

Decemberists release new CD

By **Jeff Sorenson**
Clackamas Print

The Decemberists' major debut, *The Crane Wife*, possibly one of the best albums to ever be produced by a Portland band.

The Crane Wife is a concept album of sorts, based loosely on a Japanese folk tale about a poor man who finds a wounded crane, nurses it to health, then the crane flies away. The next day, a gorgeous woman appears on his doorstep, and they immediately fall in love and get married. The woman decides to buy clothes for the man so he can sell them in town. The catch is, the man can't see her make the clothes. The man decides to peek in on his wife anyway, and he discovers that she's actually a crane that is plucking her feathers and using them to make the clothes. She then flies away and never returns.

Long-time fans of the Decemberists will be glad to know that they have not sold out. *The Crane Wife* is in many ways similar to their previous efforts, however it does contain more prog-rock elements (two of the tracks are around 12 minutes long), along with the sea-faring, Irish folk, pseudo-Brit pop music that the Decemberists are known for.

Frontman Colin Meloy's vocals are in rare form on songs like the chilling "Shankill Butchers," the upbeat "Sons and Daughters" and the title track, which is in three parts and contains very intricate and passionate storytelling, not to mention infectious melodies. And of course, the lyrics are very well written. Colin Meloy is definitely one of the better songwriters in the indie-rock world.

One of the real treats on this album is the song "The Perfect Crime #2." It is one

of the more prominent rockers on the record and features a groovin' bass line and energetic guitar riffs.

All in all, this album is stunning. I find it to be better than The Decemberists' previous works, and I believe that *The Crane Wife* will shoot this band into stardom. Sure, The Decemberists might be a little "artsy," but what do you expect from a band that put out an EP of Morrissey covers? To all the nay-sayers, I think Colin Meloy said it best in the following quote:

"I would certainly rather be [a heart-throb] to a bunch of English majors and drama fags than a bunch of sorority girls."



<http://www.amazon.com>

The cover of the newest Decemberists album which came out Oct. 3, *The Crane Wife*, displays the band's eccentric sensibilities.

The 'December Brides' show proves to be a nice surprise

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A fan of the Decemberists' I feel like I've learned a thing or two from their eloquent lyrics and deliberate progressions. When I learned that their secret gig was a month ago, however, is the next time I buy a round of for the band, I'll make sure to get to the stage.

Sept. 20, roughly 150 people, including my two friends and I, lined up along a Portland sidewalk wrapped around The Acme at 8th and Main. Shivering and restless, we waited for over an hour to see if other patrons of the capacity-filled bar would make it to the stage.

The bar had billed the evening as entertainment as a fund-raiser featuring Alela Diane and the December Brides, a pseudonym recognized only by fans of the band's own Decemberists. The door allowed 11 more people to pass before turning his back to the crowd outside, and I

was relieved to be tenth in line. Seeing the Decemberists with two buddies for a \$5 cover? It was going to be a good night.

The Acme show, according to *Willamette Week's* Mark Baumgarten, was a warm-up for their tour which kicked off last night at the Crystal Ballroom to promote the band's newest album, *The Crane Wife*. The tour will end in New York, where the Decemberists will play to a crowd of 37,000, but that night at the Acme, the Decemberists played to a handful of people in the bar plus a few more fans with their noses — and cameras — pressed against the windows outside.

After only the first couple songs of the set, lead singer Colin Meloy asked the crowd to buy a

round for the band. After two more songs, an order of Whiskey from Baumgarten himself was delivered on behalf of his paper. *The Portland Mercury* covered the next round, and *The Oregonian* followed suit shortly after. One by one, it seemed like every journalist in the room was pushing their way back to the bar to arm themselves for a truly media-driven booze battle that turned, as Baumgarten put it, "a pleasant celebration into a rowdy free-for-all." Nobody seemed to complain, either.

The second half of the Decemberists' set was littered with covers, including The Outfield's "Your Love" and the Sex Pistols' "E.M.I.," and ended with a very drunk — and, frankly, obnoxious — fan shouting directly into my left ear until Meloy, swaying and exhausted from the combination

of his performance and his drinks, conceded to his wishes and closed the show with an electric version of "Of Angels and Angles" from their last album, *Picaresque*. The song, which Baumgarten described as "one of the gentlest compositions [Meloy] has ever penned," was instead presented as a gritty, tormented ballad that, when combined with Meloy's "three inch stare," was transformed into a surreal and truly unique experience.

Between prodding for drinks, rallying the crowd to chant "let them in" (which allowed entrance for those who were devoted enough to stay pressed to the windows through the first half), and alternating between old tracks and new, the Decemberists also introduced their newest member, Lisa Molinaro, who will be covering glockenspiel and string parts — among others — for the tour.

Provided the tickets are still available by the time this goes to

print, the Decemberists will be playing a second Crystal Ballroom show tonight with doors opening at 8 p.m., and I suggest to anyone who can attend that they should.

As far as the press war at the Acme, I spent my last \$25 on a round of six pints for the band — on behalf of *The Print* — and tried to push them to the stage. The sound engineer, who was immediately stage left, told me to leave them with him and that he'd pass them to the band. I guess I still have something to learn about "big time" journalism, because I never found out what happened to the beers, and the band never got them.

My friends told me I should say or do something about it, maybe ask for a refund. I, in turn, explained to them that \$30 was a small price to pay for the story I would be able to tell from that night, which turned out to be one of the best nights of my life.

"Seeing the Decemberists with two buddies for a \$5 cover? It was going to be a good night."

Lead singer of the Decemberists, Colin Meloy, ends the night's energized set by setting his guitar on fire and falling into drummer John Moen's lap.

Meloy sings to the crowd of roughly 100 Decemberists fans at The Acme on Sept. 20.



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