



love spirals downwards

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An interview with Ryan Lum of Love Spirals Downwards by Gray Thrasher • Photograph by Betty Cobb

Call it post-shoegazer...call it ethereal majesty...call it post-apocalyptic drum 'n' bass trance...just don't call it goth. Love Spirals Downwards, darlings of the Projekt label, are a blissful masterpiece of hypnotic rhythms and swirling guitars, topped off with angelic vocals...all with a tinge of dark moodiness and Middle Eastern mysticism. With their fourth album, *Flux*, a foray into the hazed world of melodic drum 'n' bass, Love Spirals Downwards are poised on the brink of world dominance...it was on this cliff that I spoke with the mastermind behind the music Ryan Lum.

How did Love Spirals Downwards come together in the beginning and how did you first become involved with Projekt?

It's so long ago. Suzanne and I knew each other and we just decided to try it out...see how it worked with her singing on stuff I had made. I've been making music for ages. I'm always just recording and making my own music as opposed to doing the band thing. I don't mind rehearsing for shows, but I like to record...that's where my heart is. I sent a few demo tapes out for the hell of it. I didn't even know who Projekt was. One of my friends, the guy who shot our cover for the first album, knew someone in his art school...Susan Jennings (Projekt owner Sam Rosenthal's former girlfriend). Somehow they got talking and she said, "Why don't you have your friend Ryan send his tape in?" We sent a few others out, I think 4AD and Creation were the other two, and Projekt was the first and only to respond. It just evolved from that.

What were your early inspirations both musically and vocally? What singers have influenced Suzanne?

I don't think she's influenced by other people, not even people she likes. She's just singing from herself...she's just being herself. If you're looking for origins, influences back in '91...that's coming out of 4AD of the late 80's...Cocteau Twins, Dead Can Dance. And also Indian music that I was into a lot back then on our first album...kind of a big mesh of 4AD and Indian music. I'm really into moody and intense music. What got me into making *Flux* was I stumbled across some very beautiful drum 'n' bass music...it's so beautiful, probably the greatest music I've heard this decade. The only stuff I can compare it to as far as beauty would be Cocteau Twins during the *Victorialand / Love's Easy Tears* era. Just really awesome stuff...and most people who are into goth may not find it, but I just found it. It made perfect sense...this is us, this is the kind of beauty I'm into musically.

What albums are you referring to?

It's some hard to find stuff. One easy way to find out what I'm talking about is compilations...*Logical Progressions* by LTJ Bukem. It's about 3 years old. It's the defining CD of melodic drum 'n' bass. It holds up well now in drum 'n' bass clubs...it kicks ass!

What led you down the road to the new sound that began on *Ever* and finally metamorphosed itself on *Flux*?

If you backed it up, it also led to the new sound on *Ardor* that was different from *Idylls*. All the albums have a different sound...at least that's the goal. You don't want to make the same album consecutively again, that would be quite boring for us. I'm sure it would bore a lot of listeners too. So this was the next logical progression for us. I've always been into electronic music, and I finally found a style that would work well with the music that we do...something where we could be spacey, ethereal, and beautiful as we have on our previous records. It's hard to do that with house music or trance...those are precisely defined types of sounds, while drum 'n' bass is a lot more open. It will still sound like a drum 'n' bass record, but you can put on a lot of jazzy stuff to kind of make it more ambient.

Are you pleased with *Flux* and the way it was received, both among long time Love Spirals Downwards fans and new converts?

Yes, I'm really happy with *Flux*. All of my other albums I really cringe at listening to. Actually, it's kinda sad, *Flux* is the first one now where it's like, "I finally did it right." There's nothing too cringing to hear as far as the sounds or the recording. The technical aspects are done well, and the aesthetics I was aiming for are pleasing to me still. So I'm really happy with *Flux*...I'm sure it will always be for me, my favorite record, or at least one of. As far as other people, it is always a surprise. As you are making it, it's always just you and a small circle of people that hear it. But when it comes out there's always the other people factor that gets brought into the equation...it becomes something you start hearing about, whether people like it or not. I've been pleasantly surprised that people are into it, fans of ours...and we have all kinds of fans, but I'm particularly happy that the ones who don't have much interest in electronic music, trip-hop or drum 'n' bass, are into it. I think that's because it still sounds like us. Suzanne's still doing her thing and I'm still doing my thing. It's still melodic...it's all still pretty. You could still do the same things to *Flux* that you could do to any of our previous albums...sit down and listen to it at night, or make love to it, or whatever people do to our stuff. Some of the elements have changed, but it's still Love Spirals Downwards. I really don't think about what happens with my music after it's done, after it leaves my studio, gets onto CDs, and people play it. All I think about is making a great song and making a sound for me that shakes my soul...that's it. And from the stuff I was listening to, it just pointed me in that direction with *Flux*.

Are you hoping *Flux* finally lays to rest the goth connotations of Love Spirals Downwards?

I don't think anything will do that. I have nothing against goth music. What I am against is people summing us up in one fell swoop as a goth band...it's a disservice, it's dishonest, and inaccurate. People can think of us as whatever they want...people think we're a goth band, or a new age band, folk band, techno band...even a yuppie band! Not that we're yuppies, but that yuppies can dig our sound. Even adult contemporary has been thrown around. It just goes to show that our music is open ended.

What does the future hold for Love Spirals Downwards?

I don't know. It's just a big uncharted future out there. I can go anywhere...it's hard to say, even when I started making *Flux*, I just started making music with no particular intention of it being an album. I just wanted to make music for the sake of music. I just started making new songs a couple of weeks ago...I just got boatloads of new gear! I finally got it all going. I've started again...I'm gonna have some jazz buddies come over tomorrow to lay down some stuff too, so who knows what it will be...maybe I'll make a flamenco record next time! *