

# Music



WE ARE THE RHODAS

## Marathon man

Ben Gibbard and Death Cab for Cutie are racing along new paths

By Mallory Abreu  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Aggo to source for soundtracks to cathartic late-night musings, Death Cab for Cutie is a band unafraid to explore its own history — personally and musically. The group's recently released eighth album, "Kintsugi," embodies that philosophy. Named after the Japanese art form that mends damaged pottery with the intent of emphasizing breakage rather than hiding it, the album closes an era reflectively, its disparate narratives woven together through a mutual search for personal healing.

While Death Cab's members have certainly endured some losses — the

departure of longtime producer, instrumentalist, and songwriter Chris Walla and lead vocalist-songwriter Ben Gibbard's divorce from Zooey Deschanel, to name just two — the resulting cracks have left room for growth. Working with a new producer, Rich Costey, led Gibbard and his bandmates to create an album that is true to Death Cab, yet also expands the group's sound beyond the consistency achieved by its longtime lineup.

"You need someone to come and separate personal baggage from the songs, and make sure none of that gets in the way of making the songs on the record as good as possible," Gibbard says, speaking by telephone.

He knows what it's like to be stuck

in his own head. "Writing [can] be a fairly self-destructive act, in that you're alone for hours on hours, and you're dredging up the darker parts of yourself to create some kind of narrative or song out of them," he says. "I think so many writers and musicians fall into drug and alcohol abuse for a number of reasons . . . but you need a positive counterweight to what being a writer does to you emotionally."

Since 2008's "Narrow Stairs," one of Death Cab's darkest albums, and Gibbard's sobriety, which shortly followed, things have been looking up. And Gibbard has found his positive counterweight in an unlikely form. "For me, that's what running has become," he explains. "I [expletive] love it. If I had

my way, I'd just spend every waking moment out on the trails. It is such a wonderful activity, and such a wonderful community of people I've found."

And the community with which Gibbard has chosen to surround himself lately has informed not just his own state of mind, but also Death Cab's music. Costey's induction opened doors that hadn't existed previously. "It's a better record for having someone else come in and work on it," he explains, "not because Chris is not a very talented and insightful producer, but because we've all been working in this very unorthodox methodology for so long that we really needed someone to come in and shake things up. And he really did that. I'm really really

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### DEATH CAB FOR CUTIE

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At: Blue Hills Bank Pavilion, Friday  
At: 7:30 p.m. Tickets \$29.50-\$49.50.  
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proud of the record — he opened our eyes to what we could accomplish."

Gibbard's move from Seattle to Los Angeles during his time with Death Cab also inspired him to look to others for lyrical inspiration; the chaotic vibe of a city in which Gibbard sees everybody as "a little deranged" allowed him to adopt new perspectives. "I appreciate that people would think that everything I write is intensely personal, but that's not always the case," he says. "There's always a part of you in everything that you write, but I don't consider the vast majority of the stuff I do to be overtly autobiographical."

While Gibbard's first-person perspective gives the impression of lyrics being confessional and personal, he says, one song on "Kintsugi" in which he most directly drew inspiration from the Los Angeles crowd is "Good Help." "The city has a way of flipping priorities completely on their heads," muses Gibbard. "The people closest to you are people who are paid to be there. It's like you can't have a real conversation with somebody who is paid to be there. . . . It's such an unsustainable and kind of conflicted dichotomy of a city. . . . It causes so many interesting dilemmas, and that song touches on that for sure."

Gibbard's uncanny capability to embody the protagonists of his songs may have resulted in part from his efforts to broaden his own character, including his new involvement in marathon running. "I don't want to be a one-dimensional person, and I was for a long time, just being a musician and that's all I related to, and all I did," he says. "All I'd do is listen to music, talk about music, read about music. And at some point it's just not sustainable." With new passions to motivate and mend him, Gibbard feels better able to positively fuel what seems to be his sole constant — music.

"I feel so grateful that running found me," declares Gibbard. "I can't imagine my life without it at this point."

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## Hynde's rock 'n' roll lifestyle fills pages of 'Reckless'

### ►HYNDE

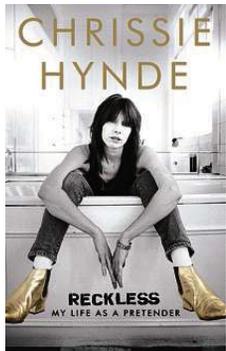
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like "Brass in Pocket," "Kid," and "Mystery Achievement" heralded Hynde as a formidable talent.

But if she's chagrined about aspects of her past — there's a nightmarish account of an afternoon spent alone with a violent gang of "tattooed love boys" — why write about it? One answer can be found in the success of recent books by Patti Smith and Sonic Youth's Kim Gordon. There's an appetite for memoirs by smart women rockers, and Hynde, 64, serves up a hearty and satisfying meal in "Reckless," writing with the sort of candor and humor rarely found in books by her male counterparts. (I'm looking at you, Steven Tyler.)

Hynde's book isn't a tell-all in the traditional sense. If you want the skinny on her relationship with Ray Davies of the Kinks, with whom she had a daughter, or marriage to Jim Kerr of the Scottish band Simple Minds, with whom she had another daughter, there's not much here. Of her scrapped wedding with Davies in 1982, to which she took a train (wearing a white silk suit), Hynde laments: "Even a total stranger could tell we were making a mistake."

More interesting anyway is Hynde's origin story in "Rubber City" — Akron was the headquarters of Firestone and Goodyear — and how growing up "trauma-free" in a company town contributed to her desire to escape. Hyndevans an awkward, acne-faced teen during the British Invasion, and music was a lifeline. She tuned in Cleveland's underground radio stations, scavenged record bins — "Freak Out!" by Frank Zappa's Mothers of Invention was a revelation — and went to every concert: Janis Joplin, the Velvet Underground, Sly and the Family Stone, the Who, Tim Buckley (in a bowling alley), and Jackie



### BOOK REVIEW

**RECKLESS:**  
**My Life as a Pretender**  
By Chrissie Hynde. Doubleday,  
336 pp., \$26.95

Wilson, who plucked Hynde, then barely in high school, from the audience and put his mouth on hers.

"I guess that was my first kiss, although there might have been one poorly aimed Juicy Fruit-flavored peck at a fair courtesy of a friend's older cousin, but no match for the salty, experienced lips of Jackie Wilson," she writes.

There is a Zelig-like quality to the young Hynde, who found herself in the company of rock stars — she once gave David Bowie a ride in her parents' Oldsmobile — and was a student at Kent State University in 1970 when the Ohio National Guard fired on her



The Pretenders — (from left) James Honeyman-Scott, Chrissie Hynde, Pete Farndon, and Martin Chambers — in January 1979.

classmates, killing four. A keen observer of her cultural moment, Hynde writes incisively about urban renewal, race, fashion, and feminism.

(Recently, while promoting the book, she made some controversial comments about rape and provocative attire that suggests she may have a way to go on that last topic.)

Hynde had a vagabond's heart and decamped to London, more or less permanently and with no plan, in 1973. Squatting wherever she could, she worked briefly as a music writer, a window washer, a shop girl at a boutique run by Malcolm McLaren, and palled around with Mick Jones and

Johnny Rotten before punk rock was a thing. (If you're not familiar with those chaps, this may not be the book for you.)

Hynde was all the while writing songs, but her attempts to form a band failed. That is until James Honeyman-Scott arrives on the scene — the shaggy-haired guitarist makes his first appearance about two-thirds of the way through "Reckless" — and the Pretenders, rounded out by Pete Farndon on drums, and Martin Chambers on bass, are born.

The book concludes, somewhat hastily, with the story of the band's rapid ascent — the first album de-

buted at No. 1 in England — and the calamitous consequences of success for Farndon and Honeyman-Scott, who hung around long enough to make a second record but ultimately succumbed to their excesses. Hynde, backed by varying lineups, continued with the Pretenders for several years, but it was never the same.

In the end, it's understandable that Hynde has some regrets, but it's also heartening that bad girls sometimes finish first.

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