

Lush: The Return of Sweetness and Light

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I remember the first time I heard Lush. Their sound was dreamy, frenetic, layered, and sounded unlike anything I had ever heard before. They were different, but had a strong pop sensibility. When I saw them live I was impressed by the sheer joy emanating from the stage, both during and between songs. The music had a mysterious air, but the band lacked pretense and clearly enjoyed having fun with each other and their fans. Lush also had incredible songs. Principal songwriters Miki Berenyi (lead vocals, guitar) and Emma Anderson (lead guitar, backing vocals) penned some of the finest guitar pop of their era, and Lush's influence on other bands can be heard to this day.

Lush formed in late '80s London and had many notable achievements in the years that followed: signing to 4AD, touring on Lollapalooza 2, and appearing on Top of the Pops (the only 4AD band ever to do so). Sadly, it all came to an end in October of 1996 when drummer Chris Acland unexpectedly took his own life. Miki, Emma, and bassist Phil King (who replaced Steve Rippon in 1992) grieved the loss of their friend and officially split in 1998. Phil became a touring member of The Jesus & Mary Chain, Emma formed a new band called Sing-Sing that was active until 2007, and Miki retreated almost completely from music. The years wore on and a Lush reunion seemed not to be.

Then, in September 2015, Miki, Emma, and Phil announced a Lush reunion with Justin Welch (previously of Spitfire and Elastica) joining on drums for a limited number of 2016 live dates, as well as the release of an EP of brand new material called Blind Spot. In the buildup to the live shows and new EP, the band reissued the compilation Ciao! (on vinyl for the first time). They likewise released a comprehensive CD box set titled Chorus, and a Record Store Day limited vinyl box set of their out-of-print albums called Origami. I spoke individually with Miki and Emma in the weeks leading up to the release of Blind Spot about the first Lush live dates since 1996 and more.

The announcement of the Lush reunion has generated heartfelt excitement with your fans. What emotions are you experiencing?

MB: Quite a lot of panic! Actually, do you know what? It's been more frightening thinking about it. The actual doing of it is fine. When we went in to record the EP, I was quite terrified of being back in the studio again. It's been 20 years! It's the same with the live shows, but when I rehearse it's nice because we stand around and play music all day. Once we're doing it, it's really enjoyable. I'm hoping the gigs will be the same, because at the moment I'm absolutely terrified! But I think we'll get there.

EA: We've had kids and day jobs, so coming back into the fray has been quite daunting. Being middle-aged as well, it's scary having your photo taken and thinking, "Oh, we don't look like we used to!" But the fan reaction has been lovely and very heartwarming. There's been a [critical] reappraisal of our music, which has been really nice; especially in the U.K., where the music press back in the '90s was very gossip-y and a bit tabloid. I think our music got lost in that. And now, especially since Chorus came out, people are actually listening to the records and saying they stood the test of time quite well and the songwriting is good. It's been really nice after all this time to have a little bit of vindication!

The songs on Blind Spot sound fresh, yet are instantly recognizable as Lush songs. What was the songwriting like, compared to past efforts?

EA: On this record I wrote all the music and Miki wrote all the lyrics. It's different from what we used to do back in the day when she wrote her songs and I wrote my songs.

MB: I did not have any time to write music [for Blind Spot], so I said to Emma, "I'll do the lyrics and that will give you extra time to work on the music." It was a really different way of writing for us. We have got occasional Lush songs where Emma wrote the music and I would write the lyrics, but it wasn't really the way we did things.

That's interesting, because even with two songwriters and varied production styles, there's a distinctive character to Lush songs.

MB: I think we feed off each other quite a lot. In the old days with Lush we would write our songs [separately], then we'd rehearse them as a band, then we'd go in the studio and demo them. It would be a long process.

Had you done any songwriting since Sing-Sing disbanded, Emma?

EA: Between Sing-Sing and the Lush reunion I had a baby, day jobs, and I sort of thought it was going to be over, actually. A few years ago somebody suggested that I have a go at writing for other people. I submitted a few songs, but it didn't come to anything. I don't even know if the person I gave them to pushed them. I get the feeling it's a closed shop, that whole area. I'm not one of those people who plays the guitar every day. I have to know there's a reason for doing it. I have to know if I write a song someone is going to hear it. I don't write just for my own pleasure. People say, "Why don't you play in the local band, in the pub, just for fun?" That's just not my style; I just do what I do. It's quite personal and I have to be with the right people to do it.



Prior to the Blind Spot lyrics, had you done any songwriting over the years, Miki?

MB: I haven't written anything. Nothing. Not a single note. The only thing I've done is an occasional guest vocal. So, when I had to do the lyrics for these new songs, it did take quite a long time. It's quite weird getting back in the saddle. There's a massive perspective shift from writing 20 years ago: what I'm interested in writing about and what...

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