

**DEATH CAB FOR CUTIE  
GREEK THEATRE  
JUNE 21, 2008**

**WHEN SOUL MEETS BODY**

Island-Life ended a concert drought of sorts to take in the sold-out show of Death Cab for Cutie at the Greek Theatre. Oakland's own Rogue Wave performed warm-up honors.

Rogue Wave has developed steadily since their 2004 "Out of the Shadows", an album of infectious sweet pop musings and pastoral acoustic folksiness. They followed up with the similar "Descended Like Vultures" in 2005. After these two first strong showings on Sub Pop, they returned with a very mature "Asleep at Heaven's Gate" on Jack Johnson's Brushfire Records.



Saturday night, the homies did very well, preserving enough edge to keep the crowd up on its feet. It may be that a number of personal tragedies among members of the band helped squelch the earlier trend to bubble-gum, and the performance displayed some of the grit that Oaktown is known for.

“Harmonium” was a tight, affecting tune that kicked off into a cool, sparkly instrumental jam opening up into full orchestration with lyrics. Picking up in perfect sequence, building in intensity with piano leading and then anchoring the melody, guitar and a gentle drum beat leads to lyrics that profess things like: “All your dreams thrown in the trash / You were born into war / You were taught not to ask / For every single possibility.”

Another highlight was the personal song "Christians in Black", inspired by a suicide. "Shuttled between LA and Oakland / Miles and miles between and above them / Born and raised to be an alcoholic / Were you too old or young to stop it / Christians in Black."

A really nice moment occurred when all four band members played percussion in a group around the main drummer.

The band closed with a rousing "Kick the Heart Out", in which Vocalist Zach Rogue got the rapidly swelling audience to shout along with the refrain. Not too shabby for guys who started out playing the Bottom of the Hill for a percentage of the five dollar cover.

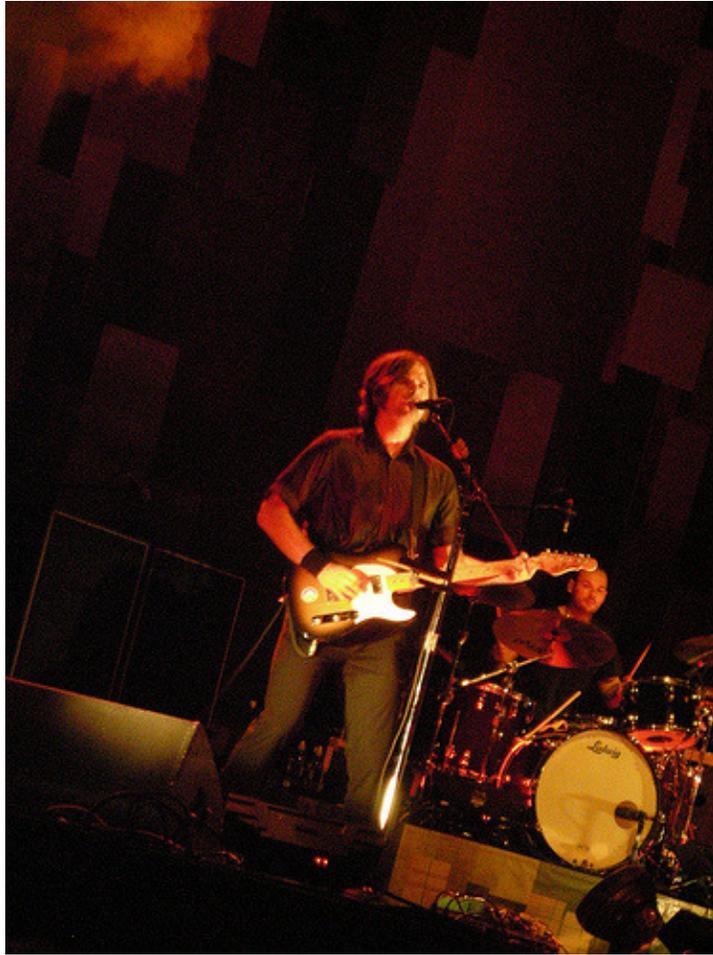
General consensus among the various folks queried in the crowd that the band rocked far better than the usual warm up gig.

By the time Death Cab appeared to the sound of a vigorous roar from the packed 10,000 seat auditorium, it was clear yet another success story had come to the venerable Greek, but with humility, and self-deprecating humor.



According to the Wikipedia, Death Cab for Cutie is an American Indie rock band formed in Bellingham, Washington in 1997. It began as a solo project of Ben Gibbard, now the band's vocalist and guitarist. Gibbard took the band name from the title of the song written by Neil Innes and Vivian Stanshall and performed by their group the Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band in the Beatles' 1967 film *Magical Mystery Tour*.

It may be a sad sign of the state of music in America today, or it may just be that the band member's earnest desire to keep it real beyond imagining enforces poverty, but the truth is that Saturday night a band of amateurs sold out the Greek Theatre with folks begging for tickets right up to show time.



That's right, all band members of Death Cab hold down day jobs to support themselves. Although the band has a contract with Atlantic Records, none of the members are professionals -- in the strictly defined sense of the word. Jason works in a record store. Guitarist (and multi-instrumentalist) Chris Walla in a recording studio. Ben and bassist Nick Harmer as warehouse monkeys for a Seattle nonprofit organization called the Committee for Children, which sells nonviolent curriculums and empathy training to elementary and junior high schools.

Gibbard has commented with irony on the situation in which he studied head-cracking subjects as a Chemistry Major in college, while his roommate, Harmer, spent his time goofing off and going to parties.

Both of them wound up working in warehouses in a story you probably should not tell impressionable youngsters.



Failures in life and failures in love, as well as personal tragedy all have fed the group's "Emo rock" style, although with a bit more maturity than usual. Saturday night, the band appeared to have overcome issues with adapting to large venues that some critics slammed them for a couple of years ago. They definitely earned their place on center stage at the

venerable Greek with an Indie style that draws from Foo Fighters methodology of starting with four bars of a rhythm motif, keyboard comping on that for another eight, and then launching into full orchestrated lyric to culminate in crescendo. They have been compared to Thrill to Spill, etc., which just makes Ben shrug his shoulders. They just do what they do. Better than being compared to Third Eye Blind.



In style and lyrics the band is self-consciously urban and cynical. The coverart for their latest CD, "Narrow Stairs", was broadcast as backdrop to the performance. The painting is a dense Kandinsky-like

collage of colored building blocks evoking the packed Universal Metropolis. The words of "Crooked Teeth" highlight this intense urbanity.

". . . at night the sun in retreat,  
Made the skyline look like crooked teeth,  
In the mouth of a man who was devouring, us both."

Its a music that emphatically rejects any "get back to the Garden" idea, if only to avoid yet another anticipated disappointment.

Oh these kids today.

If Saturday night was any sign, this tour should enable the crew to submit their resignations to the warehouse so as to work full time at what they do best and pursue the various solo and production side projects they have done and can expand upon with great success. The new material is punchy and rousing. Their "I Will Possess You" shared some ominous obessional darkness with Sting's "Burn for You" and Elvis Costello's "Spooky Girlfriend", with an insistent buildup to a sort of Dionysiac orgy of instrumentation and vocals. Heavy stuff indeed for "Emo".

They are not yet quite the gargantuan Foo Fighters, but a sold-out Greek is not to be dismissed. We look forward to whatever the next step might be for this maturing band.