

Alexandra Kalich's review on....

KMFDM



“Symbols” (1997), KMFDM

KMFDM is a German industrial metal band founded February 29th, 1984. The band itself had originally begun as a performance art project between the frontman and founder, Sascha Konietzko, alongside multimedia artist and painter Udo Sturm - both being German artists in their own respective rights. Their very first show happened at an exhibition for young European artists at the Grand Palais, with Konietzko playing bass guitar with multiple amplifiers spread throughout the building, Sturm with an ARP 2600 synthesizer and four

Polish coal miners acquainted to Konietzko pounding on the building.



Udo Sturm had left the band almost just as quickly as he had joined, but that brought the band nowhere near close to an end. Konietzko continued on, bringing on multiple others alongside him, even having a troupe of twenty people at one point. Their performances were big, loud and

messy. They even performed what can be compared to circus acts with things such as fire eating. Overall, the band has had ten separate key members from its beginning to this day, not including Konietzko who still resides and performs. within the band to this day alongside three others - Lucia Cifarelli, Andy Segway and Andee Blacksugar.

The band wouldn't release their debut album "What Do You Know, Deutschland?" until two years later, though some songs had been recorded up to a year before the band itself had even come to exist. Though, its demo album, "Opium," had already been circulating throughout the underground scene of nightclubs and bars in Hamburg from the beginning of the band, leaving them with an already established, yet small fan base to start with for the debut.

Now, KMFDM is recognized as one of the most important founding bands of industrial metal- alongside other big name bands such as Ministry (with KMFDM actually doing their first tour in the U.S. alongside Ministry), Nine Inch Nails and Godflesh. Not only that, but they're my all-time favourite industrial metal band, and could even be a top contender for my overall favourite band.



"SYMBOLS" 1997



What I'm covering today is KMFDM's ninth studio album released by Wax Track! Records in September 1997. Actually titled as five unpronounceable symbols, hence the nickname "Symbols." The name of the album holds no meaning, though En Esch would mention it was inspired by the use of symbols to mask curse words in comics, which I found to be clever and unique, adding a sense of character. At the time, key members of the band for this album consisted of; Sascha Konietzko, Tim

Skold, En Esch and Raymond Watts - while featuring artists such as Abby Travis and even fellow industrial metal band Skinny Puppy's very own Nivek Ogre.



The album would receive mixed reviews, even coming from those creating it. With Andy Hinds of Allmusic's review praising the creativity of sound and use of new contributing artists, while also criticizing its repetitiveness within the lineup - both of which I can agree with while still greatly enjoying the album. Kevin Williams of Chicago Sun-Times would refer to the opening track, "Megalomaniac," as an incredibly irresistible opener and suggested the album being the beginning of the band's takeover of electronica. Though, Sascha Konietzko himself would later speak poorly of the album, and the entire world would have a bad taste of the album in its mouth, the second of the two opinions being very frustrating to me.

The frustrating and unfortunate factor that would play into the further discredit of the album is the association it holds with school shootings. Two of my favourite songs on the album, Stray Bullet and Waste, had it's lyrics featured on a website profile belonging to Eric Harris, one of the shooters in the Columbine massacre, while also quoting lyrics from the album's track Anarchy in his signature of a classmate's (Nate Dykeman) yearbook. Eric Harris was publicly an avid KMFDM fan, and this infatuation with the band - along with several other metal bands such as Rammstein and Nine Inch Nails - created a very large stigma around the album and brought the belief that KMFDM possibly

shared the same bigoted and disgusting beliefs as the two shooters of the massacre.

Though, if you truly know anything about KMFDM, which the two perpetrators did not - you'd know that the band's ideologies politically and socially have completely gone against this event and the beliefs tied to it from the very formation of the band. KMFDM has always shown hate for war, racism, facism, and bigoted hate of any kind, this being a prevalent theme in their music and performances. The band's name itself is roughly translated from "Kein Mehrheit Für Die Mitleid," to "No Pity For The Majority," which can be seen as one of their many anti-establishment and support of minority group stances. The band would release this statement posted below onto their official website to further clarify their disgust and reaction to the tragedy.

OFFICIAL PRESS-RELEASE ISSUED BY MSO 4/21/99:

Statement from Sascha K. regarding
media reports linking the band to the school-shootings in Littleton, CO:

"First and foremost, KMFDM would like to express their deep and heartfelt sympathy for the parents, families and friends of the murdered and injured children in Littleton," says Sascha K., founder of KMFDM. "We are sick and appalled, as is the rest of the nation, by what took place in Colorado yesterday." "KMFDM are an art form--not a political party. From the beginning, our music has been a statement against war, oppression, fascism and violence against others", emphatically states SASCHA. "While some of the former band members are German as reported in the media, none of us condone any Nazi beliefs whatsoever."

While the album may seem long, landing at 56 minutes and 34 seconds with 10 tracks, it's actually quite average in length, if not slightly short compared to the majority of albums within similar genres.

TRACK LIST

Megalomaniac - 6:07

Stray Bullet - 5:32
Leid Elend - 6:10
Mercy - 5:00
Torture - 7:04
Spit Sperm - 4:46
Anarchy - 5:35
Down Out - 6:40
Unfit - 6:01
Waste - 3:39

MEGALOMANIAC

Megalomaniac is the opening track of the album, the title of the song already being a heavy hitter on context clues for how the song may go, with the meaning of the word itself being “a person who is obsessed with their own power.” The song begins with a segment of spoken German by the deep and almost sinister sounding voice belonging to En Esch on top of some very unique sounds provided by the instruments, similar to the sound of electronic beeping and buzzing in a strum. En Esch also provides his voice for the bridge for another speaking segment paired with the dreamy, almost flowing chant of “ohhs” provided by Abby Travis. While Sascha Konietzko provides the voice for the overall song, his distinct voice sounds almost robotic throughout - as if he is a speaking machine or if his voice is being put through a static radio. This use of his voice paired with the effects gives an iconic techno sound, making the song sound as if it could be the villain of some movie or game singing his intentions through a microphone. The overall sound of the song itself is busy, loud and

unique, something that I enjoy greatly and has been praised by critics as an iconic opening song, something I completely agree with.

MORTAL KOMBAT[™] **ANNIHILATION**



The song found itself peaking at the 22nd spot on Billboard’s Bubbling Under 100 Chart, being KMFDM’s first and only appearance on it in their entire run as a career. The song was not only highly praised, but also used within several pieces of media. The song found itself featured in both the film Mortal Kombat Annihilation’s end credits and in the 1998 game Test Drive 5.

Also, the lyrics within the song are all ironic, meant to mock other metal or punk bands within the scene who'd made it big and let it get to their heads as if they were better than everyone else. The lyrics go all in, with them describing themselves as megalomaniacs, "wrapped up as gift of god," and other egotistical phrases throughout the song. I actually thought this was funny, as the act of pretending to think you're better than anyone else simply to make fun of others who actually do is such a fun thing for a band to do, all while making an iconic song with amazing sound in both the vocals and instrumentals. I love this song, and while it's not my absolute favourite on the album it is so, so close. The best way I can describe it is that just about everything about it just itches my brain in the right way!

9.5/10

STRAY BULLET

Stray Bullet is the second track on the album, as well as being my personal favourite of the tracklist. The song begins in a spoken-sung sound in which he describes himself, each verse has this sound to it and it's one of the reasons I enjoy the song so much. It's easy to digest, sounds good and gives a very direct approach to delivering lyrics. The chorus is more of a chant, the singer's voice becoming more intense throughout, and at some points a female or higher pitched voice is layered throughout to give more depth to the chorus. The fast beat paired with the slow delivery of lyrics and the use of drums, and of course with the industrial and techno instrumentals - are all parts of the song that make it appealing to me and a favourite.

The song "Stray Bullet", by KMFDM, is a song in which I don't know a true meaning for, but can be interpreted in several different ways. I see it being about how a single bullet, usually metaphorical, may become more dangerous, evil or powerful than expected. With these traits, the bullet will become greedy, prideful and may even see itself as more than it actually is. This can ruin those around it, causing fear within that the bullet will thrive on. The lyrics, "I am your apocalypse, I am your belief unwrought, monolithic juggernaut, I'm the illegitimate son of God," is a good example of what I've said above. How the bullet happily reigns this terror and believes itself to be some divine creature, viewed as a juggernaut by others. There's even a lyric in the song stating,

“malignantly malevolent, I am of divine descent,” to further prove this. It indulges in its evil and isn’t afraid to deny it. The bullet almost believes itself to have the will of God, that if it says something must die or be destroyed in the name of it, it will. This interpretation can be applied to people, beings, characters and overall a theme of evil, egoism and pride. I personally applied this interpretation of the song to a character analysis in comparison to a song project I had in an earlier year of high school, where I linked the song to Smaug from The Hobbit.



10/10

SPIT SPERM

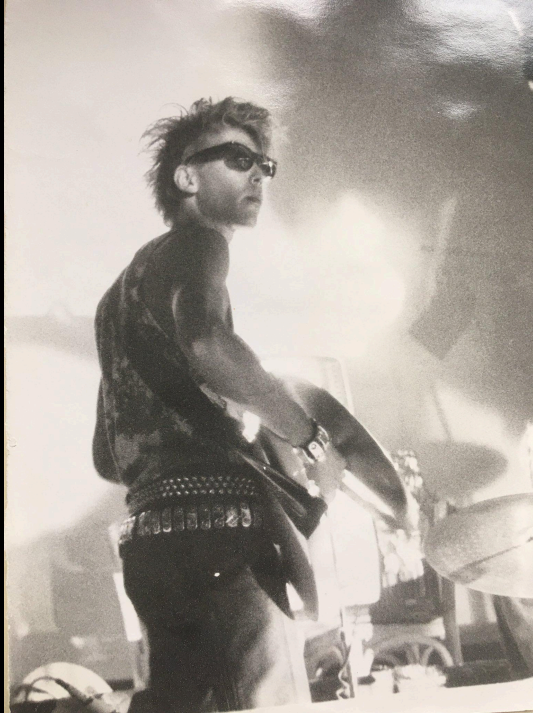
Spit Sperm is the sixth track on the album, and while it’s a song that I enjoy, it doesn’t necessarily stand out to me and does help me see the perspective of critics who say that the album is repetitive. With most of the other songs I put as stand-out songs for this album review, I can excuse the repetitiveness due to the songs being close to my heart but I can also use songs that I enjoy yet don’t actually stand out as much as a way to fairly review the album. The song holds the spoken, almost radio-sounding voice held in the other tracks on the album, though the beat is slower, heavier and somewhat distinctive from the two tracks mentioned before, it doesn’t feel like it’s own unique track. It feels as if it could be filler within another song on the album, which means it still sounds really good and fits alongside everything else but also that it lacks its own characteristics.

The song’s lack of distinctiveness is actually disappointing due to the potential it has, it holds a great sound and I personally love the way the lyrics are written but even they end up being drowned out by the instrumentals. I just wish it had something small that made it stand out more.

6/10

ANARCHY

Anarchy is the seventh track on the album, and another one of my personal favourites. It holds the consistent sound that's aligned with the rest of the tracks



on the album, but in comparison to the track above it, it still holds its own little unique traits that makes it distinctive from the others. This is one of the songs where you really listen to the lyrics, as I find them to stand out over the more simplified instrumentals compared to other songs on the track. The lyrics directly connect to some of the political views of KMFDM, their anti-establishment stance, condemning all statist governments. The first part of the song represents someone who is angry, who has been hurt, beat down and mistreated by others and the government meant to oversee him. Then, he delves into anarchy.

This is a song that's easy to sing along to while you're driving around, or even just under your breath while doing something. The vocals are what truly shine, and they're almost addicting.

9/10

WASTE

Waste is the last track of the album, the song immediately starting heavier than some of the others, with a rapid beating sound to it. This is followed by mechanical sounding whispers of, "what I don't know, I don't like, what I don't like, I don't want, what I don't want, I **waste**." Throughout the song, the title word has lots of emphasis on it, such as the loud chanting of it within the chorus followed by the same lines I had just written out as the introduction to the song. The pre-chorus, while short, is something that I personally really enjoy because of Abby Travis's vocals being used. I do wish that they had used her voice more

throughout the song, as she provides a very unique and pretty sound to an otherwise heavy song. The instrumentals are intense, yet don't drown out the lyrics due to the vocals being just as loud and intense. This song is more metal than techno in comparison to the others, and I find that a heavy-hitter in sound is a good way to end an album in a unique sense, which is definitely something that aligns well with KMFDM's unique characteristics as a band.

The actual sound of this song isn't the only heavy thing either. The lyrics are actually quite dark, though being something that many people can relate to. It heavily leans into self-hate and self-destruction, and the speaker almost seems proud of their self-destruction. This is something that I can even connect to, as like many people when struggling with mental health or experiencing things similar to a manic episode I can become carelessly self-destructive.

8/10

Conclusion 9/10

This album is one I hold dear to my heart, as it holds some of my all time favourite songs from KMFDM, both due to being the first album of theirs I had listened to as well as just overall having a unique sound that I very much enjoy. Though, I can acknowledge that the unique sound of the band becomes repetitive in this album as throughout the songs they can rely on certain sounds that can make the songs blend together. This is something they've greatly improved on within other albums, but that doesn't discredit how great this one is. Funnily enough, while I greatly enjoy the album, in 2002 Sascha Konietzko himself would express a dislike for it, even seeing it as a physical representation of the band's initial breakup. Either way, I love this album and would recommend any fan of industrial metal, or anyone who's not but is looking to broaden their music taste to give it a listen! It's not only a great album in itself but also to begin getting into KMFDM, and I love it when I can encourage people to listen to music that I love. Here's a childish drawing of the album cover I found!

