As one of the defining indie-rock bands of the 21st century, Death Cab for Cutie have spent the last 30 years defying every possible expectation.

Formed in 1997 in Bellingham, Washington, Death Cab for Cutie were initially the quintessential underdog college-radio act, anchored by co-founder, frontman, and lead songwriter Ben Gibbard's achingly earnest, erudite (yet still accessible) lyricism that drew inspiration from '80s alternative tastemakers The Smiths, The Cure, second-wave emo progenitors Sunny Day Real Estate, lo-fi acoustic hero Elliott Smith, Northwest contemporaries Modest Mouse, and introspective rock heads Built To Spill.

Still, given the overwhelming cultural significance of the 2000s indie-rock scene, Gibbard (and his legions of young fans) had no reason to expect that DCfC, despite their instant-classic, magnetic, pop-curious melodies, would transcend this particular moment in time, one marked by a groundswell of mainstream interest in the once-tiny indie-rock subculture.

Nearly three decades after Gibbard recorded his bare-bones debut cassette, *You Can Play These Songs With Chords*, and completed the DCfC lineup comprising original guitarist and producer Chris Walla (later replaced by Dave Depper on guitar and Zac Rae on keyboards), bassist Nick Harmer, and drummer Jason McGerr, DCfC have grown from underground indie contenders to pillars of the modern alternative-rock landscape.

"I'm as shocked as anybody that I'm still doing this," Gibbard says as he surveys the scope of his career. "Coming out of the '90s, I just thought the idea of having a career playing indie rock was pretty laughable. I always kind of thought that this would be something that I would do for a period of my life, and then I'd have to go back to grad school or something."

Not only did Gibbard's onetime passion project blossom into a full-fledged music career — complete with an enviable catalog of ten studio albums (three of which have been platinum-certified), seven EPs, and eight Grammy nominations — it became the very soundtrack to fans' lives. In 2021, Gibbard and DCfC were honored as one of the 200 Most Important Artists of Pitchfork's First 25 Years.

After developing a loyal underground following via their first three albums, 1998's *Something About Airplanes*, 2000's *We Have The Facts and We're Voting Yes* (later voted #27 on Pitchfork's The 50 Best Indie Rock Albums of the Pacific Northwest), and 2001's *The Photo Album*, DCfC broke into mainstream consciousness with 2003's era-defining, platinum-certified album *Transatlanticism*, home to aughts classics such as "The New Year," "Title and Registration," and "The Sound of Settling," which would go on to be named by NPR as one of "The Decade's 50 Most Important Recordings and place on Rolling Stone's 100 Best Albums of the 2000s.

As DCfC's profile grew, bolstered by a prominent guest appearance on the popular teen drama *The OC*, Gibbard and the group transitioned from the indie incubator Barsuk Records to major label Atlantic Records, on which they released their Platinum-certified, Grammy-nominated (for

Best Alternative Album) 2005 project, *Plans*, which featured chart-topping singles “Soul Meets Body” and “I Will Follow You into the Dark,” the latter of which was also honored with a GRAMMY nod (Best Pop Performance By Duo Or Group With Vocals).

Over the next two decades, DCfC would release five more beloved albums, beginning with 2008’s *Narrow Stairs*, 2011’s *Codes and Keys*, 2015’s *Kintsugi* (each received GRAMMY nominations), 2018’s *Thank You For Today*, whose lead single “Gold Rush” hit No. 1 on both the Alternative and Adult Alternative radio charts. 2022’s *Asphalt Meadows*, whose singles "Here To Forever" and "Pepper" became the band's seventh and eighth No. 1s (respectively) on the Adult Alternative Airplay chart.

In 2019, the band subverted genre expectations when they hopped on Chance the Rapper’s track “Do You Remember (ft. Death Cab for Cutie).” Two years later, Gibbard teamed up with ambient songwriter Tycho on the joint single, “Only Love.” Meanwhile, in 2016, Gibbard wrote a song called "Me & Magdalena" for classic '60s boy band The Monkees. The track appeared on The Monkees' album *Good Times!* and was ranked *Rolling Stone*'s 18th best song of that year.

A prolific songwriter, curator, performer, and philanthropist, Gibbard has always found time to weave in creative projects between DCfC albums. In 2004, DCfC supported Pearl Jam as part of the Vote for Change Tour and contributed a track to the Dave Eggers-curated compilation album, *The Future Soundtrack for America*. Their political activism continued in 2008 when they performed at the Democratic National Convention in Denver. A few years later, Gibbard became the first person to write an essay for the *90 Days, 90 Reasons* project. In 2016, DCfC's anti-Trump song, "Million Dollar Loan," launched *30 Days, 30 Songs*, and in 2020, they contributed a track to the *Good Music To Avert the Collapse of American Democracy* compilation, which raised funds for voters' rights organizations ahead of that year’s election.

Meanwhile, as the COVID-19 pandemic upended the music industry in early 2020, Gibbard hosted regular livestreaming events from his own home, which brought an enormous amount of comfort to fans still trapped at home in an uncertain time and raised over $250K in donations and supplies for various Seattle-area organizations. Later that year, DCfC released the five-song *Georgia* EP featuring covers of artists from the state of Georgia; the EP raised over $100K for Fair Fight Action, the national voting rights organization founded by Stacey Abrams.

In February 2022, Gibbard conceived, curated, and executive-produced *Ocean Child: Songs of Yoko Ono*, an acclaimed tribute to the groundbreaking singer, songwriter, multimedia artist, and activist released in celebration of her 89th birthday. The collection – which included DCfC’s own cover of “Waiting For The Sunrise” – also featured contributions from a wide range of artists, including David Byrne, Japanese Breakfast, the Flaming Lips, and Sharon Van Etten.

In the last five years, Death Cab for Cutie have taken much-deserved victory laps across the country to celebrate the 20th anniversaries of *Transatlanticism* and *Plans*, the former of which also reunited Gibbard with his bestselling supergroup, The Postal Service. Both tours landed with a splash; the Transatlanticism 20th Anniversary Tour sold 400,000 tickets in North America

alone (2023-2024) and included two sold-out nights at NYC's Madison Square Garden and three at LA's Hollywood Bowl. Additionally, they headlined festivals such as Kilby Court in Salt Lake City, Just Like Heaven in Los Angeles, Chicago's Riot Fest, and London's venerable All Points East. Reflecting on DCfC's longevity and the way its music has touched so many lives, Gibbard says: "Music is a time machine. It's this thing that takes you back to places in your life. And I think that when you write earnest music in a way that soundtracks moments in people's lives, they tend to come see you play some 20 years later."

Gibbard continues: "If someone comes up to me and tells me a story about how something that I've written has impacted them or has marked time in their life, it sounds kind of hokey, but it really is one of the greatest compliments you can be given."

As DCfC get prepare to enter a new era, complete with a return to their indie roots by joining ANTI- Records and readying new music for 2026, Gibbard opens up about what inspires him to keep creating and evolving as an artist. "I just love the feeling of being in a room having just made something that I'm proud of. I can't imagine wanting to do anything else," Gibbard says. "This is literally what I've wanted to do since I was 12 years old. And the fact that I've been given the opportunity to do it, I feel that I have an obligation to my 12-year-old self to continue to do this and find the joy in it, and to experience the odd wonder of what it's like to create things."