

THE
CLASSIC
ALBUM



EMF Schubert Dip

EMI, 1991

The first ten tracks the band ever wrote, and the album went to number one in America? That's unbelievable, quips **Roy Spencer**



Back in 1991 EMF took the world by storm with their debut album, *Schubert Dip*. On both sides of the Atlantic radios hummed with the band's fusion of samplers, sequencers and guitars. All things Madchester had opened the floodgates for Dance-inspired Indie music on the both sides of the Atlantic, and EMF went to the top of the US charts with their megahit, *Unbelievable*.

The single that would pave the way for these plucky youngsters from the West Country started life as a demo that caused a label bidding war. The band were wined and dined by every major label you can think of and were signed after only a handful of gigs. The album that followed sold by the truckload while *Unbelievable* became an anthem for a generation, and the soundtrack to major stadium events the world over. Amazingly *Schubert*

Dip contained the first ten tracks the band ever wrote.

Cracking the code

The people responsible for cracking this Pop enigma code were band member Ian Dench and producer Ralph Jezzard. "Ian was a great songwriter and he knew what he was doing," says frontman, James Atkin, "and Ralph had just come off the back of S-Express and Bomb The Bass, which was right up our street. He knew how to work with this new sample-based music. It only took us two months to write all the songs."

The band members were ecstatic just to be making a record, and each of them fell naturally into supporting roles, according to Atkin. Ian was the songwriter and drummer; Mark DeCloedt was Mr Organiser, keeping them all on the same page; Derry Brownson was Mr Vibesman, sourcing all the samples and turning them on to new sounds; bassist Zac Foley brought in the low end and was the crew's resident party animal.

"In terms of who did what in the studio, Ian was the guy," says Atkin. "He had a little bit more experience, and he was musically trained as well. I remember going to see him performing classical guitar recitals when I was still in school, 'cos he was a couple of years older than me."

"When we started, we took ideas to him of the kind of thing we were listening to and tried to make that vibe. We were listening to a lot of Balearic House beats and New Order. That was the angle we were going for. Originally I wanted it to be more Dancey, but Ian is such a great guitarist, and it's the guitars that made it, really."

"We kind of fell on this sound. I wanted to make a pumping Chicago House record, but we ended up making this Indie bedroom guitar music with sequencers on top of it."

Platinum discs

"It sold really well," says Atkin. "I don't know the numbers, but I've got a platinum disc upstairs in my bedroom so it must have sold a million in America. We partied our way through the whole thing. We were young kids. I was 20."

EMF are due to perform *Schubert Dip* in its entirety at Gloucester Guildhall on 15th December. The show will be recorded for inclusion on a forthcoming live DVD.

Track by track with EMF's James Atkin

Children

"This was originally a tune we just jammed out in the studio one day. I remember that every member of the band had a lot of input on it."

"The siren sample you hear was really important on this in the intro. It really announced us."

"Once we'd worked out the arrangement it got very polished when we took it into Mayfair, a bigger studio. We brought in those massive backing vocals. They really helped to give it an epic sound."

"It's just a great one to open an album with. The majority of our live sets opened with that as an intro as well. It's up-tempo and energetic and good to dance around to."

"I sing the lyrics. They just touch on youthful abandonment and stuff like that. There isn't a theme that runs through the album. They were just love songs, really."

Long Summer Days

"This was based on a riff I had knocking around. It was very similar to a Killing Joke riff. And I've already been sued once over this song because it sounds similar to something else."

"It has an Eastern kind of riff that made the song. We put rave piano in there with rock influences. I don't know how we made it all work. It wasn't something we were thinking about at the time. We never analysed it. I guess it was Ian Dench's musical ability that made the track come together. He was very gifted."

"On top of that we added a great radio sample that comes in at the beginning and then a four-to-the-floor beat. The vocals are a bit like The Cure. I was into them at the time. I was a real Indie kid."

"Structurally it's really weird because it doesn't have a chorus as such, either."

When Your Mine

"We've recently been going out and playing the album from start to finish, so we've been putting this back into our live sets. This track was one of the songs we never ever got to play out at the time because it was too Poppy. Replaying this album live has

LIKE IT? TRY THESE...



Andrew 'Dice' Clay
Dice

Dig around this frankly oafish brute's comedy album and you'll stumble across an 'Oh' and 'It's unbelievable'.

ADD THESE TO YOUR PLAYLIST:

Weather Goose and A Day at the Beach



Jesus Jones
Doubt

More Alternative Indie Dance from the UK. They troubled the charts here and sold out shows in America.

ADD THESE TO YOUR PLAYLIST:

International Bright Young Thing and Real, Real, Real



The Soup Dragons
Lovegod

Along with fellow Scots Primal Scream, this loopy lot helped soundtrack the Second Summer of Love. A highpoint in all things Baggy.

ADD THESE TO YOUR PLAYLIST:

I'm Free and Dream-E-Forever



Carter The Unstoppable Sex Machine
1992 – The Love Album

Jim Bob and Fruit Bat's fusion of samplers, sequencers and guitars is almost guaranteed to sit well with fans of EMF.

ADD THESE TO YOUR PLAYLIST:

The Only Living Boy in New Cross and Do Re Me So Far So Good



EMF
Stigma

Much darker than the Power Pop of *Schubert Dip*, Atkin calls it "Paul's Boutique...our forgotten album."

ADD THESE TO YOUR PLAYLIST:

It's You That Leaves Me Dry and They're Here

In The Studio With... James Atkin

"We decided pretty early on that we wanted it to be fairly Dance-based, so got some pretty primitive gear. We had a Yamaha CS-80, which was the most important bit of kit. It gave us that Acidy squelch noise. We used to use the trigger input on it because it was pre MIDI. We ran a drum machine through it, triggering notes manually.

"We had an Ensoniq Mirage too then, shortly after, we managed to purchase a Juno-106, and, near the end of

recording, an Akai S900. We also had one of those Casio four-second sampler keyboard jobs. It was pretty crude but it was actually nice to be limited to just a few sounds. We were quite simple.

"The computer we were using was an Atari ST running C-Lab's Notator. You can't believe what they were like, compared to now. I've still got a few STs in the attic now, held together with gaffer tape. It was mad. You had to work on a little black and white screen. The monitor

was quite big, but when it came up on the screen it was tiny [laughs]. It was a really tight MIDI sequencer, though.

Simple to use... I teach music technology in schools now and we use Logic. I'd like to see my students use the ST for a day. [Laughs] I actually got some of the old files up the other day, and the timing wasn't that great, by today's standards. I don't know how we got away with it but I suppose that added to the flavour of it, really."



been a great excuse to go out again, since nostalgia is really alive right now.

"It's weird playing these old songs out. Some we haven't played for 21 years. A few have dated. But people are still into it, that Indie Dance thing. It's mad, just listening to the charts, everything has gone Trancey and Techno again, which I didn't see coming. For a while Techno was a really bad word, wasn't it? Listening to the new Rihanna album I noticed there are loads of 303s and Acid noises all over it. I guess it's all coming back around again."

Travelling Not Running

"This was one of the Downtempo songs. Ian wrote that. It's a bit like a poem. Ian was into poetry. We used to take the mick out of him a lot for that. We used to be quite laddish and he was quite sensitive.

"When it came to recording the vocals I'd usually stick a guide down with the whole band, then I'd come back afterwards and do them in the studio with just the producer, Ralph Jezzard, and Ian. I'd usually just do a load of takes and comp together the best ones. There was no kind of ritual

involved with it. I wouldn't kick my shoes off or anything.

"I'd only just started singing at that point. When we first started as a band, me and Zac were on guitars. We didn't have a singer, so I said 'oh, I'll do it then'. I always wanted to play guitar. Still, being the singer isn't that bad either."

I Believe

"This was us getting back to that House and Techno sound we loved at the time. I envisaged the album being more of a Techno record, but it has all those great guitars over it.

"It just came together so quick. It was a case of it writing itself. We just got the riff together and everything came on top. It was another big single in the UK. It was a little bit different from *Unbelievable*.

"If you listen carefully you can hear the sound of Derry hitting a wall in there. It happened during recording on one crazy night in Mayfair Studios. It's probably another reason that we left the studio [laughs]. Ian was just recording everyone off their heads."

Unbelievable

"This was a song Ian wrote. He brought it to us and we did a demo of it in Derry's front room. It sounded funny 'cos it had completely different lyrics, and it had all our mates in the background singing. I didn't really think that much of it at the time.

"We got Ralph Jezzard involved as a producer. He'd just done *20 Seconds To Comply* with Silver Bullet, which we thought was great.

"It went to number one in America. It was mental. It's still knocking around now. It seems to get used for adverts all the time. It's nice to get the syncs. That's kept us going over the years.

"We used to be choosy about what it could be used for, but as you get older and you have mortgages and kids [laughs]. We let Coco Pops use it for an advert. I wish we'd made another five records like that! I'm a schoolteacher now – I teach music. If you asked the kids if they've heard *Unbelievable*, they'd say 'yeah, the Coco Pops advert'."

Girl Of An Age

"I wrote this about a girlfriend. I had all the vocal melodies sorted and I took it to Ian, and he sorted all the music underneath it. It's got a sample of Bert and Ernie from *Sesame Street*



James Atkin Today

"For the last couple years I've been working on ASBO Kid, which is me and Justin Welch from Elastica. He plays electric drums and percussion, and then we play analogue synths over the top. It's just kinda banging Techno. It's like I've gone back to my roots.

"The work is split evenly. Justin comes up with the

grooves and puts a little bit of sequencing on there, then he sends it to me. I'll change some sequencing, arrange it, and then write some vocals. Then we book a studio for a few hours and go in and play with it with the laptop up, running Logic and its plug-ins. It has a live feel to it. The album came out in September. It's called

The Sus Laws. It's a reference to the notorious Search Under Suspicion laws that came in in the early eighties.

"It took a few years to finish. It's been nice to take our time. It's a ten-track album. One of the singles is called *Two-Tone Techno*. That's a bit of a Ska one. We really like our Dub and Dancehall, so when we go

looking for effects processors we pick out the plate reverbs and spring reverbs. We're both really proud of our roots as old Acid heads as well, so there are a lot of Acid House samples and references in there.

"My wife does some backing vocals too. Remember Fluke? She used to sing with them. She likes to get in the studio..."

at the start. I think we were just sample crazy. It was such a new thing for us. It also helped us reset the tone after *Unbelievable*.

tune. We had to recall a lot of the copies of the album. We got into a lot of trouble. Yoko wanted to stop the album being released and sued us for

and a click track. Then we took it into the studio, played through it and got the arrangement together. Then we worked on the drums.

“We put Rave piano in there with Rock influences. I don't know how we made it all work”

"We weren't worried about getting sued at the time, but we did. We got sued by Yoko Ono because we used a John Lennon sample on *Lies*. We also used a bit of Mark Chapman [Lennon's killer] reciting lyrics from a Beatles

something like thirty grand for the ones we did release."

Admit It

"It came together with me and Ian demoing it with a sequencer, piano

"The live drums always took ages. Mark DeCloedt was a great drummer. He had to be like a human drum machine, but that was his style. He grew up listening

to drummers like Phil Collins, and people that we didn't think were that cool. But, being a drummer, you had to listen to people like that because they were the best. If we'd had a more funky drummer who moved

around on the beat it wouldn't have worked as well. There are loops in there too and he plays along with them. This was a time before beat-mapping, when you'd just be playing along."

Lies

"I think Derry picked up the Mark Chapman sample. Vocal samples and dialogue always work really well.

"This was our second single in the US. We skipped *I Believe* – we didn't think it was right for the American market. The single version in The States is different from the album. We got Jim 'Foetus' [JG Thirlwell] to do it. He put some Spanish trumpets on it and made it more dreamy.

"We toured America a lot. We spent eight weeks on a bus going from West Coast to East Coast, then flying to Texas for a day for interviews. We took other British bands to support us. We took Carter [USM], Stereo MCs, Pop Will Eat Itself. We got a little scene together and got to hang about with all our best mates."

Long Time

"This was the first song we ever wrote. It has this Bluesy groove and the lyrics are a bit Jim Morrison. I suppose that's Ian's poetry coming through. He was a bit arty like that.

"It's also got a great drop in it. That's something we took from Dance music – that and the big pad sounds from the Juno 106 and patches from the Ensoniq Mirage for the arpeggiated string sound. Half way through the recording sessions we did manage to purchase an Akai S900. It meant we could do a lot more and filter the sounds a little bit. Plus, we could use longer samples, like, six seconds [laughs]. It wasn't really until we went out touring the album that we got really into the Akais. The album was made with mostly primitive stuff." **FM**

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

For all the latest news and release info for EMF, visit their official website at www.emf-theband.com

NEED TO KNOW

Five Essential Facts About... EMF and Schubert Dip

1 Hallmark made musical cards that belted out *Unbelievable* when you opened them.

2 The band's name stands for Epsom Mad Funks. Or English Mother Fuckers. Or Ecstasy Mother Fuckers.

3 Bassist Zac Foley died in 2002 from an overdose of non-prescribed drugs.

4 Atkin loved getting the single remixes through. Some of which he preferred to the album versions.

5 Andrew 'Dice' Clay agreed to sample clearance after the band bumped into him in a hotel car park in America.