

Q&A: Lush On Their Unusual Legacy & Exciting Reunion

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Of all the shoegaze reunions that we've been blessed with over the past few years, perhaps none is more satisfying than the return of Lush. Unlike many of their '90s peers, most of whom either fizzled out due to lack of interest or were forced to close up shop for financial reasons, Lush ended their run on something of a creative high note. Between 1989 and 1996 the band released four increasingly pop-friendly albums, the last of which — 1996's *Lovelife* — neatly bridged the gap between hazy shoegaze and the prevailing Britpop of the mid '90s. At a time when Lush were poised to achieve even greater mainstream success, drummer Chris Acland tragically took his own life. Exhausted and heartbroken, the band simply stopped. So, for all of us who came of age with their records (and may or may not still have old VHS copies of *120 Minutes* that are permanently warped from watching the "Sweetness And Light" video over and over), the news that Lush will reform after a 20-year hiatus is truly glorious. Having announced a run of U.S. shows leading up to a performance at Coachella later this month, the band is also releasing a new EP, *Blind Spot* — four tracks of blissed-out dreampop that picks up seamlessly where they left off nearly two decades ago. We talked to Lush frontwomen Emma Anderson and Miki Berenyi about the band's great early days as well as their genuinely exciting comeback.

STEREOGUM: I appreciate the fact that you guys are releasing new music in addition to playing the live shows. Why was that important?

ANDERSON: For me, it was a nice extra, actually, because I really like writing and making music, so it kind of added a bit more incentive, and I think it's just nice for the fans as well. A lot of people do just get back together and play the old songs, which is fine, but I think it was nice to have that extra string to our bow. But it did mean a hell of a lot more work for us. We didn't make life easy for ourselves, but I think it's been worth it.

STEREOGUM: Do you find that you fall back pretty easily into the same dynamic in terms of how you make songs together?

ANDERSON: Well, this EP was done slightly differently in two ways. I actually wrote the music and Miki wrote the lyrics, which is different from what we did back in the day where I wrote the music and lyrics to my songs on the whole, and Miki did hers. Also, the way we made this record was quite different because we hadn't really played as a band or rehearsed much when we made it, so it was all done in a very modern way, with sending files to and from the producers. It's funny how different technology is now for recording. That being said, the way I write music is pretty much the same as it was back then — just sitting by myself with my guitar.

STEREOGUM: Is it strange to go back and play those old songs again? Did you essentially have to relearn them or does some kind of muscle memory just take over?

BERENYI: I think there is some muscle memory, amazingly, even after two decades. Some of it has actually been quite hard to work out because we literally can't remember how to play the songs, so there was lots of digging out bits of old paper and making notes and actually looking at old YouTube videos of performances. And then some of it does just mysteriously come back to you.

ANDERSON: I think the ones that we played a lot were easier. Oddly I found my hands were just sort of going places on the guitar without me thinking about it, which is slightly freaky. Playing "Sweetness And Light," it just kind of happens. But more often I'd be playing something and suddenly realize "Oh, this isn't right. I don't remember it feeling like this." And then having to go back and figure out how you did it.

STEREOGUM: Have you been surprised by the response when you announced that you were going to get together and play shows? Did you expect there would be this sort of outpouring of support?

ANDERSON: I don't think we knew what to expect, actually. The London show sold out in like a few hours, which we were quite taken aback by, actually.

BERENYI: I think Emma was slightly more aware because she's a bit more active on social media. I mean, I'm hopeless...I'm not on anything. I really had no idea. I think Emma was much more aware that a lot of people were still really into the band and that there was quite a lot of support out there, which I suppose is the difference now because you can kind of directly experience that. You can see what people are saying online. Before all of that, you'd just be guessing, really, and relying on a good reaction from the press or what other kind of intermediary there would be. Before we started all of this reunion stuff, it was a bit, "Oh how are they going to respond?" We were sort of aware that there was support out there and people interested, and you could see all of these new bands who were starting to champion our music. Still, I didn't really expect it to be quite as positive as this. It's nice.

STEREOGUM: I know you don't always have control over your legacy as a band or the way people think about you, but it's cool to see that your music has continued to have this life out in the world and continue to influence people. So much has been written about the shoegaze era as of late, trying to properly contextualize all of those bands. Did you feel like Lush held a funny place in that world?

BERENYI: I think it was a bit difficult for us to gauge where we stood because, again, back when we were operating, everything was really said through the press. Although we did have supporters in the press, there was an awful lot of...you know, people just thought we were OK but they didn't really respect us or weren't into our music in the same way that they raised up a band like My Bloody Valentine. And it wasn't just us. They didn't pay much attention to Slowdive's music either. I'm not really sure *what* they got right. At the time, "shoegaze" wasn't a particularly celebrated genre, and you didn't always know or understand why people paid attention to you or not. Did people like us because it was cool at that moment or because they liked the red hair? I mean I don't bloody know. Music journalism in the UK back then was very tabloid. Very few journalists were actually writing about our music. It was more of a popularity thing than a thoughtful assessment of the music you were making.

STEREOGUM: When people make lists of the best shoegaze bands of all time, Lush are always on the list thanks to records like *Spooky*. When people make lists of the best Britpop records of all time, Lush are often on the list thanks to *Lovellife*. You were one of the few bands that were able to transcend the shoegaze thing.

BERENYI: Some of that just has to do with how long you keep going, doesn't it? I think Blur have been called everything from Baggy to Britpop, so I think they even were a bit in two categories at one point. I think you just have to stick around long enough for people to keep talking about you.

STEREOGUM: I remember seeing you guys play at Lollapalooza in Dallas, Texas in the early '90s. I was quite young, but I drove there with a car full of people — mostly grunge-loving dudes— who were all very excited to see Pearl Jam. I recall having an argument with one of them in the car about their assumption that Lush probably wouldn't be a very good live band because of the kind of music you made and — quite frankly — because you were women. I remember watching you play and wondering if that was something you had to contend with all the time. Not that things have changed that much, but I remember being really naively shocked by how even the "alternative" world was so super sexist and aggressive.

BERENYI: Oh, I don't know. The whole women-in-rock thing is...I mean you could talk for hours about it. It was there then, it's still there, it will probably be there forever.

ANDERSON: It was a very odd thing for me, the constant comparison with the other bands. I can't imagine comparing Bruce Springsteen with My Bloody Valentine and saying, "Which one is the better band?" It's such a completely different type of music. That's how it was for us. We were so different than so many of the bands around

us. Also, for some bands it's not actually that important whether they're virtuosos or not. That's not really the interesting part about them. We were a much better live band than most people, having never seen us, gave us credit for. But that kind of competitive "my band is better than your band" thing is...I just can't even engage with that. I think if someone asks me what's the best live band that I've ever seen, I literally wouldn't be able to answer it, because it just doesn't work as a question for me.

STEREOGUM: Twenty years is a long time. Are you surprised by how much — or maybe by how little — the landscape of popular music has changed in that time?

BERENYI: Oh God. It's very hard because I think, in this country, I think the main thing I've noticed is that a lot of new bands that come out now in the UK come from fairly well-off families. I don't know what it's like in America, but that kind of working-class, post-punk thing is pretty much gone. Also, people don't really buy records anymore. That is a massive difference as well. I always say I'm quite glad that we did what we did back then, actually. I think it must be quite hard to do it now, to be a new band. It's interesting how many bands are actually getting back together and doing quite well. I think that is an indication that something is missing somewhere along the lines. It's just my personal feelings. People are looking backwards, even young people. We've got quite a lot of younger fans, people in their 20s and stuff. Bands from the '90s seem to be in favor again for some reason. It's funny because we actually did look at performing together again a few years ago and it just didn't happen, the time just didn't seem to be right, but it just does now for some reason. Something in the current climate, I guess.

ANDERSON: It's difficult to talk about the musical landscape because, I think, for all of the faults of having to go through a limited number of labels and the bottleneck of press attention that existed back when we started, it also meant there was a sort of finite area that you could explore. Now, I'm sure there are plenty of different kinds of bands out in the world making music, but now you just have to fucking go looking for them, which is really time consuming. I'm nearly 50. When I was 16, I'd search out records and go to wherever I could, record libraries or odd shops and things. Now, I think you have to be quite dedicated when searching out music because it's not really collated for you in the same way. It's overwhelming. A million websites and outlets. I don't really know very much at all about what's out there because I don't really have the time to go hunting for it.

STEREOGUM: Do you anticipate making more music? I think you should.

BERENYI: I think it's just a question of seeing how it goes. We'd like to make more music, definitely, and the people we worked with on the EP are definitely up for it again. It's just about time and money and just fitting it all in. We've got jobs and children now, so it's very different than back in the day when it was all much more structured and we had a record deal. There were sort of disadvantages to that as well, because we were under the gun a lot with having to tour and tour and tour. We're more in control this time, but it's trickier in other ways. We'd certainly like to make another record. Another album, actually.

ANDERSON: It's kind of almost exactly the reverse way around now than it was back then. Back then when we made a record, it was the only thing we were doing. It's your job. You're in a band. So there would be a period that would come where you were just writing. Writing, writing, and writing, and then demo-ing, and rehearsing, and it's just all about collating as much as possible and then seeing what comes out of it. Kind of what's going to grow into an album. Now we just don't have that time. It's just a really different way of working now, which makes it quite unpredictable, actually. It's almost remarkable that the EP came out as well as it did. Although everyone put an immense amount of work into it, it was just such an unusual way for us to make a record. We worked in bits and pieces. I'm still intrigued how it will happen if we make an album.

STEREOGUM: The EP sounds very much of a piece though. The songs fit really nicely together, and aesthetically it's quite seamless.

ANDERSON: Well, thank you. I think it's just interesting you can use a different process to ultimately get to the same place. It's just not what we've been used to before. I don't know, maybe next time around it will be easier.

BERENYI: But some of the things that we were used to before I certainly don't want to repeat. Let's not go there.

STEREOGUM: It was interesting to talk to the people in Slowdive about getting back together and how technology factored into that. Same with My Bloody Valentine. It was much easier to replicate the sound of those records in a live setting now. Technology is better, gear is better.

ANDERSON: Yeah, well just working with computers makes things so much easier as well, especially with recording. And cheaper as well. The amount of money that record companies were spending on studios back in the day — these expensive residential studios — you just don't need to do it now. Some of the records we made on 4AD cost quite a lot of money and we certainly couldn't do that now. As Miki said, you get the same results, really.

BERENYI: It just occurred to me that, in some ways, it probably worked as well because of the way that we've always written songs. Although I said there was that process that we used, we didn't ever get together and sort of *jam*. Songs didn't grow organically out of rehearsal sessions in that way. They were always very much mapped out before the band got hold of them. In that respect, that probably helped the way that we write songs anyway. I think it would be a lot trickier if we were trying to jam on Skype or something. We usually each came to the process with our own songs.

STEREOGUM: The new box set that they put together with all of the records in it is *really* beautiful. It's not every day that bands get to see their entire body of work represented in such a beautiful way.

ANDERSON: Yeah, it was quite a lot of working putting it all together. That people are so excited about it and actually want to buy it is quite a validation, especially after all this time. It got some really nice reviews as well. I think it also shows how much music we actually put out. It was a lot! We recorded a lot of music over the years — all of those albums, and B-sides, and all of these extra things that no one had ever seen. It is nice to have it all in one place, actually. There's the special vinyl one coming out on Record Store Day as well.

STEREOGUM: Yeah, the vinyl one is the thing that I want. Just take my money, guys.

ANDERSON: [*Laughs*] We haven't even seen it yet.

BERENYI: We have only seen photos of it.

STEREOGUM: I'm a sucker for things like that — elaborate packaging, new liner notes, etc. I nerd out for that stuff. It's also nice to hear people writing about these records again, that they get a fresh critical evaluation. I was excited to hear people talking about *Split* again, because I always thought that was a really misunderstood and kind of sadly ignored record in your catalog. It's always been my favorite.

BERENYI: *Split*. Yeah, it's funny because that one probably sold the least, actually. Out of the three studio albums, that one sold the least, but it seems to be a lot of people's favorite.

STEREOGUM: I love that record. Every mix tape I ever made for any boyfriend always had "Desire Lines" on it, which I realize now is kind of a morbid song to make on a mix tape for someone you have a crush on.

ANDERSON: Morbid?

STEREOGUM: Maybe "maudlin" is a better word

BERENYI: [*Laughs*] Come on, we have way more morbid and maudlin songs than that one. We have a lot of them.

Lush's *Blind Spot* EP is out 4/15 via [Edamame Records](#).