



CHAD VANGAALLEN

Much has been written of Chad Vangaalen as a basement genius, alone with his electronics and home-made instruments, somewhere in the unknown, sprawling riches of Calgary, Alberta. But the often solitary nature of its creation should not indicate that this is the work of a reclusive spirit. This is not an act of withdrawal. As Chad has famously demonstrated on Canadian television (ZED TV), where he was seen drawing while riding a bicycle, he is one well-attuned to his surroundings. It is an act of balance and grace, yet an action comfortable with the possibility of disaster and harm, a potentially violent encounter between creativity and the world. Free spirits of the world describe this state as the sweet spot. Those not embarrassed by such words might describe it as play.

It is the same responsive spirit that drives all of Chad Vangaalen's art. Graduate of the Alberta College of Art, Chad is renowned for his animations and illustrations, widely seen in the rapidly morphing, birthing, self-generating and self-consuming imagery in the video for his hit "Clinically Dead" from 2005's *Infiniheart*. That record, originally compiled from hundreds of home recordings by the Canadian independent Flemish Eye, and then released worldwide by the mighty Sub Pop Records, displayed a great willingness to improvise with sounds and styles. Cripple Creek shuffles, broken machinery dances, and high lonesome yearnings all shared the acclaim of such critical standards as *The Guardian*, *MOJO*, *NME*, *Exclaim!*, and *Entertainment Weekly*. Chad was soon appearing on *MTV2* and *Much Music*, and on stage with such renowned independent rock acts as the *Pixies*, *Wolf Parade*, *Built to Spill*, the *Weakerthans*, *Julie Doiron*, *Rogue Wave*, and the *Constantines*. Where before the music existed primarily in the personal zeitgeist of its own creation and passed quietly among enthusiastic fans, now a new context was apparent: live performance in the rock clubs of the world. Performed with an ever-shifting lineup of supporting musicians, often eagerly recruited from an expanding network of friends and tour mates, the songs were continuously reinvented, rearranged, and remade, in response to the particular possibilities of the moment.

Importantly, new songs were written with this environment in mind, and, again, it was a catalogue shocking in its extent. A vein of anthemic rock and roll was discovered and mined. An album's worth of futuristic dances was recorded with prepared piano and drum. Broken violins confessed their sonic dreams and offered soundtrack for the lonesome anxiety that all is amiss. But always these strange elements came together and declared themselves confidently as pop music. You can hear it in the *Modern Lovers* drive of "Burn to Ash," in the fluid sway of "Red Hot Drops," in the desperate rush of "Flower Gardens," in the surprising lift of "Dead Ends," in the tender shuffle of "Graveyard." It's as if the presence of an audience offered new opportunities for creativity, something new to play with.

Now, with 15 songs selected from this recent library, Chad VanGaalén has returned with *Skelliconnection*. It's a tight, exciting record: a record of liquid fear, of joy and wonder; a record of rising suns and final swells; a great, strange, pop record, one for the many ears. Recording by himself and performing nearly all the instruments on the album, *Skelliconnection* remains a highly personal voice, but one singing to the world outside. One foot out of the basement, summer 2006.

—Steve Lambke, Toronto, May 2006

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