

Bio information: **CHEER-ACCIDENT**Title: **CHICAGO XX** (Cuneiform Rune 476) | Format: CD / DIGITAL

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FILE UNDER: **ROCK / PROGRESSIVE ROCK**

**CHEER-ACCIDENT Celebrate 20 Albums as a Beacon of Prog-Rock Absurdity  
With the New *CHICAGO XX*, Their Third Full-Length Album in Three Years,  
These Indefatigable Weirdos Have Hit a Hot Streak Late in the Fourth Decade of Their Career**

*“We’ve made it to XX!! Yes, it took longer than it took Chicago to make it here, but that didn’t prevent us from calling it “Chicago XX,” did it? It’s a potent little sucker, too. Maybe we shouldn’t still be rocking out this much at “our advanced age,” but... well, we are! Harmony and dissonance, love and hate, oboes and drums... they all help to form this delicious and strange bedfellowship. Maybe this is going out on a limb, but it’s possible that (in addition to the bevy of instruments on this album) this just might be our most gripping full-length to date on the vocal front: Carmen Armillas and Greg Beemster and Thymme all turn in some poignant and varied performances. And let’s face it, Shelby Donnelly’s artwork is something you’re gonna want to stare at...” – Cheer-Ax*

“Cheer-Accident have just released their 20th album, *Chicago XX*, whose cover pays terry-cloth tribute to the band once known as the Chicago Transit Authority. **In terrible times, it’s important to treasure reassuring things, including brilliant but underappreciated local musicians who just don’t give up.** Founded in 1981, this constantly mutating nexus of straight-faced but smart-assed prog rock and distressing multimedia weirdness first played a live show in 1987.

Over the decades Cheer-Accident have perfected an organic dadaism that makes them kin to the Residents, say, or Henry Cow, or Canada’s Nihilist Spasm Band. They’ve always brought heart to their playfulness, and their free-range eclecticism is warm and welcoming—they’re a highly intelligent band but never spill over into off-putting cerebral iciness. This might be because of their flair for hook and melody, or because of their fundamental puckishness, which is never mean-spirited—though it can certainly be confusing or exasperating. At one late-90s Lounge Ax show, the band used a prerecorded tape to segue from their song “Small World” into a hellish multitracked version of the Disney tune “It’s a Small World (After All),” and during its interminable playback they simply left the stage and took seats at the bar. Another concert at the same venue ended with Jones surprising the night’s guest musicians (and the crowd) by mock-berating everyone with a ten-minute Buddy Rich rant he’d memorized. Cheer-Accident’s bassist for much of the 90s, former Flying Luttenbacher Dylan Posa, once spent at least that long during a Morseland set imitating a lawn sprinkler.

These bizarre, self-sabotaging jokes work, though, because Cheer-Accident back them up with skillful musical assemblage and careful attention to detail—not too many artists can make a chant of “life rings hollow” (on the *Chicago XX* song of the same name) sound so inspiring.

Cheer-Accident co-founder **Thymme Jones**, recalls the band’s beginnings as a sort of stream-of-consciousness recording project. Originally a loose collective of as many as nine players in Jones’s orbit, by 1987 Cheer-Accident had become a stable power trio, with guitarist **Jeff Libersher** (still in the band) and bassist Chris Block (long gone). Their public debut was at the defunct Igloo (which Jones says was actually quite hot) and featured a ten-minute version of “Filet of Nod,” which ends with a locked groove on their 1991 LP *Dumb Ask*—the written-out material lasts less than three minutes, but onstage Cheer-Accident play the locked groove for as long as they bloody well feel like. **Rumors have propagated of a 24-hour version, but Jones insists that the longest they’ve actually gone on with it is eight hours outdoors and seven indoors.**

Originally a noisy postpunk outfit with a bit of skronk (elements they’re perfectly capable of drawing on to this day), in the mid-90s Cheer-Accident turned to a much more melodic and mellifluous sound, producing some of the most strangely beautiful music—or just straight-up most beautiful music—to ever come out of the Chicago indie scene. The sudden death in 1999 of guitarist Phil Bonnet, who’d been playing with the band for nine years and a friend of theirs for even longer, nearly convinced them to hang it up. But their 2002 comeback, *Introducing Lemon*, with guitarist Jamie Fillmore joining the fold, was their strongest yet, even downright life-affirming. Guitarist and drummer Todd Rittmann and bassist Alex Perkolup (ex-Flying Luttenbachers) came aboard as Fillmore left, and lineup changes continued apace even during the gap in new Cheer-Accident albums that lasted from 2011 till 2017. **Those years of gestation have paid off in the one-two-three punch of 2017’s *Putting Off Death*, 2018’s *Fades*, and the new *Chicago XX*—all masterpieces. Maturity has its benefits.**

The personnel on the recording include many past and present members, including singer **Carmen Armillas**, bassist **Dante Kester**, and multi-instrumentalist **Amelie Morgan**. The touring lineup consists of Jones, Libersher, and a three-piece horn section drawn from the band’s large pool of friends and collaborators: saxophonists **Ross Feller** and **Cory Bengtsen** and trombonist **Mike Hagedorn**.

Jones tells me he was delighted by a comment from a fan at a recent show who insisted that the band combine Chicago with the Art Ensemble of Chicago. It’s as accurate an elevator pitch as anything I could come up with, honestly, except that Cheer-Accident are far funnier than either.” – **Monica Kendrick / Chicago Reader**