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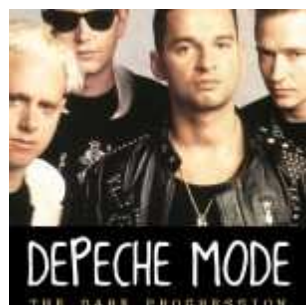
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Browse > [Home](#) / [MP3s, Concerts, DVDs, and More](#) / Depeche Mode - The Dark Progression DVD

Depeche Mode - The Dark Progression DVD

June 25, 2009 by [Adam Costa](#)

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Depeche Mode - The
Dark Progression DVD

You've got to have some serious chutzpah to even consider encapsulating an influential band's 30 year career into a 95 minute documentary (an unauthorized one, no less). More audacious still, is the choice to pursue said documentary without the blessings of the band in question. When the band happens to be Depeche Mode - perhaps the most brilliant electronica act of all time - this move might seem even more ludicrous, given the group's storied personnel changes, frequent image makeovers, and harrowing personal battles with rock star excesses that nearly tore them apart. With 12 studio albums as epic as the stadium shows they continue to sell

out to this day, one might be expecting a Beatles-esque multi-volume boxed set that breaks down each song and subsequent synthesizer drone with obsessive analysis. *The Dark Progression* does indeed dabble with the minutiae of Depeche Mode's music, but only by condensing their first 5 years into a half hour of footage and ignoring the past 14 as though they were just an epilogue to a career that officially flamed out in 1995 when Alan Wilder left the band and frontman Dave Gahan was injecting a nearly lethal dose of heroin into his bloodstream.

The Dark Progression is fairly formulaic in its presentation. Moving along in a chronological fashion that stretches back to the dawn of the 1980's when Vince Clarke, Martin Gore, and Andy Fletcher were first flirting with their own take on *New Romanticism*, a pattern is quickly setup in which the band's evolution is categorized and compartmentalized based on the major themes of each album release. *Speak & Spell* was the sound of a band finding its footing in a land overpopulated with New Wave acts. *Construction Time Again* is where the group first hinted at the influence to be found in the industrial textures of German industrial pioneers like Kraftwerk. By the time *Music For The Masses* dropped in 1987, Depeche Mode was functioning at the zenith of its powers, performing for massive audiences on both sides of the pond and even playing to a capacity crowd at the Rose Bowl.

Considering the unauthorized nature of the film, it should come as no surprise that in lieu of fresh commentary from the members of Depeche Mode, most of the interviews are conducted with electronic music aficionados (Mark Prendergast and Thomas Dolby), studio engineers (Dave Bascombe and Daniel Miller), and other musicians of the electronic ilk (Gary Numan and OMD's Andy McKluskey). Suffice it to say, much of the perspective here is of a technical slant; for all the time spent crediting Depeche Mode's quests for studio perfection and originality, little attention is given to the relationships between band members, the songwriting process, or even the inspirational ideas that led to the creation of certain songs.

But as you listen to the barrage of techie talk from some very thickly-accented British men, you can't help but marvel at just how much thought DM actually put into pushing the envelope on their sound without alienating or rejecting their core fanbase. Perhaps miraculously, Depeche Mode were able to take the quirky bounciness of synth pop and steadily mold it into a far more shadowy creature that electrified both longtime fans and first time listeners. The film shows this most notably in its comprehensive coverage of *Black Celebration*, where Depeche Mode embraced life's darker side full on against a metallic clatter of keyboards and percussion. Until the release of *Songs Of Faith & Devotion*, *The Dark Progression* suggests a group that, despite some anxiety, adapts remarkably well to fame and the pressures that come with it. The songs got bolder, the tours got larger, and the influences were more diverse. This is most obvious in the footage chronicling the aforementioned release of 1993, in which Gahan – long hair and goatee in place – takes on the appearance of a grunge god while his band mates dig deeper into guitar-based rock.

With Depeche Mode having been gradually returning to form ever since 1997's *Ultra*, it is certainly disappointing that the producers of the film chose to mark the subsequent studio releases (2001's *Exciter*, 2005's *Playing The Angel*, and this year's *Sounds Of The Universe*) as a footnote on an epic journey to popular music's upper echelon. And on a trivial but no less frustrating note: where the hell is Andy Fletcher? The most reclusive member of the Mode barely even gets name checked after the first few minutes of the film.

The Dark Progression is certainly an uneven affair, but for those who just fancy an examination of what many regard to be Depeche Mode's most fruitful period (*Black Celebration* through *Songs Of Faith & Devotion*), this low budget music history lesson delivers.

[Depeche Mode](#)

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