

The DJ Who Opened for Lush at the Roxy? Yeah, That Was Me

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By [Liz Ohanesian](#)



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Me in the DJ booth at the Roxy

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Standing over CDJs high above the crowd inside the Roxy, I scroll through songs, press play with a headphone up against my ear, and program a cue point.

I look down. The room is packed with people who scored tickets to an intimate show from [reunited British band Lush](#). They aren't here to dance. Even if they were, the crowd is so thick that they wouldn't be able to do much more than bob their heads to the beat.

I see a guy doing just that in the midst of this mass of bodies. Near the stage, there's a girl who is very clearly mouthing the words to an old Cocteau Twins song. Later on, I get a text from a friend on the floor letting me know that a girl near him is singing along with a House of Love tune.

On this night, my job is to get people ready for Lush. I work under the assumption that many here are like me: people who fell for the band during their teen years after The Smiths and The Cure had already sparked an obsession with artists from the U.K. From there, the set list expands.



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Spying on the crowd from the DJ booth

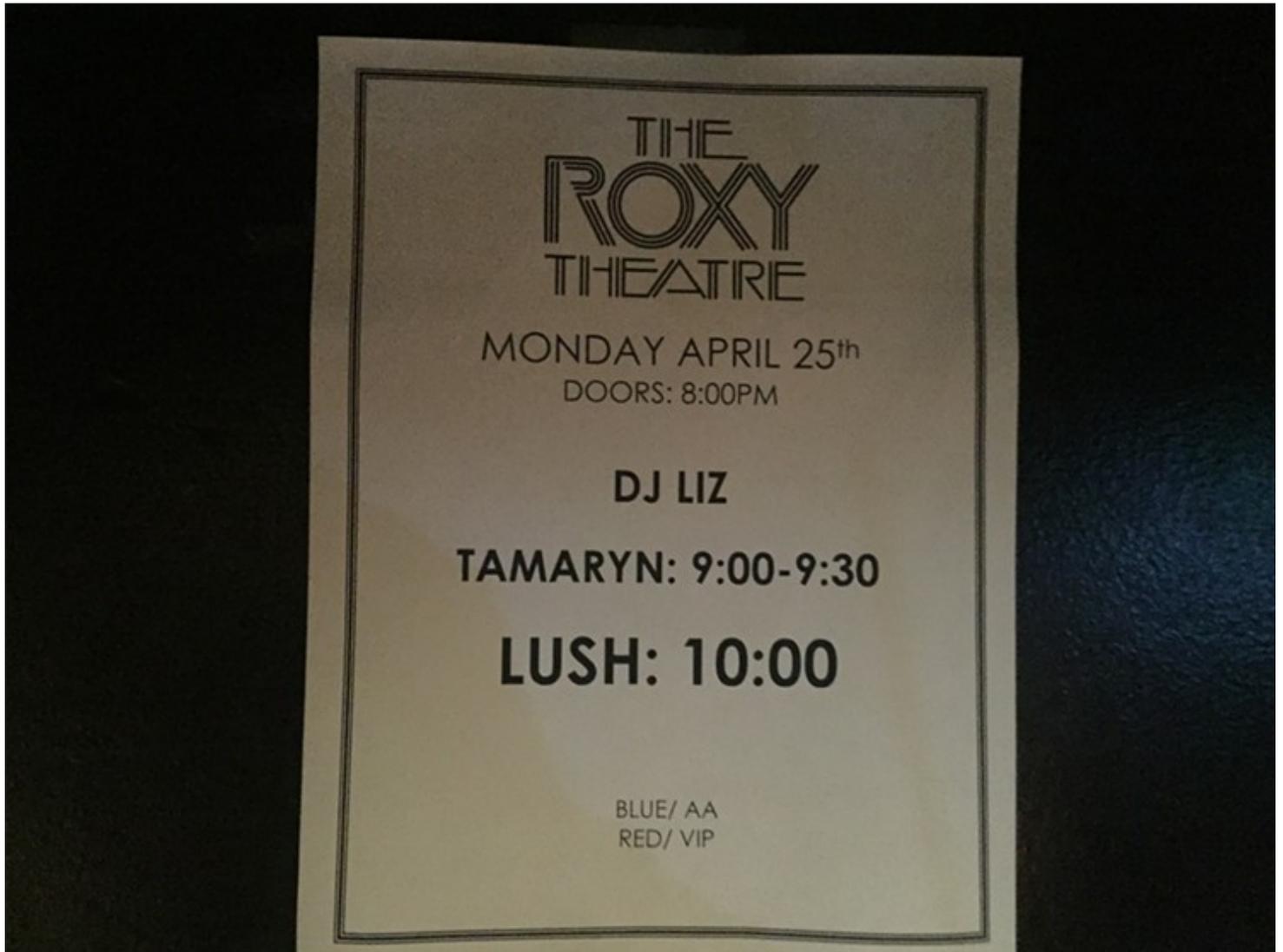
Liz Ohanesian

When I say that I DJ, some people assume that means I'm playing EDM at bottle-service clubs. Nope. If I had to use a genre to describe what I do, it would be "indie." I'm the kind of DJ you bring in when you want to hear the KROQ songs of the '80s, the bands that starred on *NME* covers in the '90s and the 21st-century groups that draw from those influences.

Plenty of my selections may fall into various styles of dance music, but just about everything I play is distinctly a song. If I play a remix, it has to be one that leaves the song structure intact and, even when I'm getting heavy into

mixing, I try to let most of the song play and don't mess with the biggest moments within it.

Regardless of genre, there are a lot of similarities in how DJs work, but there are also some key differences. Take techno as an example. The best techno DJs are essentially scoring the night. They're taking pieces of things that already exist, maybe adding some more electronic embellishments on the fly, to make a new, ephemeral work that lasts for a few hours and ebbs and flows with the vibe of the crowd. By contrast, I'm more like a music supervisor building a soundtrack. I compile songs — some of which you'll probably know, some of which you won't — that (hopefully) make a moment more memorable.



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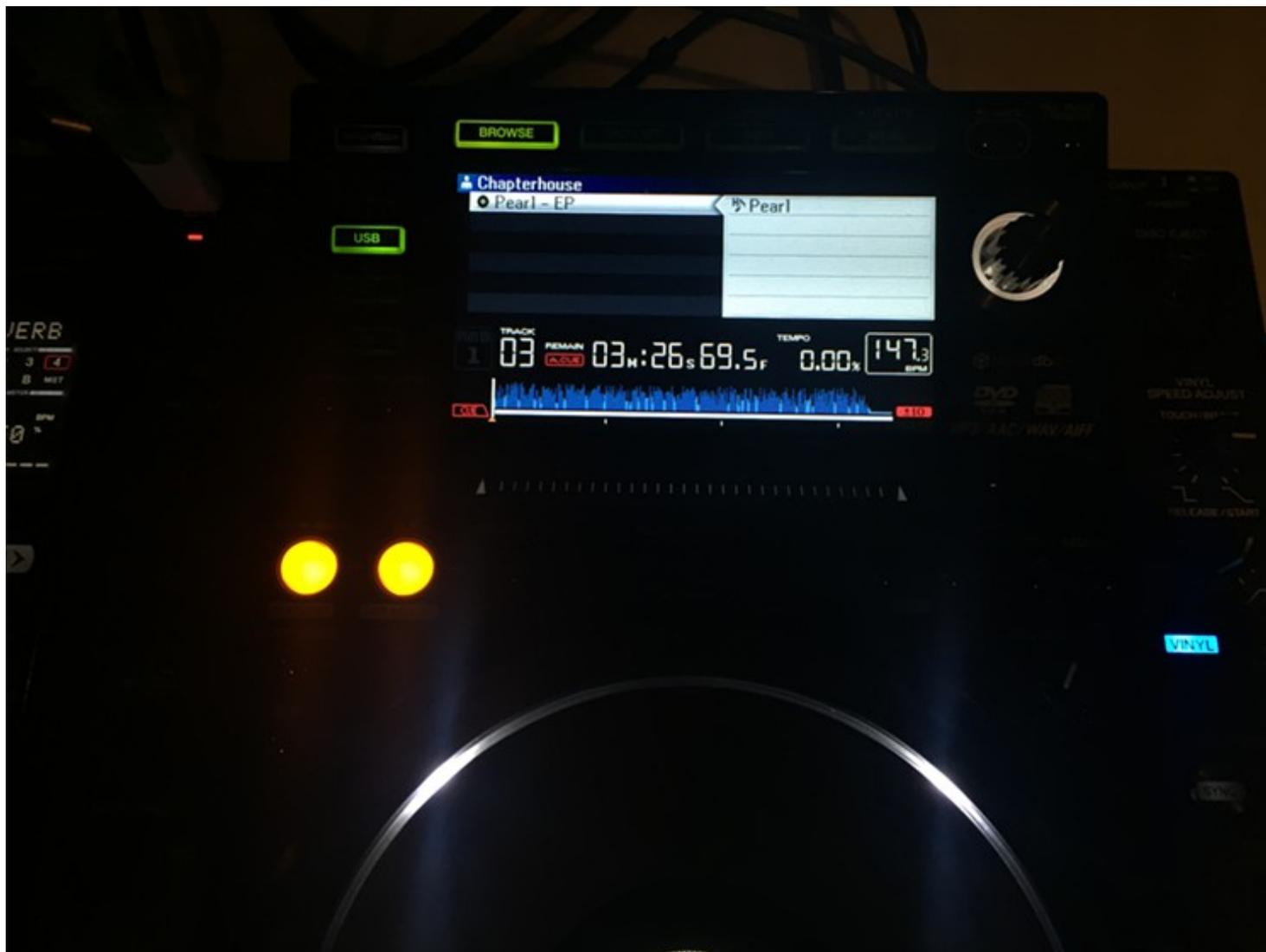
The line-up at the Roxy on Monday, April 2

Liz Ohanesian

There's a lot of power in this. Years ago, I was a resident at an indie club called Bang! It was a huge, three-room party and I played in a booth that was practically hidden by the wall above the main stage. I could see the crowd better than they saw me and would use that to my advantage. If I saw friends walk into the room, I would drop a song that I knew was one of their favorites. I would watch them run out to the dance floor and, maybe by the time the bridge hit, they would look up and we could make eye contact.

From my vantage point, I could watch lives unfold. People danced, made out, argued. I would try to test how much control I had on the decks. Could I play a song that would summon one of my friends to the booth? Yes, definitely. Could one mini-set tell the guy who just walked into the room that I'm head-over-heels in love with him? Possibly. (The guy in question is now my husband.)

I'm not above using music to manipulate people, but there's more to it than that. These sets become my diary, more so than anything I've ever written. I'm fairly diligent about keeping set lists and have notebooks that go back to the early 2000s filled with titles of songs that I played at clubs. When I look through the lists, I can tell you what I was feeling that night. There are sets that existed out of love and sets that existed out of frustration. It's therapeutic, but it's also work. Somehow, I have to find that emotional connection between myself and the crowd.



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Prepping the first song for a pre-Lush DJ set

Liz Ohanesian

For the Lush show, my job was to prep the audience. But I was prepping myself, too. I have been a Lush fan since I was 14, but this was my first time seeing them live.

With that in mind, the DJ set evolved into something about life and trying to reconcile a misfit/cool-kid past with the

onset of middle age. The songs came courtesy of the bands that sucked me into the alternative camp right before puberty hit, the ones that marked angst-filled teenage years and my time as a college English major who headed straight from class to clubs. Somewhere in there are a few newer artists who elicit the same emotional response that I felt when first heard Lush. You can hear the set (everything that's available on Spotify, anyway) below.

After the job is done, I stand in line for the ladies room, where a girl recognizes me and mentions that she loved hearing The Chameleons. It's not the only time someone at the Lush show mentions the U.K. post-punk band. It even sounded like there might have been a squeal rising from the crowd when I played "Swamp Thing." Indie folks and goths, of which there are quite a few here, really love that song.

I flash back to when I would hear "Swamp Thing" at goth clubs, maybe a decade after it was released, and feel the goosebumps rise as I hit the dance floor. I felt that way on this night just by playing the song, and I hoped this meant that all of us in the room were on the same wavelength.

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