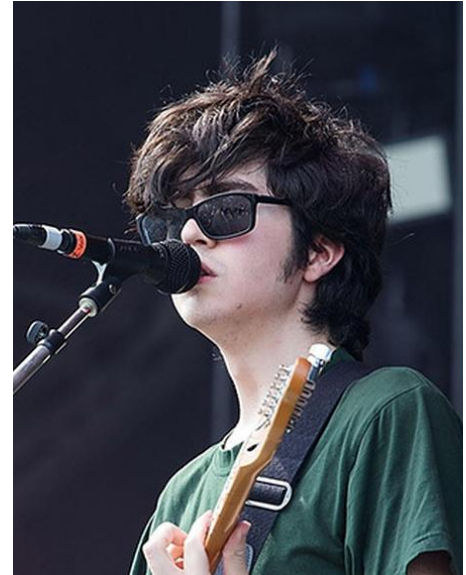


Twin Fantasy (2018)

Album Review by Ada Schemenauer

About the Band

Car Seat Headrest is an indie rock band that was created as a solo project in 2010 by recent high school graduate Will Toledo. As a child, Will (born William Barnes) had always loved music and was inspired by groundbreaking bands such as The Beatles, The Monkees, and Radiohead to create something of his own. His most influential inspiration throughout his childhood was The Beach Boys, who he pays homage to in the song *Destroyed by Hippie Powers*, describing his young self as a "chubby little kid who smiled [a lot] and loved the Beach Boys."



Will had previously tried to publish his work on Bandcamp under the alias Nervous Young Men but was unsuccessful in generating interest. Car Seat Headrest was a turning point for him to create more experimental tracks in a more anonymous atmosphere. Of the name of the project, Will said, "When I first started the project, I was looking for a name that wouldn't reveal much about the music or the creator, a sort of 'blank' name. [...] I was recording vocals in the car because I was embarrassed to sing with my parents in the house. So I came upon the idea of 'car seat headrest' and it stuck."

The first albums he created under the name Car Seat Headrest are called the "numbered albums" and are labelled from 1 to 5. The first few albums in the series are in an experimental stream-of-consciousness style, while the latter are closer to the lofi indie rock brand consistent with his later albums. Will would go on to publish his first titled album, *My Back is Killing Me Baby*, but he considers the project's first real masterpiece to be the album that came immediately after, *Twin Fantasy*.

About the Album

The album is a passionate, visceral experience that loosely falls into the category of a concept album, as it revolves mostly around a relationship Will was in at the time of writing it. It has all the biting wit and youthful angst Will became known for with one of his later albums, *Teens of Denial*. However, this album is incomparable in its raw honesty. Will doesn't hold back in terms of telling it like it is, including everything that happened between him and his mysterious lover as well as everything he was hoping would happen. The album is tender – existential as it is sentimental, with a flavour of desperation and mental disarray that makes it incredibly pertinent to the teenage experience.

In this review, I will be discussing the second version of *Twin Fantasy*, also called *Twin Fantasy (Face to Face)*. This rerecording came out in 2018 and served as an opportunity for Will to develop an album that had great potential but was held back by a lack of resources. Now with all the wisdom of an illustrious career among indie heads and a full band to back him up, he explores the full breadth of his vision – and it is beautiful. Music reviewer gave the album a perfect score, describing it as “a perfectionist giving a great album the full workout it deserved.” Will, however, rejects this description of himself, claiming he simply finds music with underdeveloped but promising ideas frustrating and he'd “rather listen to music with no good ideas at all.” The album received critical acclaim among critics, and was awarded the “Best New Music” award from Pitchfork upon its release.



Sober to Death - 9/10

This track is one that definitely tugs at the heartstrings, and the combination of a beautiful guitar melody and Will's soft voice lends well to the bittersweet subject matter. I would argue this song has the best lyrics overall, it's chock full of quotable lines that can cruise right by if you get too caught up in the dreamy instrumentation – but I wouldn't blame you for it. An interesting aspect of this song is its unique lyric structure, somewhat similar to the AAB structure found in classic blues songs. Generally, there will be an initial line, then it is repeated with some alteration. Examples include “I want to hear you going psycho / If you're going psycho I wanna hear” and “We have breakdowns / And sometimes we don't have breakdowns.”



Will discusses some of the more toxic and difficult aspects of his relationship. He sees his lover's pain and wants to help, but feels powerless to save them. He can only observe from a distance, having “seen its marks at the corner of [their] eyes,” which may reference anything from eyebags to tears. The song is an eager attempt at comfort, which explains Will's unusually gentle tone in this song, almost as if he feels his lover is fragile. It is one of three songs on the album that didn't change lyrically at all, which makes sense because, in my opinion, it's perfect as is. My favourite lyric from this song is “We were wrecks before we crashed into each other,” which is a very powerful sentiment and a really potent way to describe their relationship. The only thing I would change about this track is the outro, where “Don't worry, you and me won't be alone no more” is repeated all of 12 times. I understand the intended impact, but realistically, your average listener isn't going to sit through it all, and at some point, it isn't adding anything to the meaning of the song anyway.

Nervous Young Inhumans - 8/10

One of my personal favourite tracks, and one that has changed a lot since its initial 2011 release, is *Nervous Young Inhumans*. It has a more energetic style than *Car Seat Headrest* is known for, with driving drums and chirpy synths. Generally, this album is not heralded for being “danceable” – but this track definitely is.

Will gets a little meta (as usual) and discusses his experience as a musician, as well as speaking directly to his lover about how they understand each other. The overarching theme in this song is honesty – whether it be from Will to the listener, or to his romantic partner, he believes it’s an important aspect of any relationship and one that he has struggled with in the past.



The most controversial aspect of this track and perhaps the album at large is the long spoken-word outro. Many people believe that it becomes gratuitous and drags an otherwise near-perfect album down, however, I find it very powerful and unique. The quiet intimacy of the segment feels like a deep connection between artist and listener, and serves to immerse yourself in the experience of the album even further. It could probably be a little shorter, I rarely find myself listening to it in its entirety. However, with striking lines such as “I can lie on my back and affect the lives of those I love without moving a finger, but I would only affect them in good ways. I don’t waste time on evil.” I believe the album is better for it.

Bodys - 10/10

This song has a special place in my heart because it was the song that introduced me to Car Seat Headrest in the first place. I was listening to music with a friend when this song came on, and I had to ask him what it was called because it was so incredible. The combination of its lofi style and melodic guitar were unlike anything I had ever heard before, I really resonated with Will's unique voice as well as the lyrics he delivered.

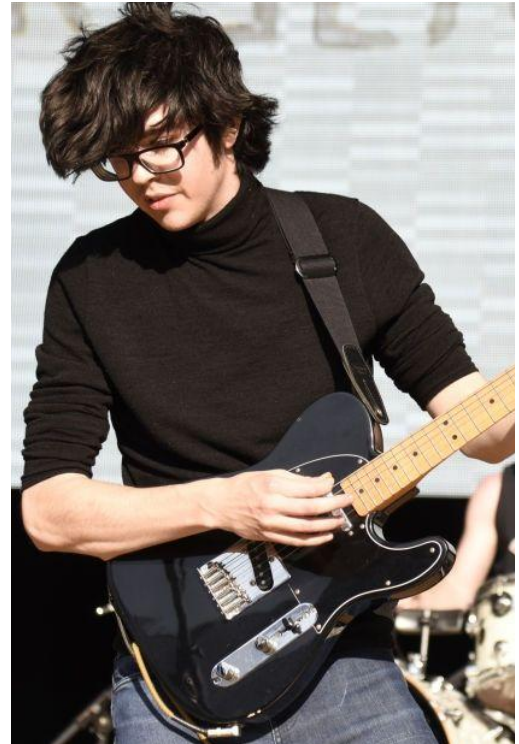


Will, the self-proclaimed “Nervous Young Man,” has a tendency to be awkward in social situations and struggles to express himself to others. This song sets the scene with a party, where Will is having a conversation with someone and is struggling to communicate his feelings for them. (“That’s not what I meant to say at all / I mean, I’m sick of meaning / I just wanna hold you” is also my favourite lyric he’s ever written.) His anxious existentialism constantly gets him down, and he expresses a desire to be as carefree as everyone else. The slight delays on the multi-track vocals create a feeling of quiet unwieldiness, as if he’s stuttering or struggling to get his words out. Eventually, he gives up on trying to be “deep” and decides to just have fun by drinking and dancing with his romantic interest. (“As long as we move our bodies around a lot / We’ll forget that we forgot how to talk”)

The outro of this song features some sick bars from Andrew Katz, Car Seat Headrest’s drummer, which ends the song on a more lighthearted note. I really enjoy the inclusion of the rap because it shows that, while Will is arguably “the brains” of the operation, being the lyricist and lead singer, he has a strong relationship with his bandmates and is willing to give them their moment in the spotlight. Andrew is also known for being all smiles, and since he’s more outgoing and goofy than the serious and sometimes pretentious Will, he balances out the general mood of the band. The two have a separate musical project together called 1 Trait Danger, which they began in 2018.

Cute Thing - 9/10

Cute Thing definitely lives up to its title, with a decidedly more upbeat tone and peppy melodies that make you want to get up and dance. The midsection of the song builds up to an invigorating instrumental breakdown, which feels different, in the best way possible. The talent of Ethan Ives is really given a chance to shine and it feels more like your typical energetic rock or pop song. The heavenly, melodic backing vocals create a fuller, almost choir-like sound, and the lighter mood of the song is like a fresh breath of air in an album that is full of heavy, and frankly, depressing subject matter. It addresses the innocent and naive aspects of teenage romance, creating a more honest and well-rounded picture of Will's relationship.



It contains more humorous and tongue-in-cheek lines than any other song on the album, including "I got so f—cking romantic / I apologize / Let me light your cigarette," and later, "I got so f—cking romantic / I apologize / Let me smoke your weed, no wait." Will also addresses his assumed cause of death, saying, "He died in an explosion / Of mixed media and poorly written reviews," probably in reference to his experience when his music started to gain traction. Sorry Will, hopefully, I won't be contributing with this one.

One of my favourite lines on the album in general comes from this song, "Give me Frank Ocean's voice / And James Brown's stage presence." I always love when artists give tribute to their inspirations. Interestingly, Will changed the names while recording, originally referencing Dan Bejar and John Entwistle. At first, I thought, sure, John "The Ox" Entwistle is known for his stage presence, but not necessarily in a good way. When I thought about it a little more, I realized that this may simply be a reflection of Will's personality at the time. He isn't a particularly explosive personality on stage, and would rather be known for his musical talent than his attention-grabbing antics, much like the late and great Entwistle. The amendment of these lyrics may show that Will has since become more confident, and wants to become a more dynamic performer.

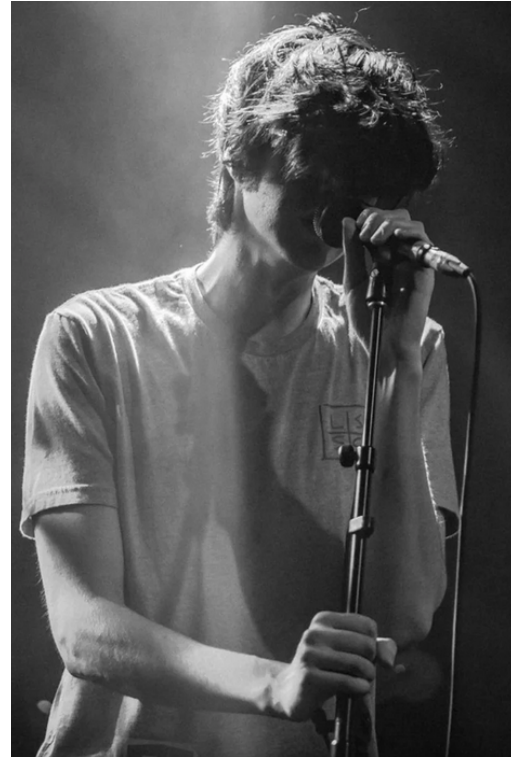
High to Death - 10/10

The guitar intro of this track is quiet and builds up slowly, setting the tone for a more introspective, sorrowful song. Will has said this song is a “mourning for an entire world,” and describes a feeling he experienced both going into and coming out of college. Comparatively, *High to Death* is stripped-down, featuring less of the musical “noise” found elsewhere on the album. It has a hazy and nostalgic feeling, and the spoken word sample in the middle of an instrumental crescendo makes it feel like a fading memory.

The title and lyrics reveal the fact that it discusses Will’s disorienting experience with marijuana, which he has discussed elsewhere in his music. He had what you could call a bad trip, and has said in the past that he “felt like he was dying.” He also read the short story *The Yellow Wallpaper* around this time, which inspired some of the lyrics. The repetition in the song creates an echoing, spinning feeling that mimics the feeling of being high, and not entirely present in reality.

The latter half of the lyrics are particularly potent, in my opinion. Another one of my all-time favourite lines is “Hell is the sun / Burning forever at the centre of things / A ball on fire at the centre of things... / A brain on fire at the centre of things.” Here, Will despairs about the eternity of existence, and compares the centre of the universe, the sun, to the centre of us, our minds. “A brain on fire” wrote all the lyrics to this album, and you can tell. Will’s lyrics are witty and straight from the heart, sometimes disjointed but always passionate. He has a palpable desperation to express himself, but it seems like his thoughts are so fast, raw and jumbled that it takes a lot of effort to make them comprehensible.

The outro of this song is a sound byte spoken by Hojin Stella Jung, who happens to be the artist behind several of Car Seat Headrest’s album covers. She discusses her experience creating a collection of paintings she dubbed, “The Lady” which mirrors how Will now feels about the original *Twin Fantasy*.



Final Thoughts



Overall, *Twin Fantasy* is a truly unique and masterful album and is one of the best to come out of the rock genre in the past decade. It has all the emotional vulnerability Will gave the album when he first wrote it, with another layer of polish following its remaster. Everything from the instrumental sound and style, to the lyrics, to the vocals, perfectly encapsulates the feeling of being young and in love.

One of my pet peeves is when music is made as a product — simply to be played on the radio and to appeal to the most amount of people possible, and *Twin Fantasy* is the perfect antithesis to that. It doesn't make any attempts to equivocate its message, it isn't afraid to be specific, and in my opinion, that makes it resonate that much more. It may be a deeply personal and individual story of Will and his past lover, but it also is a deeply universal experience that many people can relate to and understand some aspects of.

Twin Fantasy is a real work of art that I would recommend anyone listen to at least once in their life, especially indie rock fans and young people. It may not connect with everyone, for those it does, it's an unmatched experience. You'll smile, dance, and most of all, get your heart wrenched out. It isn't completely perfect, but it's pretty darn close, and if there's anything to take away from this album, it's that teenage love and life aren't always pretty.