



Death Cab for Cutie may be the best band you've never heard of, or they may be your favorite musical secret that everyone else is about to find out about. "Plans" is the fifth album of leader Ben Gibbard's melancholy musings but it only scratches the surface of his output via ep's, home made tapes and his other band The Postal Service. It is their first major label recording and sounds like it. The quirky atonal tunes from previous experiments have been replaced by a polished and compelling mix of songs that could live forever, as long as "The O.C." never gets cancelled.

Death Cab For Cutie's sound is dominated by Gibbard's voice (there is only one song with harmony vocals) and Chris Walla's pristine production. The instrumentation ranges from a simple acoustic guitar on "I Will Follow You into the Dark" to the full band sound of the almost perfect first single "Soul Meets Body" which serves as the thematic center of the songs' lyrics. Gibbard sings of the limitations of the body as it applies to finding a soul mate in almost every song. When he's not singing about body parts, ("Summer Skin", "Crooked Teeth") he's lamenting the loss of life in songs like "What Sarah Said." Far from being all doom and gloom however, "Plans" is an uplifting, melodic and confident statement by a band that's had a lot of time to get it right.

There have been many examples of indie rock bands making the move to a major label but the one "Plans" reminds me most of is the transition REM made from their early IRS recordings to the album "Green." It provided them with their first mainstream hits after five albums of brilliant, underappreciated music. Death Cab For Cutie is at a similar crossroads and "Plans" shows they are ready.