

in EMF

They're dishing out something a little less cheesy, a little more believable

Out of the secondary silence that comes like an all-too-brief respite between the high-intensity chords of EMF's latest album, *Stigma*, swells a rising chorus of harmonious voices. Deep in form and rich in unity, the methodical chants are spell-binding. Just as this stirring sound nears its pinnacle, though, a singularly recognizable tone emerges from the vocal mass, desperate and defiant in its forceful proclamation.

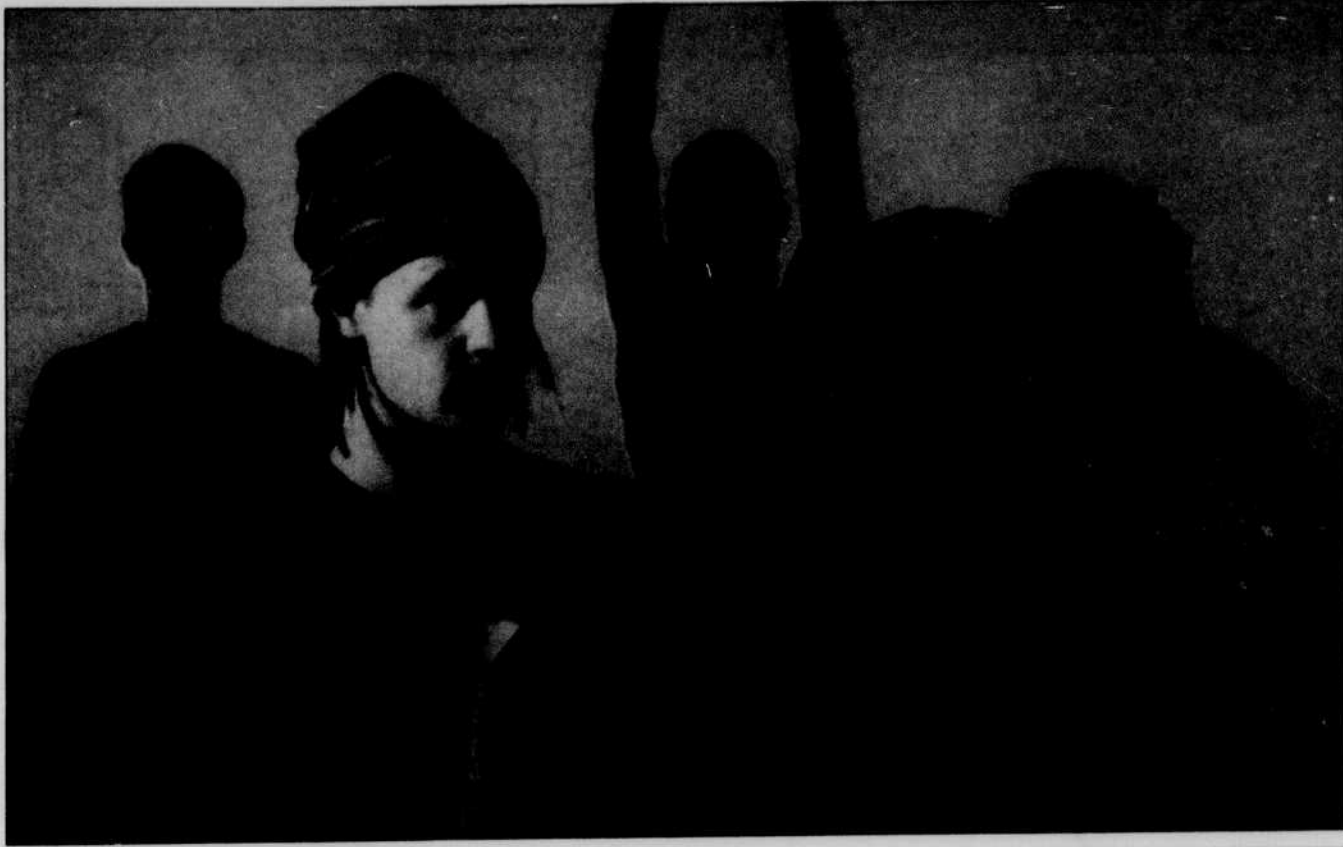
"Time is what I want," he says. But then time runs out, and the hard-edged riffs of brutal reality reach out to slap you right in the face.

"We needed something in the chorus of ['Blue Highs'] and I had this record of Bulgarian chants," Ian Dench, lead-guitarist and songwriter for EMF, says from the cozy confines of his Leeds hotel room. "So I put this record on... and just ran the track to see if anything sounded right at the beginning of this record. It fit perfectly with the track — perfect in time, perfect in key, all the chord changes — and we thought, 'Shit, there's something going on here.' So we put it straight down on the record."

It seems rather obvious that something definitely is going on here, that these overnight British sensations haven't quite fallen into the formulaic void of pop-conformity that tempts so many one-hit-wonder acts with its irresistible appeal of chart-topping success. EMF, in fact, seems determined to shed its Top 10, New-Kids-on-the-Limey-Block image with a vengeance. As the refrain of *Stigma*'s opening track goes, "they're here," and this time, they've got something to prove.

"It was a difficult time writing the album because it was so self-conscious," Dench says. "It was like, 'Who are we? What are we doing?' We had to just shrug off the pressure to write another 'Unbelievable' and do our own thing."

"[The album] is kind of autobiographical in a way. *Schubert Dip* was done at a time



By *Alison Miller, Daily Pennsylvanian, U. of Pennsylvania*

when we had no responsibilities... it was all energy and excitement about being in a band. *Stigma* is kind of dealing with what we've been through over the last two years and how it's become a way of life."

In fact, EMF appears to take a bit of a defensive stand against critics who decried the instant applause showered on the band following its first release.

To this end, the carefully crafted songs on *Stigma* serve as answers meant to silence the still-skeptical purists of alternative music. Even the album's less-than-subtle title pro-

vides a clue to EMF's opinion of its recent exposure to the studio and withering glare of the mass-culture spotlight. "I guess [the name is] kind of having to live up to people's misconceptions about the band," Dench admits. "Some people still write us off as some shallow pop band; they haven't listened."

EMF's calmed-down, second-time-around approach to studio recording, coupled with a much clearer sense of its intended musical direction, allowed the band to explore freely the boundless limits of its style while recording *Stigma*. The band had all the time it needed to finish the experiment.

"Another problem with *Schubert Dip* was that we were rushed in doing it; we worked with producers and just didn't have the confidence to stick up for our beliefs in some ways," Dench says. "It was a bit of a compromise. But on this one, it's like we know how we want to sound now... we're just capturing that sort of live energy."

"We're working more as a band, and maturing, and we're kind of getting into it more," he says decisively. "We developed more control over this album. It's kind of like our first album; it feels like our first album."

Ironically, though, the band's staunch determination to gain critical and artistic approval may have alienated it

from an essential legion of its original fans — the teenybopper set.

"I think [the album] threw some people, some of the teen press that say, 'Oh, they turned their back on their exciting stuff and they got old and boring,'" admits Dench with a hint of droll British sarcasm

"Hey, look, we go deeper than that. We're authentic."

in his voice. "Well, fair enough. I guess some people who liked us being a pop band or whatever don't like us to develop away from that."

"So many rubbish songs go to number one. It's not really a recommendation for a song to go to number one and for a band to have immediate chart success with our kind of background. Some people write you off for that, though 'Unbelievable' was an excellent song."

Thus despite the obvious appeal of churning out mindlessly robotic-sounding singles, Dench professes EMF would much rather earn success during the longer rafter of its career. "I don't always want to do this 'heart of the top thing' too much," he says.

That may mean giving up the mass saw-it-on-MTV following of fans who come with being at the top of the charts with a song like "Unbelievable." But Dench doesn't seem to mind, especially if the band makes itself and its music a little more believable along the way.

"If there's anything we should steer clear of, it's obvious single material," he says emphatically, "'cause if there's something we feel uncomfortable with, it's a jolly upbeat pop record. We just wanted to make a sort of statement: 'Hey, look, we go deeper than that. We're authentic.'" 