

The New Odds

Have you heard the new Odds album? Have you heard The New Odds album? In order to fully appreciate the duality of this question as it relates to Cheerleader, it might be necessary to recap a bit about this band's remarkable past.

1987: the Odd-yssey begins...

In 1987, four highly individual Vancouver musicians put together a guitar-based, power pop strike force to write catchy melodic songs built on crunchy rock guitars, full-voiced harmonies and walloping drums. Original members Doug Elliott, Craig Northey, Steven Drake and Paul Brennan worked the bar circuit and honed their sound. After a long, hard slog at some flea-bitten dive bar gig, they found themselves asking the musical question: "What are the odds of us ever escaping bullshit gigs like this?" That weekend they became simply, Odds, and proceeded to do what a lot of frustrated Canadian acts had done before them: they headed to L.A. and got a major label deal. Shortly after the release of their self-produced debut, *Neopolitan* (Zoo Entertainment 1991), they were recruited to back up Warren Zevon on his *Mr. Bad Example* tour. They channeled this master class into their next recorded work, *Bedbugs* (Zoo 1993), and raised their profile further when their comedian pals, Kids In The Hall, appeared in their video for the irony-laced single "Heterosexual Man." After Paul Brennan's departure in 1995, Doug Elliott invited his longtime friend (and former Bryan Adams drummer) Pat Steward into the band, resulting in a weightier wallop and groovier groove for their next release, the platinum-plus selling *Good Weird Feeling* (Warner Music 1995), which featured the hits "Truth Untold" and "Eat My Brain." After their involvement in the Kids In The Hall's feature film, *Brain Candy*, for which Northey composed the original score, the band released their final album as Odds. *Nest* (Warner Music, 1996) yielded the chart-topper, "Someone Who's Cool," (which enjoyed 8 weeks as the number 1 song at Canadian rock radio and went Top 40 in the U.S) and the hit single "Make You Mad."

2007: Meet The New Odds

The original Odds members were busy as bees up until today. Cranking out more music than in their life as the Odds, Northey, Elliott and Steward collaborated on projects by Strippers Union with Rob Baker of the Tragically Hip, Northey Valenzuela with Jesse Valenzuela of the Gin Blossoms, Northey's solo album *Giddy Up*, several Colin James albums, session work for Jeremy Fisher, Matthew Good, Payolas, two feature film scores (Kids in the Hall in *Brain Candy*, *Dog Park* with Luke Wilson) and the themes for CTV's hit *Corner Gas*.

It's obvious that although they had been on a "walkabout" from Odds, the core unit — Steward, Elliott and Northey — never really "split up." It is this nucleus, along with new guitarist Murray Atkinson, which forms (and informs) The New Odds (TNO) on their "debut" album *Cheerleader*.

"One day, Pat and Doug pointed out that it felt like it was time to put on the band hat," recalls Northey, "just like in 1999 it felt like it was time to take that hat off."

"Since the last of the Odds shows," adds Doug Elliott, "Pat and Craig and I have done hundreds of shows together under all sorts of different names. The best ones always

seemed to feature Craig Northey songs and Odds songs. This is where my soul is. This music is in us; it just flows out.”

Northey, Elliott and Steward started jamming out new songs in much the same way the Odds had done ten years prior. Around this time, their old friends Barenaked Ladies invited them to debut the new songs live, during one of their Caribbean concert cruises. “How do you say no to that?” Northey asks rhetorically. “They asked us what we were going to call it and we flippantly told them, The New Odds. We didn’t realize it was going to print that day!”

“But I do think,” adds Elliott, “that since three of us had built up a certain amount of equity as the Odds, why not have a name that sort of tilts toward a history we’re extremely proud of.”

Initially hesitant to add a fourth member, they soon realized that a second guitar was needed in order to attain their signature band sound.

“Pat and Doug had been gigging in another band with Murray Atkinson,” Northey recalls, “so it seemed obvious that it should be him. I taught him some parts that I’d written and he instantly made them better.”

“Murray’s cut from the same cloth as us,” says Elliott. “His personality and his musicality fit in with us totally.”

While a decade younger than his bandmates, Atkinson – a rock guitarist raised on grunge, funk and KISS, and a talented solo artist in his own right – instantly fell in with the former Odds members.

“We all share a deep love of KISS,” says Atkinson, “as well as Stax and old R&B. Plus, they’re all such super nice guys and world-class musicians. It’s the best band situation I’ve ever been in and I feel lucky to be learning so much from them.”

The New Odds is a whole new thing, with the soul of the Odds of old propelling the collective eagerness of a brand new band.

2008: Four Men and a Cheerleader

“Cheerleader,” says Elliott of the new release, “is the culmination of the music that we’ve created in our lives up to this point, and I think it’s the best music we’ve ever made together. I believe in Craig so much as a songwriter; his songs come from the same place I’m coming from. But there’s no real leader of this band. We’re all in this together. We all share in the work and we all share in the wealth.”

“The music is something we all create together,” says Northey, “The beauty of pop music is that you can sing some pretty dark or intense lyrics, then put a bit of jangle and a nice melody on it and everybody dances to it. When we were looking for a title, ‘cheerleader’ was one word that encapsulated what the music was. It’s almost comical when you put it up against the underlying lyrical themes of the songs.”

The “walkabout” years provided the New Odds with a broader, fresher outlook when it was time to come home to their “happy place.”

“The idea that ‘it was good once, so let’s do it exactly the same way,’ always leads to disaster,” says Northey. “So we all went out to get new ideas and make other kinds of

music. And while we've returned to the comfort foods of power-pop music, I would hope that we're coming back with a lot of those outside experiences in our DNA. All of that, plus all of Murray's experiences, make it possible for this music to happen this way, at this time."

Finally, Northey is adamant that what's going on here is "more than your typical rock band reunion."

"We never really felt like we went away! We were always working together under different names and trying different things. So we just came back to the old rock band way of working together and added a new guy. That's not a reunion; it's just the next phase of a long and musically rewarding relationship."