

Lush - Miki Berenyi and Emma Anderson on Their 1994 Album "Split"

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Apr 29, 2015 [Web Exclusive](#) By Frank Valish

Lush never really fit in. Formed in London in 1988, the band—guitarists/vocalists [Miki Berenyi](#) and [Emma Anderson](#), bassist Philip King, and drummer Chris Acland—went on to release three proper full-length albums. From its inception, Lush was publicly well received, but critical reaction for the band's first two albums, 1992's *Spooky* and 1994's *Split*, was mixed. Falling somewhere between shoegaze, initially a pejorative term in the band's native country, and the burgeoning Britpop scene, Lush never completely fit in. By 1996's *Lovelife*, the band dealt with accusations of modifying its sound to fit the times, a charge that was baseless when one actually listens to the album. Years of management push for Lush to break Stateside had worn the band down, and Lush saw its tragic end when Acland committed suicide on October 17, 1996.



With years now in the rearview and shoegaze becoming a more respected term, Lush has started to see more of the universal accolades that eluded it in its own time. The band's catalog, though never remastered and reissued like that of so many of its contemporaries, is now seen for what it was, a deft combination of aural soundscape, moody brilliance, and pop smarts. *Split* is arguably the band's best work, but the truth is that its realization was more difficult than Lush ever expected. The story of *Split* is a story of a band fighting for its songs and itself amidst exhaustion and a process that threatened to extend in perpetuity. But listen to *Split* and what so defines Lush comes through in spades. It's elegant. It's overflowing with melody. It's gritty. It's Lush.

Berenyi and Anderson each spoke with *Under the Radar* to discuss the making of the band's seminal work. [[Also read our separate interview with Berenyi and Anderson on Lush's final album, Lovelife.](#)]

Miki Berenyi

Frank Valish (*Under the Radar*): Is there a particular memory that sticks out for you in the making of *Split*?

Miki Berenyi: It was quite a traumatic time. Unfortunately, I've got memories of being in the studio in France, mixing the album, and it just being all a bit agonizing. Emma's probably spoken about going to Mike Hedges' studio in France. It was a bit grinding. I feel a bit bad, because at the time I was so bloody angry with him and with Ivo [Watts-Russell, 4AD Records co-founder/label head] and with [A&R executive] Tim Carr and everyone who was meant to be helping us, but actually it was probably our fault as well. Because I think the Manic Street Preachers went there

and managed to record an absolutely astonishing album with no problems at all. So maybe there just wasn't the right chemistry. That was quite hard work. Although actually recording it in Wales, which was at Rockfield Studios, was a huge amount of fun. So there you go. Two sides.

I know that the album then ended up being re-mixed. Did it end up sounding the way you wanted it to in the end?

Oh god, by the end of it, I wouldn't have been able to tell you if it sounded good or not, I was in such a state of pulverized victimhood. I can just remember trying to listen to the bloody mixes on different speakers and in cars and on everything, and just completely confused and thinking, "Oh god, please, someone else say whether this is alright, because I've just lost the will to live with it." It's my favorite record, actually, of the ones we made. But it was just such a difficult process. I think the final product is great, but lasting the distance was just too much for me really. Every time we mixed it with someone else you'd have to get all enthusiastic again and go sit while they're mixing, going, "Yeah, that sounds brilliant." But I honestly couldn't have told you if it was great or not at that stage.

But looking back with some time in the rearview mirror, it pleases you now?

Yes, it does. And the thing is, I'm never very good at listening objectively to stuff that I've actually played on, where it's your voice and it's your songs and it's your lyrics. It's a completely different experience for me than listening to someone else's record. And not to be too pretentious, but I always remember Woody Allen saying that once he's made a film, he never watches it. He can't bear to. You can only see the mistakes. And I sort of go along with that. I'm not hearing the same thing that other people are hearing when I listen to records that I've been on. I'm just not the right person for mixing and producing.

Listening to the album now, to my ears it seems to be split between the more pop side of the band and the more shoegazing side. Was that intentional in terms of how you sequenced the songs?

No. I think we always were quite a bit pick 'n' mix with the way that we wrote songs. Some bands have one really coherent sound, but we didn't really have that. Maybe because it was two songwriters. But even if I listen back to the album, if I listen just exclusively to Emma's songs, they're all really different. I'd write a song and think, "Right, okay I've written a slow song. Now I'm going to write a fast song." You didn't really want to keep writing the same thing, just to maintain your interest. And I think we always did that, even on the first record. I don't know. I'd just get bored writing the same thing over and over. So it was almost deliberate to sort of thing, like, "Okay, we've already got this many slow songs, we need some fast ones."

To me it almost sounds like very much a Side A and a Side B. Which kind of leads into my next question. I wonder whether more generally you think the whole shoegaze tag was a help or a hindrance, because you really fell somewhere in between?

Well, considering that it was originally coined as a term of insult by someone who basically just wanted to imply that all of those bands were really dull to watch and had no energy or spark to them—that was the original genesis of that term. What was interesting was that when we went to America, people would interview you and use that term as though it was something brilliant, this sort of uniting great scene. And at first it was a bit jarring. It felt a bit weird, like you're taking the piss or something. But after a while, there's no doubt. It has certainly helped us now. Whether they call it dream-pop or whatever, it sort of pulled together a kind of music that was a bit sneered at actually, in this country in particular. It was around the same time as Madchester, and was quickly followed by Britpop, and it was all this sort of quite laddish, in-your-face, attitude kind of music. I think all those bands are very different in their own way, but they all had a sort of nebulous, introverted quality, which just wasn't very fashionable. So in that respect, initially it was definitely a hindrance for us in this country, because it was just a way to dismiss us. But in the long term, it's good that someone will listen to My Bloody Valentine or something and then feel that this is part of that kind of music, so I guess in that respect it does help.

Emma Anderson

Frank Valish (*Under the Radar*): Is there a particular memory that sticks out for you in the making of *Split*?

Emma Anderson: [*Laughs*] Probably being at Mike Hedges' studio in France. That's probably the abiding memory, which was not, let me tell you, a particularly happy time. We started at Rockfield, which is a studio in Wales, and that kind of went well, but by the end of it, yeah, Mike Hedges' studio in France was not a great place to be, not particularly conducive to anything really. It was a bit mad. We'd been working on the album a long time by then as well and I think everyone was getting a bit stir crazy. It wasn't somewhere that was quite kitted out for people to stay and relax and hang out and have a nice time, and it was the middle of January and it was raining and things weren't going very well on the mixing front either, because that's why we went there. Everyone was going slightly mad, including Mike Hedges. So that's the overriding memory. But it started off quite well in Rockfield. Those are better memories.

That studio in France was kind of in the middle of nowhere as well, wasn't it?

Yeah. Well, it was in a town, but at that point, none of us could drive, and it was raining, and everything was shut anyway. I think there was one time where we ventured into town and went to this bar and played table football and that was about it. There was just nothing to do. And the studio itself didn't even have a living room with a television or anything. It was really bizarre. He told us, "Oh, I've got a swimming pool." And the swimming pool was basically this pool that was covered by this strange plastic covering with cigarette butts around it. It was an awful time. The main entertainment we had was one of those pinball machines, where we would just put in this money over and over and over again. We couldn't even watch the television. It didn't even have proper channels. Oh god.

Was that the first time it was mixed? I read that it was mixed poorly the first time so it had to be re-mixed.

[Mike Hedges] started mixing it, and I think basically what happened was that we had been away for a while. We'd been at Rockfield. We were then at Abbey Road for a week and then we were at this place in Sussex, a weird place of this guy he knew, basically this guy's house—he lived with his mother—and we did the strings at this place in Sussex. And I think we thought, "Well, Mike's wife is now getting really annoyed because she wants him back in France," so he said to us, "We have to mix it in France, we have to mix it in France, because I've got this old desk from Abbey Road, this EMI desk, and it won't sound good on any other desk. It's got to be mixed on this desk." And I think we were all, at that point, just like "Oh no, we don't want to go away again. We really don't." I'm not a massive fan of residential studios anyway. I think they probably work for bands who need to be kept away from drug dealers or who need to jam and hang out together to be creative, which wasn't really what we were like anyway. Our songs were written before we went in the studio. Mike got his way in the end. He ended up not really mixing it. He got a guy in called Ian Grimble, who is an engineer, and he was doing it, but it just wasn't good enough. I'm not saying that's Ian's fault. It was just that everything was going badly wrong. I think Mike had lost interest by this stage. It had been going on too long.

I think another thing that we did wrong was that we did about 18 songs, because I think we thought we'd do all the B-sides as well. And it was too many songs to work on. We should have thought, this is the album and this is what we'll just do with Mike and then the B-sides we'll do another time cheaply. But we did too much and by the time it was over, it was too much to work on, we all got bogged down, Mike kind of lost interest a bit, and it just turned out not very well. It was weird because when we were there, Ivo was being sent DATs back to London and he was going, "It's not good enough, it's not good enough." And at the time, we were like, "What do you mean it's not good enough?" We didn't really realize. We were so penned in, like caged animals, in this bloody studio in France. We'd sort of lost all touch with reality. We couldn't go home. We couldn't listen to it on our own stereos or anything like that. But I had a couple weekends off. I've got a bit of a back problem, and the beds in this studio were awful, so I had to go back to London to see my chiropractor. And then I listened to it on my stereo at home and it sounded terrible.

What was wrong with it?

It sounded thin. It just sounded really bad. It sounded sort of like a demo or something. It wasn't like a proper production, considering the amount of work we had put in it already, weeks and weeks and weeks. So I went back and said, "Listen guys, we've got to get out of here." So it was stopped then and we all came back and the whole thing was mixed again by Alan Moulder in London. It's 20 years ago now, the truth might as well come out.

I read, or maybe I inferred from things that I read, that your manager was trying to strong arm you into working with Scott Litt, saying that if you didn't do that, you wouldn't make it in America.

The manager at the time was very, very obsessed with making it in America. Even the manager after that was. There was always very, very massive pressure on Lush to break America, partly because of how our deal was set up I think, with the licensing, and the way we'd already got money from America. So every album we released, there was this massive pressure to break America, which personally I found too much, and yes, Scott Litt was actually brought in to mix "When I Die," the last track on the album. So we went into a very expensive studio in London with him and did that, and it didn't turn out very well, so it was never used. So there you go. I don't remember him doing the whole album being discussed, but he definitely mixed "When I Die." But it didn't come out well enough. A lot of money was spent on that album. A massive amount of money. Again, I think it was to break America. At one point our manager even suggested Rick Rubin. Before we even started with Mike Hedges, our manager was very, very keen on Rick Rubin recording it. And a lot of it was about big name American producers. It wasn't even about what the record would bloody sound like. It was just having those names associated with the record. They thought it would get more radio play, more press. We were like, "Oh god." So actually, when Mike Hedges was suggested, we thought that actually he was probably more up our street, because he'd done a lot of British bands we liked, The Cure and Banshees and all that sort of stuff. On some levels it did work with Mike. He was very good with strings. He was very good with vocals actually. He was quite a good disciplinarian. These other big name American producers were bandied about, but ultimately they didn't work on the proper album.

I know that you got some mixed reviews for **Spooky**. Did that experience factor into what you ultimately wanted to do with *Split*?

No. The thing is, when *Split* came out, Britain had gone all Britpop crazy by then. So it was a bit out of step with what was going on. There were a couple songs that were more Britpop, like "Hypocrite," which was the single. But "Desire Lines" and "Light from a Dead Star" were still very much in that ethereal vein. We didn't have any game plan with it. When it came out, especially in this country, people would sort of point the finger, like, "They never get in the charts like everybody else does now." All these guitar bands were getting in the charts, and Lush were always still underachievers. And then someone had the bright idea of releasing two singles on the same day, which was "Hypocrite" and "Desire Lines," sort of a commercial shoot-yourself-in-the-foot. That was part of the thought, a bit like, "We don't care, we're going to do something really uncommercial," and yes they didn't chart either. We certainly didn't have some sort of plan to be conquering the charts. *Spooky* had mixed reviews. *Split* had mixed reviews. *Split* probably had less favorable reviews to *Spooky*. It had very average reviews. But I think a lot of that was because in this country everyone was going Britpop crazy and it just wasn't fitting in with the times. Years have passed and people have come to appreciate it more.

Why didn't that double single idea work? It seems that those two singles represented both sides of the band really well.

One of the reasons it wasn't successful was because we were on 4AD. We were not on a major label. There were a lot of indie labels in this country that at that time were owned by major labels. That sounds a bit weird, but basically what it means is that being an indie label just means you use independent distribution. I don't know what it means now, but back then that's all it meant. So a label like Sony could create a label and put it through indie distribution and it would get on the indie charts, but they'd have the money from the major. They weren't really indie labels. But 4AD was an indie label, and it didn't have the money. All these other bands were on indie labels and people were like "Oh, indie bands are getting in the charts." Whereas if you dug deeper, they were actually on EMI or something, or they had a lot of money behind them. They would do all this formatting and they were giving records to shops

which were chart-return shops. They were doing all these little tricks to get their bands on the charts. And 4AD never did that. They just didn't play that game, to their credit probably; maybe, maybe not, I don't know. But that's one of the reasons we never went very high in the charts compared to other bands.

Sometimes we were bigger than some of these other bands. I remember once playing in Glasgow, and do you remember there was a band called The High? One of them used to be in The Stone Roses, years and years ago anyway. They were on I think London Records, so they weren't an indie band, but they were on London at the time. And I remember going to this shop and their single was on sale for 99p. And it was on the counter. And we were playing the same night as they were in Glasgow, and we played quite a big venue and they played a tiny, tiny, tiny, venue, and they got in the charts and we didn't. It was when "Sweetness and Light" came out. They got in the chart and we didn't even though we were a bigger band and probably sold more records. Because the record company was doing all these tricks. So that was one of the reasons Lush were never as successful. We were on a label that didn't do all that stuff. It was quite frustrating at the time. People were going, "Why didn't Lush never get very high on the charts?" I remember, even when *Lovelife* came out, the week that "500" was out, and I was in an HMV in London and there were no copies of the record in there. You couldn't actually buy it, because they didn't flood shops, like other labels did. So we didn't do as well in the singles charts. In hindsight, who cares really, but at the time, it was like, "Oh, Lush haven't gotten in the charts again?" And it's like, "Oh shut up."

Was there a conscious decision that, for *Lovelife*, you needed to do something different from the *Split* experience, because of the sound? You have mentioned moving more toward the Britpop thing. Not that the songs are markedly different; I think people kind of assume that they are...

I know what you mean. Yeah, they're not remarkably different. I agree. Whatever happened was not really discussed in that way. I think that what was definitely discussed was that there was an immediacy that we had when we played live that was missing a bit on the record, on all the records, not just on *Split*. They were possibly a bit overproduced, where there was an energy when we played live which maybe wasn't coming across. And also I think *Split* is apparently one of the most expensive, if not *the* most expensive album 4AD has ever made. I remember at the time someone saying that. Because it took so long. And with residential studios, and being away from home and having to mix it again with Alan Moulder. There was definitely a feeling of, "We're not doing that again. We're doing it in London. We'll do it with Pete [Bartlett], who we know." He was a soundman but he'd been in bands before and was a pretty seasoned professional in that sense. We did it in a studio in North London. We didn't want to go through that whole agonizing process, when it didn't have to be like that. We ditched the effects to a certain extent. And I think we were definitely being influenced, I can definitely say that I was, by some of the bands that were around. I really liked Elastica and Supergrass and The Bluetones. And there were some bands that were around at that time that I really did like, and it probably did affect my songwriting. So there were fewer songs like "Desire Lines" and more like "Single Girl."

[Also read our separate interview with Berenyi and Anderson on Lush's final album, *Lovelife*.]

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