

Ace Of Bass ...Phil King Interview

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We conclude our Lush trilogy with an interview with Phil King, former bassist with Lush and member of the Jesus and Mary Chain. Phil replaced original Lush bassist Steve Rippon, who left the band in 1992 after developing a phobia of sitting in inordinately large trees playing "air bass" for video shoots. We asked Phil about his time in Lush, life with the Mary Chain, and found to our surprise that Ricky Gervais may well have based elements of





“Extras” on Phil’s own life

VP : *Looking back what were your personal highlights of your time in Lush ?*

PHIL: For me I guess it would have been the Spooky world tour in 1992: Over 120 shows in a year. Ireland, the UK, the USA, the Continent, Japan, Israel and Australia. In the past I’d played around the UK with various bands – The Servants, Felt, Biff BangPow!, See See Rider – and even been to the Continent on various Creation package tours, albeit crammed in a minibus and occasionally sharing beds; but this was on a whole different level..

Touring America that year was the most amazing thing for me. We had a tour bus, great audiences, and drove the length and breadth of the country. I could see why Lush had built up such a good following in such a short time as we worked hard doing any press,TV, radio or in-stores that came our way and always made a point of being friendly to the fans.

VP: *The Story goes that your interview/meeting to join Lush was held in a pub. What were your first impressions of*





the band, and did an ability to drink copious amounts of alcohol play a factor in you joining ?

PHIL: Miki called me up at work. I was a picture researcher at the NME at the time. I remember having read in the paper the story that Steve was leaving. The band had been recommended me by a mutual friend, Polly. I vaguely knew Emma as she used to come into the NME office delivering records when she was a press officer for Jeff Barrett and I had seen Lush play a few times. The first was quite early on at The Sausage Factory at The White Horse, West Hampstead. I just remember a darkened basement and lots of giggling in between songs. I then saw them again supporting Felt and The House Of Love and headline in Ladbroke Grove – when they played shows in North, South, West & East London – not long before I joined. We arranged to meet up in the not-that-famous-at-the-time pre-Britpop “The Good Mixer” in Camden Town. I lived just round the corner. At that time it was frequented by 50s rockers and their beehived girlfriends – who all hung around the pool table – and had a well stocked jukebox. I remember Miki and Chris being there – not sure where Emma was.- and a friend of theirs called, Johnny. He’d played in the first line-up of the band and had a memorable Link Wray tattoo on his arm. They were both very friendly and had no airs and graces about being in a pretty successful band. We of course all got very drunkand I was in the band. It was a bit of an eyebrow raiser – but also a bit of a relief really – that they didn’t even want me to do an audition. In retrospect it made sense, as the most important thing when you’re stuck together with someone 16 hours a day is that you get on pretty well.

VP: What was the first Lush song you played?

PHIL: The first song I ever played – well mimed – was for the video for “For Love. “It was so soon after I joined I

didn't even know where my fingers should go. Not that it mattered at that stage of course. I've checked with Emma about what was the first song I actually played in our first rehearsal and she seem to think it was "Tiny Smiles." Prior to it I'd tried to work out some of the basslines. Miki's weren't so difficult, but I found that apart from "Sweetness & Light" and "Nothing Natural," that Emma's songs weren't as easy as I'd first thought. She had a habit of not using root notes to make things a little more interesting. For example in "Monochrome" the guitar chords are the same for every verse, whereas the bass notes change each time round. She told me that when they recorded it in the studio, Robin Guthrie had asked how anybody was expected to be able to learn it. I had to have it all written down on a couple of sheets of paper, which I would have next to my set list onstage. We would play it for the encore. I remember at one show on the "Spooky" UK tour we came back onstage and somebody has stolen them and we had to ask for them back, which was pretty embarrassing. Luckily, after a few months of playing it every night I managed to memorise it.

VP: *What are your favourite Lush songs?*

PHIL: Sweetness & Light/Thoughtforms/Nothing Natural/For Love/Monochrome/Light From A Dead Star/Kiss Chase/Undertow/Lit Up/500/Ciao!

Cover versions:

I'd Like to Walk Around In Your Mind/I Have The Moon/Love At First Sight

Remixes:

Undertow

VP: *What was your view of the music press's treatment of Lush . I know Miki got a bit pissed off with them and said "We couldn't do right for doing wrong"*

PHIL: I think that maybe because we lived in London and would be seen at a lot of shows, the press kind of took us for granted. There was no mystery because we were so ubiquitous. Also because we were seen out I think they felt we never worked. I always found it funny in the US as the press there seemed fascinated by the English music press and would always quiz us on it.

VP: *Did the final U.S. tour really take it out of you as a band. Emmas been quoted as saying she was fed up feeling like a "product"*

PHIL: Yes, it did. After the initial thrill of the 1992 tour of the first album – not counting Gala of course – we then hit the difficult 2nd album syndrome with Split and didn't recover till our success in England with Single Girl, Hypocrite and 500 in 1996. By this time we had new management, who couldn't believe the amount of goodwill we had in the US and decided that we needed to break into a new market there by supporting unsuitable acts like The Gin Blossoms and The Goo Goo Dolls. Unfortunately The Gin Blossoms had just released their difficult 2nd album and whereas their first had sold millions, the newest was a comparative flop in most markets in the US. We ended up either playing in large venues to audiences more interested in their popcorn and soft drinks than us, or the very same venues that we'd played a few months before, but now as a support act.. Also, because of the success of Lollapalooza a lot of the radio stations now hosted their own festivals. Part of the deal was that you played their festival and they would play your record – or else they might not. We would end up on unsuitable bills playing to audiences in the middle of nowhere. We also did radio sponsored shows on our own. We played one in Raleigh, Carolina to almost nobody and the next day while waiting for our plane, met some Lush fans who asked us what we were doing in Raleigh and when we told them, said they knew nothing about the show as it hadn't been advertised.

The most frustrating thing was that we were having success in the UK – and thing were looking very positive – but had only played a warm-up tour of small clubs earlier on in the year. We also missed out on nearly all the UK festivals as we were in the US on inappropriate tours. There was a homecoming tour of the UK booked in the

autumn, but that was not to be. Blur & Pulp had complained about the US being an alien place. For us in the past this had not being the case, but on our last tour there it certainly was.

VP: *There are rumours you filmed a lot of behind the scenes video during the Lush years . Will it ever see the light of day ?*

PHIL: Yes, it's in the pipeline. I took my Super 8 camera on the 1994 Split tour and filmed a couple of hours of footage. Nearly all black and white – and all silent. The Split recording sessions; the UK, the Continent and the USA tours. I would have filmed our trip to Japan, but unfortunately my camera was broken in transit on a trip to Israel, although I did manage to film the 1992 trip there. On the 1996 tour I tried out a Russian clockwork camera, but the results were patchy, although I did manage to capture Chris' 30th at The Fillmore when we hired a male and a female Elvis impersonator to both serenade him before the encore.

VP: *When the decision was made for Lush to call it day, did you have plans in terms of what you wanted to do next ?*

PHIL: I don't think any of us had any plans as Chris' death took the wind out of all our sails. After six month – when the money ran out – I signed on, which as you can imagine was pretty demoralising. I did do a bit of office work here and there – Q, Vox, NME – and was even a film extra for a short period of time. The stand in for a singer in Sliding Doors, an IRA man in Titanic Town, a Paparazzi photographer in What Rat's Won't Do (bit nervous about that one as it was filmed at Heathrow Airport the Monday morning after Princess Di had died). I turned down more than I was offered. Hung, drawn and quartered for Elizabeth (They wanted to shave my head too) One of many jesters in Shakespeare In Love (don't look good in tights). There was even talk of a part in Stanley Kubrick's 'Eyes Wide Open, but he of course cancelled. 'The final straw was standing around in 70s man made fibres in the freezing cold at Pinewood Studios, waiting to do a scene as a photographer (getting typecast now too) for the British Spinal Tap film Still Crazy. I took refuge from the cold on the Albert R Broccoli soundstage and watched them film a scene where a storm hits a festival the band Bad Fruit are playing at and all their equipment gets blown over. I just remember a couple of poor extras standing behind a mountain of Marshall stacks trying to keep them from toppling over as two giant industrial sized fans created typhoon wind conditions. Another extra told me that he'd filmed a battle scene for Merlin on the soundstage a couple of weeks before and that it'd been horrible. Covered in mud, brandishing plastic swords, wet, bruised and frozen to the bone – all for £60 a day .When I got a call later on in the day from the NME saying did I want to come into their nice warm offices and work on the gig guide I jumped at the chance. It was while I was there that The Jesus & Mary Chain's management rang asking if I wanted to play bass for them. I turned it down the first time, so disillusioned was I with the music industry; but then thought, "*Don't be stupid, it's the Jesus & Mary Chain!*" and called back.

VP: *Have the Mary Chain's famously feuding Reid brothers mellowed over the years. I hear they spent much of 1992's Lollapalooza locked in a room arguing and fighting !*

PHIL: Yes, but who could blame them. They had the worst spot on the bill – after Pearl Jam, who'd just sold a few million copies of their album – and played in the middle of the day. The audience came, went crazy for Pearl Jam and then dispersed to the sideshows. By comparison, being the opening act, we had an eager crowd ready and waiting.

Nowadays, with The Jesus & Mary Chain we fly in, do the show and then leave. No beer is spilt or tempers frayed. Jim & William are both now parents, don't drink, or do drugs and also no longer have to endure weeks stuck on a tourbus together. Therefore it is all a lot more relaxed. It's a lot of fun to be playing all the Mary Chain favourites.

VP : *What sort of music do you listen to yourself, these days ?*

PHIL: At the moment I'm into French space synth music from the 1970's – Droids, Milkways, Space – and releases on Mike Always's El reissues label – such as Hungarian jazz guitarist Gabor Szabo – and Johnny Trunk's library and soundtrack label. I also like that Vampire Weekend album.

VP: *Finally as somebody who has played in some of the finest bands from the last 20 years such as Felt, See-See Rider Lush, Loop(?), Biff Bang Pow and The Servants (which featured Luke Haines) have you any "Spinal Tap moments to share?*

PHIL: I saw that Loop mention in Wikipedia. Never did play with them, although I did work with the bass player from the band Neil in a sandwich bar in London Bridge in the late '80s and their drummer was in The Servants.

Here are a couple of Spinal Tap moments.

Lush:

We did only ever did one Radio One Roadshow, in Hunstanton in Norfolk. A rainy seaside town that Emma used to go to with her parents for her holidays. We were on the bill with Dodgy, Baby Bird, Ultra Nate and some long forgotten boy band, whose name escapes me. It was in a local park down near the seafront and we played to an audience that seemed to be predominately mothers, with their babies positioned in front of them in pushchairs. I remember looking round and seeing DJ Simon Mayo on Emma's side of the stage dancing to Single Girl – in a fat suit. Miki may have told him to fuck off. To add insult to injury we had to drive back the same day to London and sit waiting in a BBC dressing room for five hours for as Emma puts, it *"30 seconds of humiliation"* on All Rise For Julian Clary. He played a judge in a mock-courtroom setting doling out pithy putdowns. We had to come out holding a stack of music papers for a young Lush fan whose mother had thrown them away. Julian made some remark about Miki's roots and we were ushered offstage again. No wonder everyone was so vague about what we would be doing. Ah, the magical world of light entertainment.

On the 1996 tour, on one of the before mentioned radio sponsored festival shows, we played on the same bill as Kiss. It was at Irvine Meadows in California and was the 4th Annual KROQ Weenie Roast. Each band – apart from the headliners – were only allowed to play four songs. We were on after The Fugees. For some reason they were 40 minutes late getting to the stage and when they did, launched into a jam which they didn't seem to count as being a song per se. So when they launched into what they thought was their last song – which was at that time No. 1 in the US charts, *'Killing Me Softly With Your Song'* – the stagehands looked at their watches and decided to rotate the revolving stage with us on the back of it. As The Fugees disappeared from view we appeared to a barrage of booing with Miki shouting *"Give us a fuckin' chance!"*. They didn't.

Links

[Light From A Dead Star](#)

[The Jesus And Mary Chain](#)

[Miki Fan Site](#)

[Emma Anderson Interview 2008](#)

[Miki Berenyi Interview 2008](#)

[See-See Rider On Myspace](#)

Video

["Undertow \(Spooky Remix\)" By Lush](#)

["Between Planets" By The Jesus And Mary Chain Live 2007](#)

Wallpaper

