



Sergio Galoyan

He's young and dynamic and has a very clear idea of where he's going. GEORGE SHILLING talks to Sergio Galoyan about production, vocals, preproduction and doing something really different.

SERGIO GALOYAN was born on Christmas Day 1981 in Moscow and at 17 years of age wrote his first song, which became an enormous worldwide hit in the shape of Tatu's All The Things She Said. Trevor Horn mixed the version that was a hit, but used many of Sergio's original files. Tatu reunited with Sergio (now aged 23) for their recently released second album, which features six new Galoyan productions (for which he is officially now credited) and five co-writes.

An ambitious, energetic and likeable man, Sergio is keen to stress that he is Armenian rather than Russian ('like Cher and System Of A Down'). Now based in London he has hooked up with a major producer manager and has done additional production and remix for Marilyn Manson (This Is The New Shit) and a remix for J-Lo (I'm Glad) in his inimitable style, with exciting, brash, shiny productions. He produced an as-yet unreleased solo album with Keith Flint from The Prodigy and has recently set up a label Bi-Angel with his wife Sasha, which aims to bring Russian bands to the UK — to that end, they have already worked with two bands and Sergio is also working with Anti Icons, another female duo, this time featuring Swedish and German models. *(photos www.recordproduction.com)*

How did you get into the music business?

Well, it was by accident. I was 16 years old, I was studying electric guitar with the best teacher in Russia, Dmitri Maloletov who was teaching this new style of playing, two-hand tapping on the neck, like playing piano. I spent a couple of years learning, and when I was 17, I started writing songs. The first song I wrote was All The Things She Said. I was sending the recording to all the studios, and I had a response from one of them. They wanted me to write more songs for this project with two girls, and a crazy guy, Ivan Shapovalov. I met him, he gave me the Russian lyrics for All The Things She Said, which fitted my melody. We did a little bit of production, went to the studio and recorded it. It was released six months later and was massive in Russia, it was like The Beatles, everyone was just crazy about this project. A couple of years later it was released here [UK], and you know what happened...!

So what was playing the melody on your original?

It was basically a different arrangement, different sounds, because it was before the studio. I just sang the lyrics in Russian. Everybody loved it.

What was it recorded on?

Well we didn't have an SSL desk! It was a little Mackie, NS-10s, a PC with Cubase on it.

It's amazing for you to have acquired such knowledge so quickly...

It's not about knowledge, it's about passion, and about doing something new in the music industry.

When you were introduced to Tatu, were they good singers?

Actually no. They were singers in a band, then Ivan took them from the band and they recorded a song that wasn't good. When I started to work with them as music producer, everything turned a different way, and the girls started having the idea to be lesbians.

How did you record vocals with them?

We recorded them separately. On the last album there was a song called Show Me Love. We had 35 backing vocals of each singer in each chorus. And at that time, the equipment wasn't so fast, so the Cubase session was always crashing, because of the huge amount.

For the lead vocals, did you record many takes?

Basically, we'd record a verse ten times, and choose the best words.

And did you use Autotune?

We didn't use Autotune because Autotune wasn't released at that time, so we did it manually. They're not great singers, and everybody knows that. But they're just fun, they come into the studio and smash everything, tell everybody 'This is my music...!' The vocals this time in Los Angeles were not good because Julia just had a baby, like a year ago, and

some acid from her stomach burned her throat. And she couldn't even speak. I actually managed to get her to the studio to sing these songs. We hired the best doctor who was filling her with Chinese medicine and antibiotics.

How did you start doing studio work?

I was in Moscow and I had a 486 computer and a program called FastTracker 2 [an MS-DOS tracking program], I did all the preproduction stuff in this program, then we'd get to the studio and re-record everything, but the main ideas were done on this computer. Then when I got a bit of money I bought a good PC, some Korg synthesizers, then when I got more money I bought Logic and Pro Tools. But it doesn't really matter what kind of equipment you've got, because for ideas you can use this computer and FastTracker. It doesn't record anything, but you can take samples and do loops.

Where did you record the second Tatu album?

In Los Angeles. After the first album I was split from the band because of misunderstandings, I didn't really understand what they did with Ivan, going on stage with the guns and everything. I was like, I do music, you do whatever you want. And it had all gone well, then suddenly they called me: 'Sergio, we have split with Ivan, please write us a new hit!' That was last summer. I said, let's meet and see what we've got. So we met, and there was the girls' manager Sasha. I fell in love with her and we got married. Two days

after the marriage we went to Los Angeles for three months to record this album. We spent a really good time at this amazing studio called The Village, a famous studio. I was preparing the tracks, and we stayed in the best hotel, the Santa Monica Fairmont while we did the job.

What equipment was used for the new album recording?

It was recorded into Pro Tools HD, eighty-something channels. We were using the Avalon preamp for the microphone. On the production I was using the Moog synthesiser with the blue lights on it [Voyager], also [Novation] Supernova, Nord Modular 2, and I was using a Gibson Collection guitar that cost 15,000 dollars, and another electric Gibson.

Do you use an amplifier?

Oh, of course. On this album we used a Fender, I'm bad with names, I think it was a vintage one. We covered it with pillows and put a microphone in front, which went through the Avalon. Then we recorded the same part through a different amplifier, which was a Marshall I think.

So did you play everything or were there other musicians?

Well me, no, but I know the producers on the other tracks brought Sting and other good people.

And who engineered?

Yeah a very interesting guy, Mats Björk. Here's

something you won't know; he's the grand-grand-grandchild of famous composer Edvard Grieg. He's mega-professional, I just love him.

How do attitudes differ in Russian studios?

There are not many Russian projects around at the moment, there are a lot of problems. Western people are trying to get all the new ideas and all the new equipment. Russians are quite cold, they're doing normal pop music which is quite different from Western stuff. I don't really like working in Russia.

Where did you do the Marilyn Manson remix?

Here in London, in my home, I have Pro Tools in my bedroom like Moby. I have small Genelecs, a little Mackie desk, Pro Tools, a bunch of synthesizers, plug-ins, Cubase as well, and a G5 Mac. And a Neumann microphone. I have a 002 Rack for Pro Tools, I cannot hear a difference between this and the HD system, although you can only use 32 tracks, but you always use less when doing a home production. Then you go into a studio a record guitars and vocals on an HD system.

How did you learn to produce, did you work it out yourself?

Yeah! Basically, no-one can teach you to do that, because what you have to do is listen to other guys' productions, Trevor Horn, Youth or whatever — big producers. Try to understand what they did wrong, and what they did right, and do it better than these people. That was my point. When I was a teenager



I would listen to music and be angry with people because they did good ideas, but bad realisation, bad production. And I thought I could do it better — let me do it! That's how I became a producer.

How do you coax a great vocal out of somebody who is not a great singer?

Well it's the hardest thing in the studio because it's a real timing thing. Singers come in for a couple of hours, or four hours at the most, and you need to get them in the mood. And first, to get them to sing well, you need to free them from bad behaviour, and you need to be like a teacher. You need to basically tell them how to sing the song, so they are just like an instrument in your hands. You take them to the vocal booth and tell them how to do each line. It's really,

really hard. With these girls I have worked with them for five years now, they just understand you from the work. They say: 'Oh Sergio, we've known him for five years, so we'll only listen to him!' I was the only Russian-speaking guy in the studio.

What is good sound?

It needs to be something really new, something that takes the best from each style of music, and mix in one song. It doesn't necessarily need to sound like something before, like The Beatles, Oasis, or the Sex Pistols, it needs to be something you created yourself without any influence. Take ten styles of music, take the best you can from each style; for instance, take a good synthesiser part from trance, drums from punk, guitars from garage, and vocals from rock, and do your own thing.

Who would you like to work with?

Metallica, if I work with them once before they are deaf, I will be happy.

Would you change their sound?

Of course, I would take them to the best studio, tell them not to drink while recording, to have a good attitude, and probably make the album sound like the Black Album, their best album.

But maybe they were drunk when they did it!?

Well that's why it doesn't sound so good...! With these guys you could make a masterpiece, they are kings of music. Also, Michael Jackson would be nice, and I was dreaming to get Madonna to sing one of my songs, but she didn't respond. I sent her a CD through Spike, but she didn't respond.

Why Madonna?

I think she is the main singer in the world, and I think we have the same kind of energy; she is always changing her style, she always wants to be a bit arrogant and shock people, something new — that's what I do. Once she found the French guy who did the Music album, it was amazing, the best production I ever heard, and he stepped up a little bit. I was thinking that I could be the next guy, and I think if she would respond to my music, she would have the best time of her life. Because I think for me it would be really interesting to work with her in the studio, sharing ideas and listening to what she wants, bringing my style to her music.

What is it about you that is unique?

It is simple: I am young, I am passionate, I can bring a lot of new ideas to everybody, even Madonna or Metallica. I can really bring something to people. Other producers go to the studio and do the same thing every time. I am trying to do something really different, really new, and to do the best. ■

