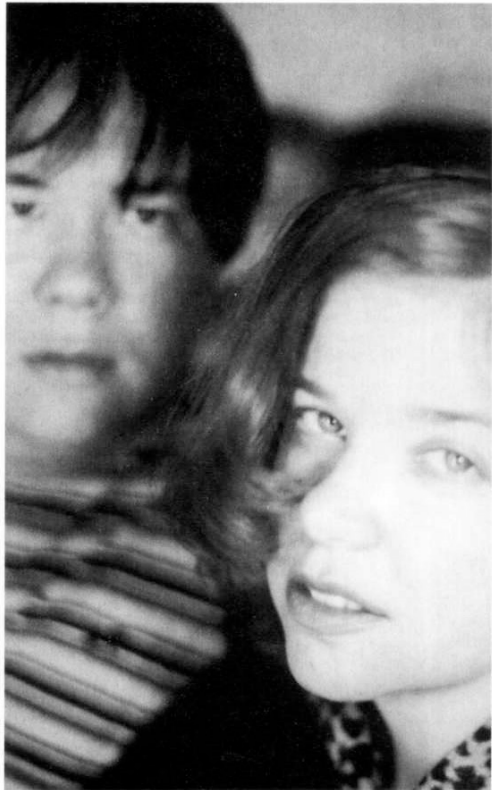


jump street

sound spirals upwards



SUSAN JENNINGS

Lum and Perry of Love Spirals Downwards.

"ONE THING I LIKE ABOUT OUR NEW album is that it's almost impossible to categorize with any of the conventional musical categories," declares Ryan Lum, guitarist and keyboard player for Love Spirals Downwards. "There are really folksy songs, really electronic, ambient dance songs, and then these weird, loopy psychedelic songs. I think it all works together really well—it isn't a huge shock from one to the next."

Lum and vocalist Suzanne Perry create a lush, inviting sonic template on their third and newest album, *Ever* (Projekt, PO Box 166155, Chicago, IL 60616). Important components to their sound are Perry's beautiful, dreamy vocals, Lum's delicate, sometimes cryptic acoustic six-string melodies, and their integration of swirling keyboards and subtle effects, all of which produce a captivating kind of romantic, ethereal folk.

Live, Lum uses two tunings: standard and E A D G A D, a variation on D A D G A D. "Instead of my first note being D, it's E," he says. "That way, all the strings are tuned normally except for the high two strings, so I can fret chords on the low strings as I normally would and have all those drones on the top two strings." On record, he uses some additional tunings. "'Sideways Forest' is in a weird tuning [E B E A B E, with a capo at the second fret], which I learned from seeing the set list of a Red House Painters show on the Internet," Lum says. "I saw one that looked interesting and I tried it, and that's how 'Sideways Forest' came about."

While they have an electronically enhanced sound on record, Lum and Perry prefer a stripped-down, acoustic guitar and vox approach in concert, in part because they want to show audiences that they can play without the effects. "It surprised a lot of people," Lum says of their recent live tour. "They think we're one of those bands that just turns the reverb up to 11 because

we don't know what we're doing. They see us live, and there's no drum kit to hide behind, there's very little effects to hide behind. It's just voice and guitar. If you can't play, if you can't sing, it's really obvious really quickly."

Even so, Lum adds, "We're not a big musicianship kind of band. It's important, but we're not Yes or something like that. We play what we gotta play to make the music sound right. Sometimes it's easy, sometimes it's a little difficult. The most important thing is that we play it right."

Play it right they do. Love Spirals Downwards recently played to 950 people at the Projekt Festival in Chicago and before a 1,600-person throng in Mexico City, and in both instances they entranced audiences with their pretty, enigmatic music.

—Bryan Reesman

EQUIPMENT PICKS FROM DON WALSER, LOVE SPIRALS DOWNWARDS' RYAN LUM, CHRISTINE LAVIN, MICHAEL HEDGES, AND ROBYN HITCHCOCK

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Ryan Lum of Love Spirals Downwards owns and plays one acoustic guitar, an Ovation that he has had for ten years. "I forgot what kind it is," he admits. "The sticker on the inside has peeled off. It's a good mid-line Ovation acoustic guitar." A pick player, Lum uses light-gauge Martin strings. "I know a lot of acoustic players don't like [light-gauge strings] because the thicker strings are supposed to have more tone, but on my guitar, I've tried them all and light works best. It plays the best, it feels right, and the tone's good."

In the studio, he records his Ovation with an AKG C-1000 condenser microphone, compresses it a little bit with a DBX 160 compressor, then goes straight into a Tascam 388 eight-track recorder. During mix-down, he uses one of two chorus units, a Boss RCE-10 or a Roland Dimension D. He has an affinity for the latter. "When you have it on, you don't hear this wild chorusing," he explains. "But when you turn it off, all of a sudden the sound just loses some luscious quality. It's subtle chorusing, but it's powerful. You notice its absence more than its presence. That's why I like that box. It preserves the natural sound of the guitar."

Lum does not use his acoustic pickup in the studio unless he wants a more electric sound. "But live, I'll mic the guitar and also run the direct out from the pickup," he says. "It just helps out live; it's not as critical of a listening situation. It's a good combo—that way your guitar can be louder and there's less feedback."

—Bryan Reesman

Reprinted from Acoustic Guitar No 51, March 1997