

# EMF



EMF! Wow! Saw the videos, heard the unbelievable single that was such a huge hit in America, talked to their polite youngish guitarist (he's either 23 or 2) in their louverly hotel. I sat across the breakfast table from him in a dining room empty apart from one vacuuming cleaner and helped him feel at ease by watching him eat breakfast.

"Excuse me — you don't mind me chomping do you?"

I assured him I didn't mind him eating his two softish perfectly formed fried eggs and tomato, bacon and continental sausages with toast and those little plastic container things of vegemite and jam and coffee. Just thought you'd like to know.

Ian Dench was surprisingly together considering he had had only five or six hours sleep after a pretty hectic American tour which involved (if one believes the stories) some serious drinkin' and partyin' with PWEI. In the UK, however, EMF have been perceived as a kind of New Kids On The Block teen girl's pin-up band and attract harassment from young girls even at press interviews. This seems to be an interpretation they are not exactly comfortable with.

Are you guys teen idols?

"I guess we are teen idols to some people, unwitting teen idols, we're a real band, a rock band really. We never had any intention to be teen idols and to a great extent don't like it."

At this point Ian is visibly squirming so I decided to push the point.

You don't like it?

"Well, no, you get young girls turning up to your gigs 'cos they've seen you in a magazine. I'd prefer older audiences any day 'cos they're into the music and into stage diving and all that kind of stuff which is cool, and those are always the better gigs."

But having said that I don't want to

be mean to young people 'cos they can like whatever music they like and I was a teenager once and in a way it's an education. Some of these people come to our gigs and the poor things queue up early and rush to the front and then get crushed 'cos of all the moshers behind them. They come out loving it and sweating and saying 'Oh, I've never seen anything like it' 'cos you can imagine a young teenage person going to see some pop act and it's all very tame and then they come and see us."

That's what happened to me when I was young, I got dragged along to see a couple of gigs and they were pretty polite. I went to see the Damned once and I was right down the front 'cos it was just so inspiring and I got hooked on punk rock after that."

Blimey, EMF as punk rockers? Is ability more important to EMF or attitude?

"Bit of both really. You can't give expression to one without the other, attitude is pretty important. The whole thing about rock music is that you don't need a lot of ability. My dad's a classical musician and he keeps saying you ought to have a proper musical education. And I say to him I already know more than enough to be able to make rock music. I know too much to make rock music. I get caught in chords and then it gets in the way, it'd be much simpler to know nothing about it really."

EMF's career rise reads like the great pop legend storybook for seventeen year olds: two months to rehearse for their first gig in the Forest of Dean in England which attracted four hundred people, two months later they were signed to EMI's Parlophone label. Why did they get picked so quickly?

"Because certain people in the band have been in bands before so we had contacts and we just kind of phoned up people and said that I was working with Mark (the drummer) and people were interested. We said 'We're in a brilliant band and you gotta come and see us — no demo tapes, you gotta come and see us.' The chap from Island came and word went out like wildfire. By the fourth gig the head of EMI came to see us. Half way through the gig London Records was offering a hundred thousand pounds in advance and then offering to double it. But Linda our manager said we don't want the money, we want a good record company."

What is the secret of your success?

"Dunno really. It's a secret to me. As a mixture of personalities the band has got a really good balance. I'm kind of the serious one, I'm older than the rest of them and I guess I'm the musical director — I'm good at giving form to the energy and enthusiasm of the rest of the band. It's a band with everything — it's got

structure and form and melody and I think that's what makes a good band. It's one of those rare combinations of people that works."

Being so young, I wondered whether the band still lived with their parents.

"Yeah, except for me 'cos I'm a bit older, I left home a while ago. But everybody's going to buy a house now which is kind of amazing. I mean, two of them are twenty, two are twenty-two and we're gonna be able to afford our own houses. That's what American means — we're gonna be rich in a year's time, which is really weird."

So what about the girls, the babes?

"You get a lot of girlies hanging around. I've got a girlfriend. To start out with three of the band didn't have girlfriends so we took advantage of it. You get fed up with sycophants. If somebody says they don't like the band all of a sudden you really fancy them. It's funny with girlfriends, you have to have a little security, they came to America."

Ah America! According to Canada's *DJ Times*, drummer Mark DeCloedt recounted EMF's exploits — stealing gold discs from their record company, inviting an entire audience back to their hotel with them and throwing them all in the pool which led to their American press agents calling them the Sex Pistols of Indie Dance. Yeah right. I

dunno if they saw the same show I saw. In fact, probably not because I saw their show at the Town Hall in Auckland which is a fair swim from the States. But they looked... um... pleasant to me. Well dressed youngsters politely screamed and waved slogans "James you're unbelievable" (cool huh?) and got rowdy on the dance floor. I must admit thought that the 'E-ctasy!' etc song prompts a fair giggle.

What does EMF stand for anyway? "Doesn't stand for anything, we've given it various meanings. When we started we were the Ecstasy Motherfuckers and that kinda got dropped. Then we wrote a song where the chorus went Ecstasy Motherfuckers, then on the last tour we decided it stood for Eat More Fruit and someone the other day pointed out it stands for Fuck Me backwards."

Hahahahaha. How did the h American tour go?

"When we went to America nobody recognised us 'cos we didn't wear baseball caps. Everyone's got dreadlocks now and looks quite different. But that's kind of nice in a way 'cos the 'Unbelievable' thing was done a year ago and everyone's moved on. It was brilliant. Had such a good time."

Did you expect the Americans to like your music?

"Mmmm, I guess we had an inkling 'cos the moment 'Unbelievable' was

released in England K-Rok in LA started playing it and it went right to Number One on their playlist and it just looked like it was gonna be big right from the beginning. It had been big everywhere else so we kind of expected it in a way."

Had EMF heard any NZ music?

"No, who's from New Zealand? I try the Chills, Straitjacket Fits to blank looks. In desperation I suggest Split Enz."

"I love Split Enz. Are they from NZ? I thought they were from Australia."

Uh huh. Is there gonna be a backlash against EMF?

"Certainly has been already in England 'cos England is sort of way ahead of everywhere else so when we were on the way up we were press darlings and the moment 'Unbelievable' was a success there was a sort of backlash. We got accused of being manufactured and all this sort of stuff. We always said wait for the album and when it came out the critics were silent. The album got great reviews and they admitted we'd been prejudged."

The Forest of Dean in the west of England is, one gathers, more accustomed to rearing deer than pop stars. What would the lads have been if they had not mastered the arts of drinking, smiling, playing guitar and reading keyboard manuals?

"Derry (keyboards) ran a clothes shop and would've got into some dodgy business, Mark (drums) was a plumber, James (vocals) was always into music and he would've been in a band anyway — he used to work in a music shop. Heaven knows what Zac (bass) would've gotten into. Zac was a man without vocation and I was a professional unemployed person for seven years. I had a place at music college though."

So, it was music or nothing. EMF — the next Rolling Stones? Guess we'll just have to wait for the next album and try not to notice the fucking over of years on these teen idols too much. Heck they seemed like keen chaps to me.

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