

Lush: Shoegaze, Blind Spot and Reunions

S theskinny.co.uk /music/interviews/lush-interview

•



Lush

Editor's Choice

"You know, I *hate* the term shoegazing." Emma Anderson laughs but she's frustrated rather than amused as she reflects on the continuing and uncomfortable packaging of the scene her band Lush helped kick-start a mere quarter century ago. That time might have flown but the lazy compartmentalising has remained. "The scene was ridiculed to some extent," she continues, "but if you go back to the 90s, a lot of stuff hasn't stood the test of time very well at all, and I can see why *this* has. It has a slightly other-worldly quality, I guess. It's very musical. That might sound really silly but it's not lyric-driven, it's certainly not scene-driven. It's based in music and genuine, real emotion."

Hear hear. And her band's lasting qualities go some considerable way towards explaining why their unexpected regrouping late last year was greeted with such immediate warmth. With the likes of [Ride](#) and [Slowdive](#)'s returns leading to a thoughtful re-evaluation of their back catalogues, Lush begin again with their credibility secure, despite elements of a largely supportive press at the time throwing them the odd bitchy barb. As we talk by phone ahead of the band's first release in 20 years – the tremendous *Blind Spot* EP – and a run of live shows that include two headline performances at London's vast Roundhouse, Anderson recalls those slyly negative notices with bemusement.

"This has come up quite a lot actually," she says. "I think back in the day it wasn't necessarily about the music. I mean, if you look at how the press treated us, it so often was about how we were going to gigs and how we supported Spurs! I do look back now and wonder whether that was partly our fault – you know, because we weren't sitting there being all mysterious and enigmatic. Because, really, we're not those sort of people, and I think the music press back then was so gossipy and to some degree they pounced upon our, erm, *jovial* qualities."

Lush versus their reputation

Anderson is wryly aware of the band's part in their broader perception back then. Their 'joviality' saw then acclaimed

in some parts of the music press as non-stop liggers when there was little evidence to suggest their peers were staying in to finish their crocheting. To be fair, Lush had more supporters than detractors, of course – *Melody Maker*, in particular journalist Chris Roberts, helped promote them early on. "Yeah, he was great – one of the early adopters, as they say. But many writers did ignore the music to some degree and chose to portray us as these party animals, almost as if we weren't serious musicians in the same way as, oh I don't know, [Spiritualized](#). Do you know what I mean? Or [Suede](#) or whoever. So, yes, it was a bit of a pervasive thing. But that's just the way it was, really."

We move on to talk about the return to live performance. Lush were always a blistering, uniquely physical live act, and Anderson is nervous about how their audience will view them 20 years on but confident in her band and her bandmates. "It's sounding really good," she says. Much of the response to their reformation has recognised the tragedy behind the band's lengthy absence. Drummer Chris Acland took his own life in 1996 as the band were struggling to decide on their next step. His death was, of course, immensely difficult for all concerned but Anderson is keen to move on. "Obviously, it's been a long time and now we've got a new drummer (Justin Welch, formerly of *Elastica* and a friend of the band) – but he's brilliant. Of course, Miki (Berenyi) and Phil (King) are fantastic but Justin – he's just so committed and proactive, and he's made such a huge contribution to it all. It's sounding really, really good."

While Anderson recalls the early days fondly – "Oh my god, I vaguely remember that one," she says, when taken back to a very early, very messy gig at no less than Derby Dial Inn, circa 1989 – it's the prospect of reviving those glories where her focus now lies. "It's daunting, but the passing of time changes you as a person and you become slightly more philosophical about things. I'm sure that when we're standing at the side of the stage at Coachella or what have you, we'll be pretty nervous. I don't know... ask me again after the gigs!"



Lush in their 90s heyday (l-r: Phil King, Emma Anderson, Miki Berenyi)

Anderson might be still feeling her way around being back in the music business but she agrees that any cynicism has eventually been replaced by respect and goodwill. "Yes, I think it has. We're nervous, definitely. We're not as young as we used to be and I remember our very first band photo and now, *well...* our first new photo came out recently in *The Guardian* – we didn't get it together, typically, to get it done properly – and we were like, 'Oh no! What's everyone going to say?' But, you know, it was fine..."

People were kind and supportive, though. "Yeah, they were for the most part but, you know, it being *The Guardian*, you get all these comments from absolute idiots." Indeed. Whereas most readers responded warmly, a few halfwits couldn't quite live with the fact that Lush had dared to become middle aged, no matter how well they they brushed up. Berenyi offered an immediate, beautifully worded, no-prisoners response that concluded: "Say that shit to my face, you piece of shit cowardly fuck." Anderson laughs: "Yeah. Oh yeah, she went for it. She's still *quite good* at putting people in their place."

(Continues below)

More from Music:

Andrew Falkous on *The Peace and Truce of Future of the Left*

"A sound nobody hears" – Isabel Jones and Duncan Chapman



With talk turning to how well their peers have done second time around – "Yeah, that had something to do with it, I think. Encouraging." – Anderson is insistent that without new material, it's a hollow enterprise. "We did look at it a few years ago as well but the time just wasn't right. I don't know. The stars were aligned this time. It seemed to be that an opportunity had opened up and we thought, 'Well, it's now or never.' And also, we thought it would be nice to make a record, because a lot of bands who come back, they just play live and don't bother making any new music. But we were quite keen to get some new material out at the same time."

If the *Blind Spot* EP is any indication, 20 years to ponder their next move was time well spent for Lush. Drawing a line back to the spidery atmospherics of their earliest work, its four songs suggest that band and fans share a common preference. "Oh yeah, I think most people's favourite period is that early material," acknowledges Anderson. "And from our perspective, I'm not sure I could face the prospect of writing another *Single Girl*, to be totally honest! That kind of song was most definitely of its time. It probably wasn't, in hindsight, that representative of us as songwriters, that song and many from that period. It was a weird one, that album [1996's post-shoegazing Britpop concession *Lovelife*.] I think we were damned if we didn't and damned if we did. If we had made another *Spooky* or *Split* in 1996, people would have just gone, 'Oh god, all that bloody fluffy cloud rubbish again.'

"And it wasn't fluffy cloud rubbish anyway," she continues, "but we still went with it and went all stripped back and made an album that perhaps was more in fitting with the times." That said, people liked it. Bought it, too. "Well, yes, it did quite well, commercially, but now it's not really where our hearts are. If I write a song, it just kind of comes out. It's certainly not a conscious or calculating thing. So, all of that said, it's not as if we thought, 'Oh, we've got to make a Britpop album!' It just came out like that. We were probably just being influenced by what was around."

Out of Control, from Lush's comeback EP, *Blind Spot* (Edamame, 2016)

When pushed on the actual songwriting methodology, Anderson is still not entirely clear after all this time just how they do it. "Oh god! I can never... it's so difficult to explain how we write songs," she says. "I mean, I wrote all the music on the new EP and Miki wrote all the lyrics, which is different to what happened back in the day. Back then, she wrote *her* music and lyrics and I wrote *my* music and lyrics. It was quite separate. I think because of our lifestyles – I'm a single mum and I get a bit more time on my own – I had more of an opportunity to write music."

Does music demand a different discipline? "Music's a bit more *intense*. You have to be isolated and you can't have kids running around when you're trying to get a melody out of a guitar. So it just turned out that way this time around. But still, I don't know how to explain how I write songs. These melodies come into my head or I'm just playing around. I'm just walking down the street and the tune will come. I record these little bits into my phone and I just build them up when I get home, which is always what I did, really – it's not changed much at all."

Lush's enthusiasm for new music is undeniably refreshing but, first and foremost, the hardcore want to see them tear apart the old stuff. We can wait for new. We probably *can't* wait to see the likes of De-Luxe and Sweetness and Light brought back to life with volume and with fire. Anderson gets it: "I know. The live set is drawing more on the earlier stuff. I think we've realised that that's what most popular want to hear right now. It's slightly more Miki's area, this, but it's been quite easy to select the songs that we think people will want to hear us play. We are going to play a couple of new ones but for now I think we'll concentrate on the older stuff."

The lasting legacy of Lush

With new fans picking up on a sound that the current generation have purloined more and more, it's fair to assume that Lush are shifting tickets in their thousands to more than just survivors of the late 80s indiepop wars. "Yes, absolutely," says Anderson. "We know that younger people have picked up on it. We get messages like 'I'm a shoegaze fan and I'm 21 and I'm from Sweden and I love you,' and all of that stuff is really sweet. Things like that from America as well. When you think about it, I remember when I was in my teens and if you're a real music fan, you go back, don't you? You always go back. You plunder the past – you don't just listen to what's in the top 40. When I was younger, I was going back to the Velvet Underground and Joy Division. Let's not forget – we were going 25 years ago. It's quite a long time..."

Let's not get ahead of ourselves, of course, but with Lush's first songs in years turning out so very, very well, is there – whisper it – talk perhaps of an album? Anderson laughs and considers: "Hopefully. *Hopefully*. There are plans for more. It's not recorded yet but we've got so much going on. I actually sometimes wonder whether we're trying to do *too* much. You know, we've got all these gigs coming up and all this rehearsing. A *lot* of rehearsing actually, because it's been a long time, but, as I say, that's going very well, actually. So yes, we're looking at doing an album." Be rude not to? "Well, yes. Wouldn't it just? Well, that's the plan, anyway, so bear with us!"

Blind Spot is released through the band's own Edamame label on 22 Apr
Discography box set *Chorus* is out now on 4AD