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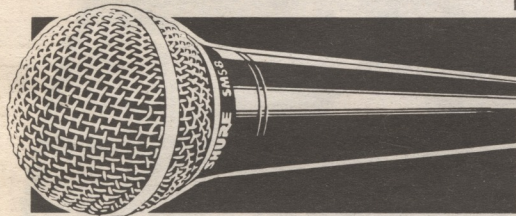
EDITED BY TONY HORKINS

LUSH



It's taken three producers, and a lot of hard work, to get LUSH's music out of the studio and into the shops. But, as KEITH GRANT discovers, they could soon be ready to go it alone. Pics: NEIL COOPER

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THE 16TH CENTURY TUDOR splendour of Ridge Farm Studios is not the sort of place you would expect to find Lush hanging out. But, here they are, or at least Emma, Miki and Chris - departing bass player, Steve Rippon, having already honoured his final commitments to the group and left for London. Somehow, you just imagine that Lush songs are committed to tape in some dim, damp, basement studio, via an ailing mixing desk onto a rosy, old, multi-track machine. Working with producer, Mark Freegard, however, they've committed three songs to tape - including a cover of Wire's "Outdoor Miner" - on the very best Neve and Studer recording equipment.

Freegard, who has recently been working with Andrew Eldridge on

some new Sisters' material, took the opportunity to get behind the desk with Lush after seeing the band live at the Rocket, in North London, and the idea of ensconcing them in a countryside residential studio was his. The three songs are to accompany the A-side of a new 10-inch EP, culled from their debut LP, "Spooky". Ridge Farm is more normally occupied by artists like All About Eve, Beverley Craven and serious raaww bands, who delight in rattling those old Tudor beams with their Marshall stacks. But, for Lush, it offers the opportunity to continue their experimentation into the various ways of making a record. Set-up as a band in the live end of the studio, they could hardly be more removed from the months they spent with Robin Guthrie in his September Sound Studios, crafting their debut album piece by piece.

"I'm not really producing them in the way that Robin did," explains Mark. "It's more of a co-production with the band, with me fulfilling a producer/engineer role. We're not trying to emulate the sound that is on the album - we'd have to start sequencing the drums and stuff to do that. Here, we've just set up as a live band."

This is obviously something that pleases drummer Chris Acland, who's been given the opportunity to beat the skins of his brand new Yamaha kit, having been confined to a Simmons electronic kit by Guthrie for the duration of the album.

Miki: "When we did 'Mad Love' (their second EP, and first Guthrie production), we actually did live drums first in The Church studio, and then treated them later on in September Sound, but, for the album, Chris actually played live on a Simmons kit into the sequencer (an Akai MPC60). That was something he didn't particularly enjoy."

Chris: "When we made 'Mad Love', we spent two days getting the live drum sound in The Church and, even then, I think Robin ended up using samples. He's used to working with drum machines, and he likes everything being really precise. He can't handle something if it's not right there and, maybe, it's just a bit more 'natural'."

Working with The Cocteau Twins was a decision that they gave careful consideration to, and not only because of being signed to 4AD, and the obvious comparisons with their label's former, brightest stars. There were also, of course, the political questions, with the Cocteau's split with 4AD being ever so slightly bitter.

Emma: "We'd sent him a tape before we signed to 4AD even, and he was really into it, and we wanted to have someone produce us who was really into the music."

Miki: "I think we did have our own problems with making our first record with Robin Guthrie, especially being with 4AD, and it was maybe a bit dangerous, in that people look at us as just some shite band that Robin Guthrie had made sound good. But he was very sympathetic to our sound, and didn't bully us into anything that we didn't think was right for us. The sounds and stuff that he came out with we thought were really good; I don't know how he did it, but it's really brilliant."

Emma: "If it had been anyone else it might have been really bad, you know, cos they would have had all that control, but, as it was, he worked with us. He had always turned up to see us play, and already had an idea about what he wanted to do."

Miki: "We did learn quite a lot after we worked with him the first time on the 'Mad Love' EP, especially about guitar effects and stuff. It was a case of rushing straight out and buying all these pedals, cos, up until then, we had basically had a clean sound, and a distorted sound - there was no real in between. You always feel a bit intimidated going into Denmark Street and faffing about with a load of pedals, with all sorts of arseholes eyeing you up all the time. It was good to have somebody like Robin to show you what sounds you can actually get."

Robin Guthrie, however, is not the only producer the band have worked with: the 'Sweetness And Light' EP was made with Talk Talk collaborator, Tim Friese Green.

Miki: "It was weird cos we were looking for a producer for 'Sweetness And Light', and all the people we thought of couldn't do it, so we phoned him up - which wasn't an easy thing to do cos he's such a recluse - and he said he was really into Lush, and had got all the records, and he was planning to come and see us play the next week in Cambridge. He was totally different to Robin to work with. Everything was done with microphones. He would have the amps out in the studio, with all these different mics, and he'd move one of them like two inches over to change the sound."

"He's not an effects man at all, everything's done for real. There were times I would say, 'Oh put a bit of this on', and it was like I was blaspheming. We did a lot of overtracking - it went up to 48 tracks in the end - on 'Sweetness And Light'. He got a percussionist in who did various things with an egg-shaped thing, and a wet cloth, and all sorts. And any one of those things would take up an entire track."

"There was this one bit in the song where he put me in the room with all the lights out, and just my guitar and amp and a candle, and said, 'Right, do something!' Doing the vocals was really different, cos he's such a perfectionist, whereas Robin treats everything so much that you can get away with almost anything."

Whatever the final production methods, Lush's songs begin life as Porta 05 demos of differing degrees of sophistication, depending on whether the songs are Miki's or Emma's.

Miki: "We don't write together, cos we're not capable of doing so. We write songs differently. I think you can still tell the difference between the songs that I write and the songs that Emma writes. I always used to start off songs with the rhythm section, but now I've started experimenting, writing songs with just the guitar and vocals."

Emma: "I come up with a melody first, and then write the guitar around it, which I suppose, for a guitarist, is like the wrong way round. There have been a couple where I've come up with the guitar hook first, like 'Sweetness And Light'. We've both got a portastudio and a drum machine (Roland R5) at home, but I'm not very good with them. My home tapes are just classics."

Chris: "Some of them, like 'Tiny Smiles', I listen to them and think, this is just so f***in' weird. These are the ones I like best of all. Miki's are always really polished, well-written drum parts, and stuff."

Emma: "She's more mathematically organised when it comes to songwriting. I used to write on an acoustic guitar and a tape recorder, and I'm still doing that, really."

It's these tapes that Emma and Miki present to the rest of the band at rehearsals, where parts are ironed out, and, although Robin DI'd everyone in the studio, he still started out with everyone playing together, recording the drums into the sequencer. After which, the tracks were built up using his army of effects and processors.

Miki: "We didn't use any of our own effects in the studio at all. He has racks of guitar effects, including this Gallien Krueger rack that we plugged straight into, and the sounds that he created from the racks went straight onto tape, with things like delays being added at the desk. The principal effects that he used on the guitar were chorus effects."

Emma: "Essentially, we are a guitar band, but there are effects on that record that make the guitars sound like other instruments. Where I did the rhythm guitar, it was left fairly basic, and Emma's guitar was worked on a lot more, creating all

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different types of sound. We only used keyboards once, on 'For Love', where we used a sample sound off of a CD ROM.

"I used my Strat (a recent Hendrix re-issue model) and my Telecaster (Thinline Deluxe) mainly, but Robin's got this Ibanez Artstar, which we used a bit, and his Paul Reid Smith."

Miki used her 12-string Gibson 335, and '67 Rickenbacker, also 12-string.

At the end of the day, Lush see Robin's work as just one approach that can be taken with their songs, and although they are clearly happy with the results, they still have some reservations. Is this a positive sign that Lush are beginning to form ideas of their own as to how they should sound in the studio?

Emma: "Our songs are very vocal-based, cos we're not very competent at doing guitar solos and stuff like that. There are a few things of that nature on the album, though. With Robin, I think if there's one thing he's been criticised for, it's a lack of dynamics. Like, sometimes, there's been a song where there has been a guitar solo, where he's really pushed it down in the mix,



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and he really isn't into pushing the guitar out from the wall of sound."

Miki: "It's been really good doing these songs here with Mark cos it's been so much of a co-production, and it's been a freedom that we've really enjoyed. Having worked with producers from so many different schools of approach, I think that, hopefully, in time, we'll know enough to say this is how we should do it, and produce ourselves."

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