

in

Depeche

of

The reinvention

Is it possible to reinvent your sound after making music for more than 13 years? Depeche Mode may have managed to do just that on its 10th album, *Songs of Faith and Devotion*.

"We never really want to repeat ourselves," says 31-year-old keyboardist Andrew Fletcher. "We were very conscious that the last album was such a success. This album is much looser and is less programmed."

Essentially, *Songs* is kind of a mid-life musical crisis for DeMode. Just a few years ago, the British foursome graced every teen magazine cover on the newsstand. But the new songs carefully take apart the concept of Depeche as mere Euro-pop pinups. From the harsh shrieking sound on the opening of "I Feel You," the group is telling its audience it's time to wake up. While a severe call to arms is necessary after a three-year hiatus, *Songs* also must be interpreted as a transformation for the group. With its full musical spectrum sound, this album is the antithesis of the synth-pop beats that first gave the band notoriety.

"Who we appeal to surprises us," Fletcher says. "Very early on in our career, we did a lot of teen magazines. We wanted to aim for a particular audience. Now, we try not to aim at any audience. We make music for ourselves and whoever likes it, likes it."

That music has metamorphosed, and Depeche Mode is hoping the audience who likes it may well have done the same. *Songs* marks the first time that Fletcher, lead vocalist David Gahan, songwriter Martin Gore and keyboardist Alan Wilder have worked with outside musicians.

"Our producer, Flood (U2, Nine Inch Nails), encouraged us to change all of our rules about sounds and instruments," Fletcher says. "He convinced us to use strings and gospel singers."

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Fletcher says the group always has been hesitant to allow other participants to enter its small circle. "Martin was very against the idea," he says. "He always felt that every sound should be produced by us or it wouldn't be soulful. I think those [outside] influences play key roles on this album."

The British group, whose first album was released in 1981, is among the most influential in the arena of elec-



By Rob Hooper, *University Times*, California State U., Los Angeles

tronic-based music. It was not until "Personal Jesus," a dance track from *Violator*, that Depeche even began to incorporate guitars into its songs. "I Feel You," the first single from *Songs*, relies heavily on scathing guitar riffs to carry its aggressive sound. "It's not very representative of the rest of the album," Fletcher adds.

The song, in fact, seems inconsistent among the merry-go-round of mood swings evident on the remaining nine tracks. It is also the only commercially accessible cut on the new album. "I think there's a lot that grows on you on this album," Fletcher says. "It takes time. It's not an instant album."

Some standard Depeche ingredients do exist on the new album. The music, at times, leaves the listener with a feeling of impending doom much like 1985's *Black Celebration*.

Songs like "Higher Love" and the gospel-flavored "Get Right With Me" convey a positive outlook not typical of Gore's often morose world view.

Fletcher says *Songs* represents both a personal and professional coming-of-age for the group's members. He and Gore both became fathers while the album was being recorded. Wilder, who oversees the production aspects with Flood, tested the use of live drums on many of the songs. "He's been working out lately because he hasn't drummed in years," Fletcher says with a laugh.

For Gahan, this work showcases an exceptional amount of vocal growth. "Dave went through tremendous emotional traumas," Fletcher says. "His big release was definitely through the vocals on this album. Whereas before he was perhaps a bit lazy, he really applied himself this time. He put a lot more emotion into his voice and is singing perhaps the best he's ever sung before."

Whether or not this album achieves the commercial success of the last, its breadth of change should appeal to the college audience that has long supported the group. *Songs* adheres to the Depeche formula for releasing only quality material.

And the group is looking forward to a lengthy world tour to showcase that quality. Beginning in Europe this summer and arriving in the United States by the fall, the show will make use of the guitars, live drums and gospel sounds heard on the new album.

"There's a special atmosphere created in a live setting," he says. "I don't know if it's just because our music tends to transfer well to a live situation or not. You'd think that it would not. People are so used to seeing the same type of band on stage. We just look a bit different, I guess."

He adds with a laugh, "This time we want to look just like a standard rock band."

A new sound is born with *Faith and Devotion*

★★★★

To say that *Songs of Faith and Devotion* is a new beginning for Depeche Mode would be to downplay the quality of its last few albums. This new effort matches 1990's *Violator* in production quality but surpasses it with a series of lyrical punches.

The major themes here deal with sex and religion, which are not new to lyricist Martin Gore. Those topics find their way into almost all of his songs.

Where *Songs* differs from other Depeche projects is in Gore's newly found succinct writing style. From the hopeless devotion and uncertainty of "In Your Room" to the positive redemption of "Get Right With Me," Gore leaves you craving

more songs.

Be warned, though, because the first single, "I Feel You," is nothing like the rest of the album. Its fast pace and heavy guitar riffs bear no resemblance to the moodiness of the nine other tracks.

Although the group has been criticized in the past for its gloomy approach, this album contains many positive lyrics camouflaged by sullen instrumentation.

The combination is intriguing because what seems contradictory at first ends up sounding so natural and effortless. This album may not grab you instantly; its hook is found after repeated listenings. — Rob Hooper