

## **EMMET SWIMMING:**

Arlington To Boston (Epic)

Rating: \*\*\*\*

By Brett Anderson

It's traditional for regional loyalties to be evident in the sounds of indie-rock: the fidgety, angular guitars of Chapel Hill's Archers Of Loaf and Superchunk; Sup Pop's one-time allegiance to music embracing punk's scrape with metal conjured images of misty Seattle; drop the needle on any old Descendents' nugget and hear the resilience of Cali-punk.

When you never leave home, it's also easy to get caught in a groove. Arlington, Virginia's Emmet Swimming is aware of this. In the tune named after the band's home base, singer Todd Watts wails with disgust and mock glee, "Who's your favorite Kennedy?/What's the flavor of the week?/I live next to Fugazi." Watts's lyrics cast a critical judgment on the intense social dynamics that drive not just Arlington--home to both the Pentagon and Fugazi's notoriously righteous and, some say, elitist, Dischord record label--but music "scenes" in general. "I'm a sellout now," Watts sings on "Sellout." "I'm telling you it's easy."

*Arlington to Boston* gives a voice to the insider as outsider; the struggling major label band with neither serious clout nor underground cache; the well-bred intellectual with a troubling past and a shaky future. Under the wing of one-time R.E.M. knobman Don Dixon, Emmet Swimming lays it on thick but gentle. Erik Wenberg and Watts's guitars jangle softly, the lush, radio-friendly antidote to Watts's more prickly, sometimes overwrought sentiments about life in the slow-lane. Similar bands have turned this earnest mixture into pale soft-rock, but on *Arlington To Boston*, Emmet Swimming make it perky ("Fake Wood Trim"), expansive ("Wake") and boldly uncertain ("Boston").