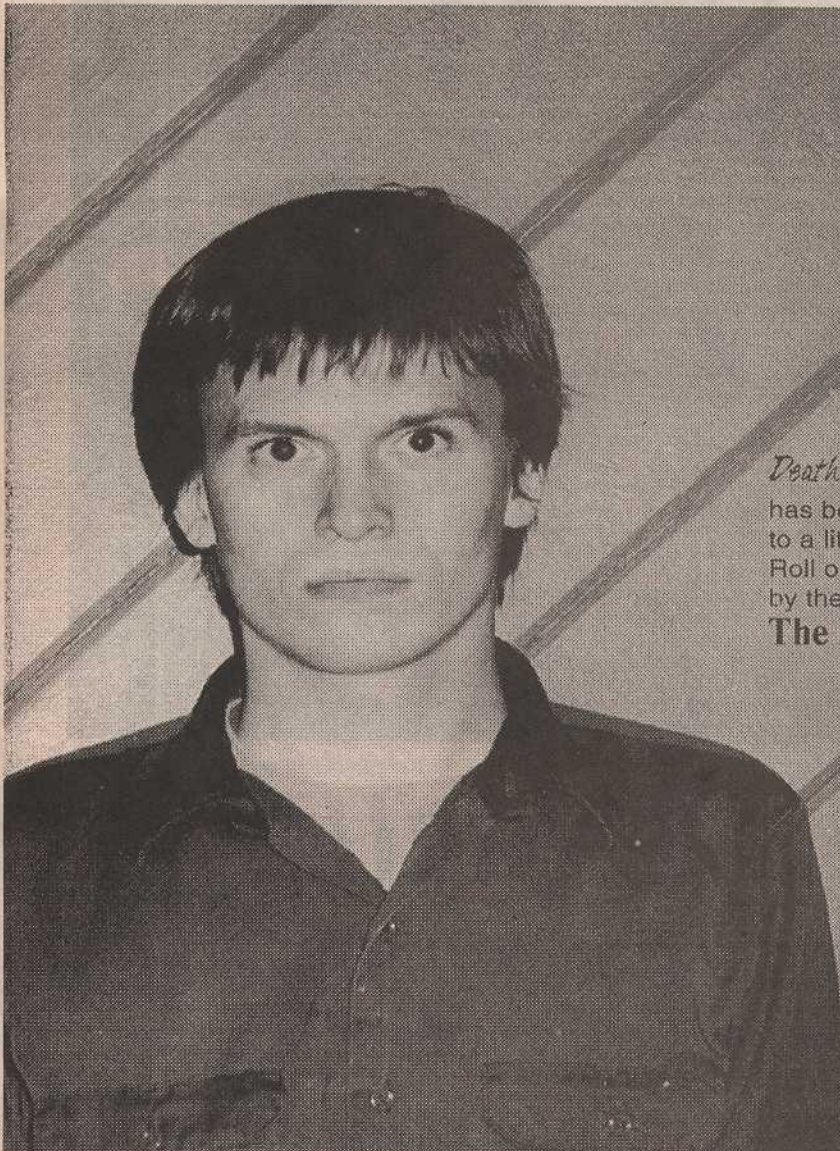
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Directly since their first release, Death Cab has become THE band to see locally, building a devoted following that continues to increase in size with each live performance. Long lines of eager "Cabbies" stretch sidewalks and parking lots hoping to get inside the generally sold-out venues.

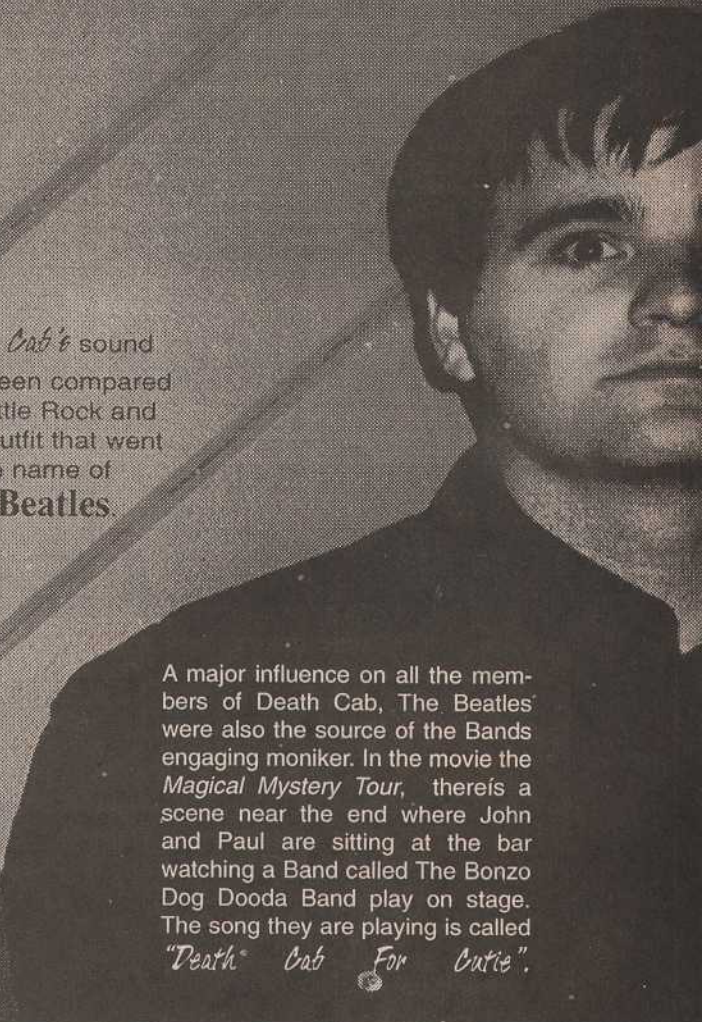
In spring of 1999, Good left the band for personal reasons. Without a suitable replacement readily available, and a follow up album to complete, Gibbard decided to play the drum tracks himself, clicking sticks on eight of ten tracks. But although he played most of the drum tracks, you'll never see him play drums live. "That whole deal was because our original drummer had decided to move to San Francisco, kind of a life choice. And we were caught without a drummer. We actually had a drummer playing with us for live shows, but we weren't totally happy with him as far as being our full time drummer. So I just decided to do the drum tracks myself... just out of a need to complete the album."

Shortly before the release of *We Have the Facts and We're Voting Yes* in early 2000, Good was replaced permanently by Michael Schorr. Schorr was suggested by yet another friend, Portland Or. Studio owner (Jackpot! Studios) and former Vomit Launch Bassist, Larry Crane. "Larry introduced Michael to us down in Portland. He knew we were looking for

For Cutie



Death Cab's sound has been compared to a little Rock and Roll outfit that went by the name of **The Beatles**.



A major influence on all the members of Death Cab, The Beatles were also the source of the Bands engaging moniker. In the movie *the Magical Mystery Tour*, there is a scene near the end where John and Paul are sitting at the bar watching a Band called The Bonzo Dog Dooda Band play on stage. The song they are playing is called "Death Cab For Cutie".

a drummer and Michael was available, so we tried him out and things just clicked. He's an extremely fast learner," Gibbard supplied, "when he came to play his first gig with us he had learned all of our stuff in like three or four days. He just moved up from Portland and is getting settled in."

Death Cab For Cutie is once again fully intact and enjoying plenty of positive feedback.

The band's most recent project was an EP released in the fall of 2000, *Forbidden Love*, which has been met with the same eagerness as the first two efforts.

On the live front, the band has logged some fairly decent frequent touring miles, becoming road-tested veterans. Having played on several national tours and scores of mini-tours, the band has honed an articulate set that is one of their greatest strengths. They only practice two or three times a month, getting most of the work done on the road. "We're on tour usually about three or four months out of the year, so it (touring) does help bring our sound a little tighter," Gibbard agrees.

The chief songwriter in the group, Gibbard explains that the songs are created with a guitar and a four-track, "there's no magic formula or anything," he says. The songs are simply born of creative noodling. His

personal favorite is a brand new song that's not recorded yet called "A Movie Script Ending."

"My favorite stuff is usually new material 'cause sometimes the older stuff can get a little tiring," he explains, but offers "Zeppilogue" as his favorite recorded song.

Along with local-and-spreading indie rock fame, there's live footage of the band running in the Northwest Passage at the EMP:

"That's one of the cool things about being in the museum, you don't have to pay to get in. I went with my girlfriend; we took her parents when they were in town. They saw us (the band) in there, so it gave me some kind of validity ... **I mean here I am in this shitty little indie band and I'm in the fucking EMP.** As far as the museum itself, I didn't like it. I mean I think it's a great place for people who really want to know about the history of music. ...As a musician it didn't really do anything for me."

The band was on a short hiatus until about late January, and is currently on a national tour that will stretch through February to March 2nd. "We also will be playing the SXSW music conference in the middle of March. And then it's back to the studio to record a new full length album in May," says Gibbard.★