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### Composer Desmond Child and partner Curtis Shaw: Gay people can be parents, too

BY STEVE ROTH AUS, [srothaus@MiamiHerald.com](mailto:srothaus@MiamiHerald.com)

Miami pop composer [Desmond Child](#) had one of his biggest hits with Ricky Martin's 1999 worldwide smash, *Living 'la Vida Loca*. Now nearly 60, Child's personal life has become anything but.

He and Curtis Shaw, partners for 24 years, live in suburban Nashville where they're raising twin sons, born almost 11 years ago at Mount Sinai Medical Center in Miami Beach. The boys are the subject of a new documentary, *TWO: The Story of Roman and Nyro*, to be premiered Tuesday at the 15th annual Miami Gay & Lesbian Film Festival.

"Why did we do it?" Child says rhetorically about authorizing such a personal film about their family. "We felt it was a way we could help straight people understand — and have gay people see that it is possible — that they could live and be parents and have that kind of joy in their lives."

Child and Shaw were together about a dozen years when they decided to start a family.

"I had been watching the news," Child recalls. "George Bush was trying to kill the gay marriages and what not. He went on TV and said, 'I don't know why they want to get married. They can't have children. Well people who are infertile still want to get married. Should that bar them from getting married? We're not infertile. We can have children. We are having children. There are thousands of children being born biologically to gay parents. It's not just about adopting children."

Child, 59, said the argument still could be heard in March during gay-marriage hearings at the U.S. Supreme Court. "Why don't they stop talking about procreation? We're procreating! End of discussion America!"

Born in Gainesville and raised in Miami Beach, he has been out of the closet since 1979 when his band at the time, Desmond Child & Rouge, released its second album, *Runners in the Night*. A track on the album, *The Truth Comes Out*, "was my exuberant coming-out song," Child said.

He soon shifted from performing to composing. He has written and produced huge hits for Martin, Bon Jovi (*Living on a Prayer*), Cher (*We All Sleep Alone*) and Joan Jett (*I Hate Myself for Loving You*).

In 1989, Child met Shaw, then a 27-year-old aspiring actor from Columbia, Mo., working as a maitre d' in a New York City restaurant. They became partners and Shaw moved with Child to California and later Miami Beach.

"I don't think of myself at all as a public person," Shaw said. "It's mostly Desmond, but he's not so much a recognizable person. He'll show up and go to a red carpet. I've been on a couple of red carpets. We do have friends who are superstars and we've had a window into their world and understand the pros and cons."

The couple briefly split in the late '90s and Shaw moved to Nashville. "We separated but we talked twice a day. What kind of separation is that?" Child said. "We reconciled a year later. All our friends sat us down together and said 'We're freaking out, we can't stand it. You have to get together again. It was like an intervention: 'Stop this crazy midlife crisis!' It was the first time we listened to our friends. And I'm glad we did. We're perfect together."

Back together, Child and Shaw decided to have children. "After the reconciliation, we said 'Let's do this, let's have the family we always wanted.'"

They worked with Miami Beach family lawyer [Elizabeth Schwartz](#) and [Growing Generations](#), a Los Angeles company that helps gay men become parents.

The son of Cuban singer Elena Casals, who died in 2012, Child said he himself came from "an alternative family." At 18, he learned that his biological father was not the man married to his mother when he was born in 1953.

Child said it was "very important to me to have my own biological children."

"I'm away a lot. I'm in New York, LA or Miami," he said. "I needed the biological connection because I wouldn't be the stay-at-home parent."

Shaw, one of four sons born to a conservative Christian mother and a Missouri schools superintendent, says it didn't matter to him whether he was biologically connected to their children.

"I just knew before it even happened, before we became parents, it wouldn't make any difference. I would love the child and he would love me," said Shaw, who adopted the boys in California. "It's just so pure. As soon as you hold a baby in your arms, how could you not bond? Biology doesn't make a difference. No paper would legitimize what I already felt inside. I already knew I was these kids' parent."

Child and Shaw selected eggs from an anonymous donor and asked their close friend, Angela Whittaker, to be gestational surrogate. On the second attempt, she became pregnant with two implanted embryos.

Roman and Nyro Child were born May 8, 2002, in Miami Beach. Child (called "Daddy") and Shaw ("Papa") decided to raise the boys in Tennessee — "the belt buckle of the Bible Belt," Shaw said.

"He's made the sacrifice to let us be where we want to be," Shaw says of Child. "I prefer Nashville to anywhere else we've lived. The kids do, too. It's easier, people are nice. If I'm less stressed out, things run more smoothly."

The family lives on "eight acres we've collected over the years," Shaw said. "The kids share a room, they're in the same class at school and the same soccer team. Both take guitar and piano lessons, and Spanish



Roman, Desmond Child, Curtis Shaw and Nyro walk Frank in South Beach. C.W. Griffin / Miami Herald Staff.

lessons.”

The dads and their sons remain close to Whittaker and her mother. “We believe we’re part of the same family,” Shaw said.

From the start, Child, Shaw and Whittaker documented their journey on video. These “home movies” became the basis for the documentary.

“Being handed 300 hours of footage is a daunting challenge to say the least,” said *TWO* director and producer Heather Winters, who also grew up in Miami Beach.

A centerpiece of the film: Superstar singer Jon Bon Jovi, one of the boys’ two godfathers, blesses the babies in 2002 by reading a poem he wrote called *Two*, which would become the title of the documentary.

Winters, the mother of two sons, ages 7 and 15, said she’s impressed with the Shaw and Child’s parenting skills.

“They’re raising their children the way I hope all parents raise their children, the way I raised my two boys. To realize that people are different and there’s no one way to love or do things. That’s what makes life and being human so important. That’s one of the universal messages of our film.”

“It’s about a modern family, but it’s about the ultimate triumph of love,” she said. “There have been other films about gay dads. What makes it different is that I wanted to tell it from the perspective of the children.”

Nyro and Roman are bright, precocious and a bit uncomfortable promoting the film.

“Too many questions,” Nyro said. “No offense, but I don’t like being interviewed.”

Roman thinks the film is “pretty cool” and so is its message: “Everybody has rights. They should just be inspired by this movie. People say gay parents can’t have children and we proved them wrong.”



Dads Curtis Shaw and Desmond Child with sons Roman and Nyro, and dog Frank in South Beach.  
C.W. Griffin / Miami Herald Staff.

## IF YOU GO

What: *TWO: The Story of Roman and Nyro*

When: 8 p.m. Tuesday

Where: Colony Theatre, 1040 Lincoln Rd., Miami Beach

Tickets: \$15 film only, \$25 party only, \$30 film and party

The Miami Gay & Lesbian Film Festival runs through May 5.

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