

How Synth-Pop Icons Depeche Mode Helped a Brazilian Superfan Come Out

In the new documentary "Spirits in the Forest," a gay disciple pays tribute to his own personal Jesuses.

[Carla Hay](#) 11/19/2019

Concert documentaries are usually vanity showcases for the artists, but British synth-pop band Depeche Mode have flipped the script for their new doc, casting the spotlight not on themselves but on six lucky superfans from around the world.

Depeche Mode: Spirits in the Forest, which will play in cinemas worldwide for one night only on November 21, was directed by longtime Depeche Mode collaborator Anton Corbijn and filmed at Waldbühne ("Forest Stage") in Berlin. The movie features footage from the final shows of the band's 2017-2018 Global Spirit tour, but nearly half of it consists of intimate profiles of the six fans, who each share how Depeche Mode has had a profound effect on their lives. One of its most compelling stories is from Brazilian-born, Berlin-based Daniel Cassus, who discusses how the group's music helped him come out.

Depeche Mode - "SPIRITS In The Forest" (60 second trailer)



Depeche Mode has had strong ties to the LGBTQ community since the band formed in 1980. Their 1984 hit "People Are People" became a queer-rights anthem, and while Glenn Hughes of the Village People campily represented the gay leather scene, and Frankie Goes to Hollywood cheekily told people to "Relax," Depeche Mode served up the ultimate tribute to BDSM realness with their controversial 1984 single "Master and Servant."

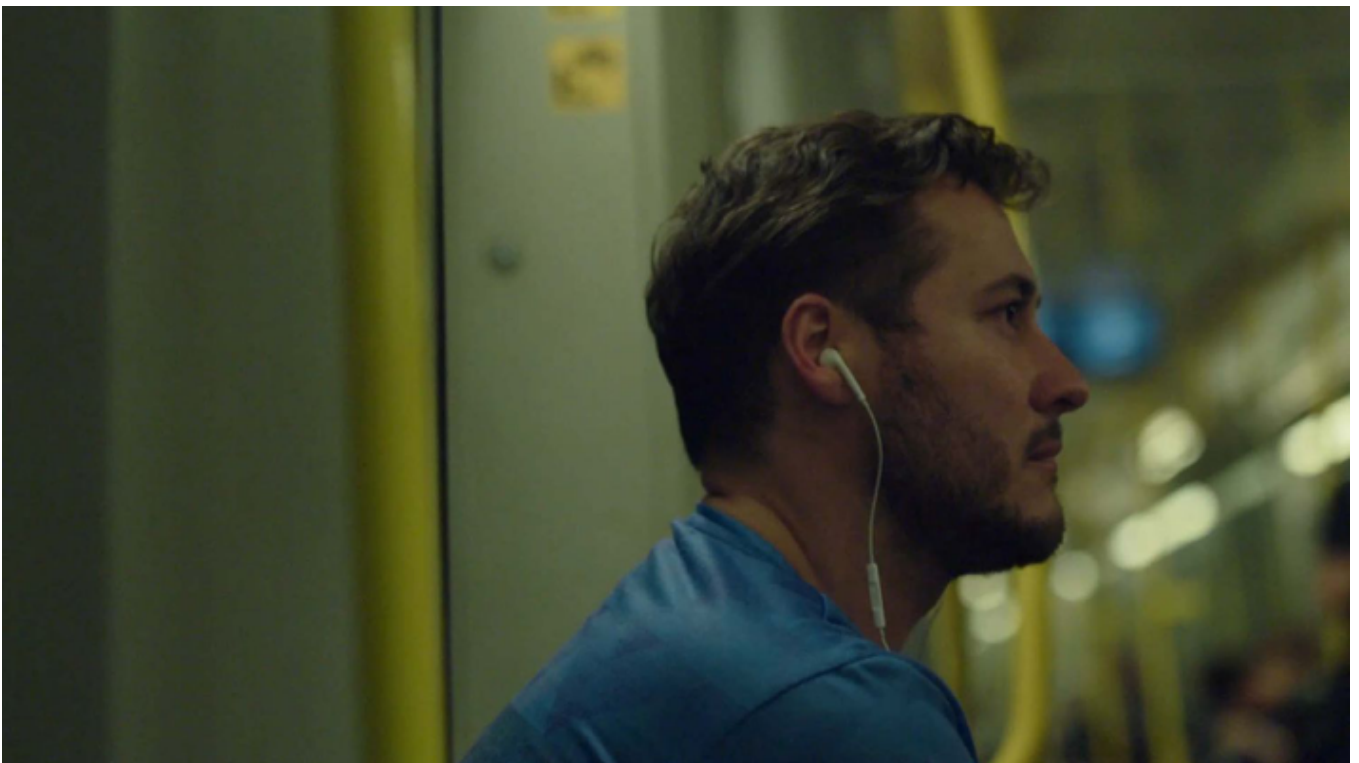


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Depeche Mode in 1982.

Now that their followers from the '80s and '90s are all grown up (and even bringing their kids to DM concerts), the group's shows have shifted, becoming more family-friendly. But if many fans are there to sing and dance along to upbeat gems like "Just Can't Get Enough" and "Enjoy the Silence," others see their music as a form of solace, a way of working through personal issues and turmoil.

Cassus, who came out in his mid-20s, struggled with being closeted in his native Brazil, a country restricted by many anti-LGBTQ laws. He says Depeche Mode's songs led him to question everything he believed about sex, lust, and religion.



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Daniel Cassus in Depeche Mode: Spirits in the Forest.

"Their lyrics started to speak to me," he tells *NewNowNext*. "Hey, you can be whatever you want. If you don't fit in with what they expect of you, it's not your problem. It's theirs!"

The other fans profiled in the documentary are Indra Amarjargal from Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia; Liz Dwyer from Los Angeles; Cristian Flueraru from Bucharest, Romania; Carine Puzenat from Perpignan, France; and Dicken Schrader, originally from Bogotá, Colombia, and currently living in New York City. Schrader became a YouTube celebrity when he, his daughter, and his son formed the Depeche Mode cover band DMK in 2010 and their videos went viral. His kids, who are now teenagers, also appear in the film.

The six superfans were chosen for *Spirits in the Forest* after participating in Depeche Mode's "Takeover" promotion in 2017, when the band had a different fan curate posts on its Facebook page every day for a year after the release of their *Spirit* album. Fans were then asked to film a short video of themselves describing their "Takeover" experiences;

unbeknownst to them, those videos were auditions for the documentary.



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(L-R): Carine Puzenat, Liz Dwyer, Daniel Cassus, and Cristian Flueraru in Depeche Mode: Spirits in the Forest.

In the movie fans address the challenges they've faced in their lives. At age 25, Puzenat was in a car accident that left her with amnesia except for her memories of Depeche Mode, and her recovery was challenging. Now a middle-aged mother, she frequently battles depression. Flueraru lives in a country where getting access to Depeche Mode's music was difficult and somewhat taboo. Dwyer, a divorced biracial mother of two teenage sons, survived breast cancer, using the group's music as her emotional therapy. She has also dealt with racism from people who think Depeche Mode fans are supposed to be white.

Cassus says in the film that one of the reasons his family was homophobic was because his father's brother died of AIDS-related complications in the early '90s, when many people had the misconception that it was a "gay disease." While living in Germany as a post-graduate college student, Cassus met a man named Philipp on a

dating app. They've been together for seven years, and Cassus says his family has completely accepted him and Philipp. However, earning their acceptance was a tough process, and Cassus still worries about the rampant homophobia in his home country. "There's a lot of violence against LGBT people in Brazil," he says, "but we can hope things will get better."

Being a gay Depeche Mode fan has helped Cassus connect with fellow disciples in unexpected ways. "I'd bring Depeche Mode up as a subject when trying to make small talk to DJs at gay clubs," he says. "I once managed to get late DJ and producer Peter Rauhofer chatting with me while he was playing—which is the opposite of how he used to be: silent and moody—because I passed him by and mentioned remixes he had done for Depeche Mode. He even pulled his remix of 'It's No Good' out of his crate because I brought it up. I've made quite a few friendships among DJs in gay clubs because of Depeche Mode. They're a band with well-earned respect in the club scene."



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Members Martin Gore (left) and Dave Gahan in Depeche Mode: Spirits in the Forest.

Cassus says that filming his segments of the documentary took about five or six days, and he was even able to spend a brief moment with member Martin Gore backstage before a show, when he cordially thanked the fans for participating in the documentary. The scene didn't make the final cut, but Cassus isn't sure it needed to be included.

"After watching the film, I realized that it was good that there's not footage of us interacting outside of a crowd-stage relationship," Cassus says. "There's more focus on our stories, which almost anyone can relate to, and then there's the band on stage proving why we are their devotees."

He adds that seeing the documentary made him very emotional. "I pretty much cried," Cassus says. "This movie is not so much about fandom, but about being human."

[Depeche Mode: Spirits in the Forest](#) *hits cinemas worldwide November 21.*

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