

REC and STUFF O R D S

by Ned Raggett



LOVE SPIRALS DOWNWARDS

For Ryan Lum, instrumentalist for the L.A.-based duo Love Spirals Downwards, sticking to just one means of musical expression is not an option. "I go between making this pure acoustic music and then going into this analog synthesizer, drum machine sound, tweaking knobs and stuff, just to keep things fun! If I did the same thing for a while, I'd get burnt out!" Combined with the truly beautiful vocals of Suzanne Perry, Lum's work in Love Spirals Downwards is a lush, wondrous experience. The band's third album, *Ever*, has just been released on Projekt, and clearly demonstrates that Lum and Perry have moved from being simply fine disciples of the Cocteau Twins school of performance to becoming distinctly intriguing artists in their own right. For Lum, the question of influence is a tricky one, reflecting the tension between inspiration and the need to be one's own person. "It's hard to say which bands I listen to are my influences and which are not. I guess every-

thing I listen to somehow gets mixed up in what I do. That's a tough question, because I don't know what I'm trying to get away from, or what I'm trying to be like."

On *Ever*, Lum found new ways of creating songs (reflected especially well in the new single "Sideways Forest," in both its original and stripped-down, pulsing remix) which helped flesh out the album in different, intriguing ways, as opposed to the usual practice where he would give Perry a full song track to compose lyrics for and to sing over.

"Usually everything would be completed by that point, all the guitars and basic drum patterns. This album, I found that it was interesting to don't have everything down, to just have the basic tracks for Suzanne to sing on, and then afterward I'd add different, new guitar parts that her vocals inspired me to do. It's a little more interaction than me saying, 'Here, here's a song, sing on it and let me finish it.'" For such a studio-based band—as Lum notes elsewhere, he was creating home tapes four years before Love Spirals Downwards released a record, while careful, full production marks all three releases so far—it might seem that live performances would be something hard to carry off. Yet the band have played a number of shows over time, which Lum sees as a distinctively different way of looking at the duo's work.

"For other bands, it might be natural to play live and try and record that later. For me, I record and then later I think, 'Well, if we are going to play this live, how are we going to do it?' There's many different ways we could have gone about it, and the way I chose is essentially the two of us. We don't have any backing tapes,

sequencers or keyboards; we just have Suzanne singing and me playing acoustic guitar. Occasionally she'll play a little tambourine.

"I've learned, after playing a few shows, that live is about getting this kind of energy going or magic power happening! One thing that surprised me was that I didn't know how possible that would be with just our stripped-down live sound. We thought we might need drums or all this other stuff. I've found that our acoustic sets are much better than they'd be with everything else!"

Though the band don't play tours per se, having played at most three separate shows at any one jaunt, Love Spirals Downwards have played its share of one-off shows over time, with one of the most interesting, according to Lum, located in Mexico City—not least because it showed that the band's fan base isn't just a goth thing.

"The Mexico City show was typical of our kind of audience, with a mish-mash of different kinds of people. We tend to attract an extremely diverse crowd. There were goths there, but there were any other kind of fill-in-the-blank kind there as well. It was our biggest show, and that was weird! We'd never played to that many people before.

Performance-wise, we were doing pretty bad that night! But they were energetic, and we fed off that; it made our evening go a little better!" What's next? With a few more one-off shows planned in the spring, Lum has already begun recording again, though there's nothing specific on the horizon: "I don't have this big scheme or plan; I may stop soon, or I may go for another ten years!"

Reprinted from Mean Street Vol. 8, #4 1996