



IRASCIBLE MUSIC



DAN DEACON (USA)

Album / Single: Well Groomed

Label: Domino Records

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Web: <https://dandeacon.com>

EPK: irascible.ch/dan-deacon/well-groomed

On the heels of his fifth studio album *Mystic Familiar*, electronic musician Dan Deacon returns with the original soundtrack to Rebecca Stern's HBO documentary about the world of competitive creative dog grooming, *Well Groomed*. Immersing our ears in a subculture bursting with vivid colors and surreal imagination, Deacon's score ranges from Vangelis-inspired soundscapes ("Creative Sunday") to Krautrock-influenced anthems ("Adriane in Wonderland"), in the process channeling the joyful energy of his legendary live shows more than any of his film work to date.

Both of Deacon's prior soundtrack albums, *Rat Film* (2017) and *Time Trial* (2018), crafted sonic landscapes to match those films' challenging experimental forms and narrative intensity. Stern's documentary strikes a lighter tone, welcoming viewers into a world where prizes are awarded not for shearing dogs to meet conventional beauty standards, but rather for transforming them into flamboyant living art objects. This often funny and largely upbeat subject matter offered Deacon an opportunity to compose with more playful tones and organic instrumentation. In finding his way into a documentary where dog owners mold their canine companions into everything from giant roosters to *Alice in Wonderland* characters by way of Tim Burton, Deacon developed an affinity for its creative groomers—or folk artists, as he sees them. He related to developing a creative outlet that reflects their unique setting, skill set, and materials at hand; their consuming need to compete; and their self-identification within a community that may baffle outsiders and even at times face harsh critiques.

This common ground guided Deacon's process for *Well Groomed*. Setting aside the digitally driven player-piano and robotic drums central to *Mystic Familiar*, Deacon hand-picked a new quintet comprised of impact-focused sounds, piano and guitar meeting mallet-driven vibraphones and

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glockenspiel. In selecting musicians, Deacon prioritized gifted improvisers capable of raw, spontaneous passages that could conjure dogs' swift shifts from resting state to ecstatic play. Some of these players have appeared before in Deacon's discography: pianist M.C. Schmidt hails from experimental duo *Matmos*, to whose album *Ultimate Care II* Deacon contributed; vibraphonist Rich O'Meara appears on *Bromst* and *America*; and guitarist Steve Strohmeier played on *Rat Film*. But none of them had recorded with each other before. This newness, coupled with the verbal, Fluxus-influenced improvisation instructions that Deacon used in place of sheet music, nurtured an intentionally loose, exploratory conversation of instruments. Deacon recorded each player in isolation so he could later chop up and recombine any single-instrument phrase like a sample, slowly composing a whole new animal bit by bit.

As song titles like "Snip Snip" and "Jurassic Bark" suggest, the resulting music unmistakably springs from the imagination of the same Dan Deacon that gave us "When I Was Done Dying" and "Sat by a Tree." With great feeling, they also tell us a story—from the groomer getting lost in her craft in "When They Are in Color" to the ramping up of competition in "Super Zoo" and the both terrifying and exhilarating moment where you have to consider your work done and serve it up for judgment in "Scissors Down." Like the film into which it's woven, *Well Groomed* conjures a vivid swath of Americana, brimming with rainbows of braided fur and the wide-eyed spontaneity of a newborn puppy.

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