

2016 Artist Survey: Miki Berenyi of Lush

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Berenyi on Trump, Brexit, Self-Driving Cars, Scary Movies, Parenting, and Her Favorite Movie

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For *Under the Radar's* [14th annual Artist Survey](#) we emailed some of our favorite artists a few questions relating to 2016. We asked them about their favorite albums of the year and their thoughts on various notable 2016 news stories involving either the music industry or world events, as well as some quirkier personal questions. Here are some answers from Miki Berenyi of [Lush](#).

1990s shoegaze legends Lush reformed in 2015 with the core lineup of Berenyi (vocals/guitar), Emma Anderson (guitar/vocals), and Phil King (bass), with former Elastica member Justin Welch stepping in for the late Chris Acland on drums. Last April Lush released a [great new EP](#), *Blind Spot*, and in 2016 the band toured Europe and America. But last October [King left the band](#) and then in November Lush [once again broke up](#).



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Lush were one of the originators and main icons of the shoegazing genre, along with Slowdive, Ride, My Bloody Valentine, and Swervedriver (who have all reformed in recent years). Lush released three albums in the '90s, but split up after the 1996 suicide of Acland.

For our annual Artist Surveys we emailed the same set of questions to musicians about Trump and the election, 2016's deaths, self-driving cars, *Stranger Things*, first kisses, scary movies they shouldn't have seen as a child, which *Friends* character they are most like, and much more.

Pick up or download [Under the Radar's Best of 2016 / 15th Anniversary Issue](#) for Artist Survey interviews with Amber Arcades, Austra, Faris Badwan of Cat's Eyes and The Horrors, Boxed In, Caveman, The Charlatans, Cursive, Lucy Dacus, The Dears, C Duncan, Sadie Dupuis of Sad13 and Speedy Ortiz, Dutch Uncles, Ezra Furman, Robyn Hitchcock, The Invisible, Justin Lockey of Editors and Minor Victories, Lost Under Heaven (LUH), Lush, Midlake, Phantogram, The Range, Springtime Carnivore, Sunflower Bean, Surfer Blood, TEEN, The Thermals, Nick Valensi of CRX and The Strokes, Jenn Wasner of Flock of Dimes and Wye Oak, and Yuck.

A shorter version of Berenyi's survey appeared in the print version of [Under the Radar's Best of 2016 / 15th Anniversary Issue](#), this is the full unedited version.

Top 4 Albums of 2016

Bit lazy of me but I'm just basing my choices on the bands I got to see play at festivals this year, and who had 2016 albums.

Fat White Family: *Songs for Our Mothers*—I saw this band for the first time in Saint-Malo at the La Route du Rock festival. My family were camping (it was their summer holiday, since we had no time for a family getaway!) and we had a brilliant time. Saw them again when we camped at Green Man Festival in Wales and I'm now a fan-as is the whole family!

Savages: *Adore Life*—Another performance from Saint-Malo—this is now my daughter Stella's favorite band. In fact, she blew out Lush's last show in Manchester to see them play at the Brixton Academy. They were eye-wideningly impressive and I'm thrilled I got to see them live.

Cavern of Anti-Matter: *Void Beats / Invocation Trex*—I watched them play at Green Man with a smiling feeling of nostalgia. Moose (my partner) had a stint in Stereolab, as did Mick Conroy (see below) and I was at a lot of their first shows. It was great to watch Joe Dilworth playing drums—he makes it look so easy and laid back, although I'm sure it isn't!

Modern English: *Take Me to the Trees*—Mick Conroy stood in to play bass on our last show in Manchester. It was a mountainous feat to learn and play the 21 songs in the time we had to squeeze between work and family commitments, and he made this last difficult month of Lush's existence fun and exciting for me. So I'm giving his album a plug.

2016 was regarded by many as a fairly tough and negative year. Was it also a hard year for you personally? If so, how? And also what were the high points for you?

There were many, many high points. Making the EP was great, and having such talented people involved in the band's creative output and performances has been amazing. I met and worked with some wonderful people, who I may never have become friends/spent time with if this reunion hadn't happened. The shows were fantastic, too. I was so nervous during the build-up, and needed a lot of rehearsals to feel able to get on stage and perform again. But the audiences really blew me away. When a crowd is behind you and willing and encouraging you to perform to the best of your ability, it really makes you want to give them your best. Yes, there were downsides—mostly too raw and painful for me to discuss in detail. In the wake of this last show I am reminded why I spent 20 years away from being in a band. I'm not motivated by being in the limelight, particularly because an inevitable part of that is also to be in the firing line. I guess the rumors that are being perpetuated about me right now are all part of the social media world we live in, but it is infuriating to see outright lies being spread.

What are your thoughts on how the U.S. presidential election played out?

Mixed. There's no doubt that inequality has been on the rise for years, maybe decades, and that needed addressing. The political elites appeared to be in cahoots with the wealthy and powerful, and seemed hell bent on maintaining a status quo that served those particular elites well, whatever the cost to everyone else. But I guess it never occurred to me that the protest would come from the right, rather than the left, and it saddens me that—whatever the views of individuals who voted for Trump, and indeed Brexit—there has been an increase in self-righteous vitriol and bigoted views toward people of color, women, gays, white working class men, white working class women, the young, the old... EVERYONE. And it's extremely unpleasant.

Let's discuss Donald Trump. What does the rise of Trump tell you about America in 2016? What concerns you most about a Trump presidency? How do you think his presidency might personally change your life?

What message do you have for those who voted for Trump? What actions will you take over the course of the next four years to either protest a Trump presidency or support it?

I don't like him and I don't agree with his views. I have known men like Trump (albeit not as rich!) throughout my life and I didn't like them either, and I wouldn't have trusted any of them to run a country. I realize I am basing my views on personality rather than policy, but since his policies are so unspecific, with little realistic indication of how he will carry them out, and he keeps changing his mind about them anyway, it's difficult to do otherwise. I'm not sure what actions I will take. I think that's probably the question facing all of us who have been loudly pontificating and blasting our views in the pub or on social media without actually physically getting off our arses and making a difference.

What are your thoughts on Brexit and the future of the European Union? To what extent do you think the Brexit vote and the election of Donald Trump were motivated by the same factors?

I, as much as anyone else, feel at the mercy of global powers, but this is not new—have a look at the history of the East India Company. People have always wanted to enjoy goods at the expense of the people/countries who produce them. Controlling those corporations and making them tow the line is absolutely necessary, but pulling up the drawbridge and retreating from ties with other nations seems worrying. But hand on heart, the entire European question is so mind-numbingly complicated that I don't think it should ever have been brought to a simple In/Out referendum. I have read loads and loads, on both sides of the argument, and I can still only claim a gut instinct on being a Remainer. The nostalgia for a bygone golden era that both Trump supporters and Brexiteers seem to be longing for worries me. As a mixed-race woman whose parents were immigrants, I don't really feel enthused about turning the clock back to an era when someone like myself had less rights and less opportunities to simply live and work and exist. I worry that the steps that have been taken to make the world a more free, equal, and peaceful place (and I'm aware that these progresses are still woefully inadequate globally) will be set back decades. And I worry that there are some who would be very happy to put people like myself back where they feel it is "my place" to exist.

Which *Friends* character are you most like?

I have all of their worst characteristics. Sarcastic (Chandler), gullible (Joey), spoiled (Rachel), neurotic (Monica), opinionated (Phoebe), and self-pitying (Ross).

What scary movie did you see way too young as a child, how'd you end up seeing it, and does it still scare you now?

My stepdad was a stunt man and director on *The Avengers*, and a good friend of the series creator, Brian Clemens. We used to spend time at his farmhouse in Bedfordshire and while the grown ups went out to scour antique shops, I would stay back at the house on my own and watch Brian's video stash of classic movies. I think I was around 9 or 10 when I watched *Psycho* and it so utterly scared the crap out of me that for years after I thought the figure in the cellar was a scarecrow with a pumpkin head.

Are you ready for self-driving cars and a more automated future?

I got done for drunk driving a couple of years ago—an experience so mortifying and shameful (and the cause of all my visa problems last year) that I have sworn never to drive again. So self-driving cars would probably be a welcome development for me.

Tell us about the most memorable fan encounter you had this year.

Actually, I had an enjoyable "woe-is-us" conversation in Manchester with a guy who had bought tickets to see Lush in Boston and NYC. He's massive into rally driving and took part in the Mongol Rally, which took him through Iran. The passport stamp meant he was refused entry into the U.S. so that was that. Flight, gig tickets—all wasted. We bonded.

If you have kids or plan to have kids one day, will you encourage them to be a musician or artist or would you prefer they get a more stable job?

It's often said that periods of social unrest and political upheaval are rather good for creativity and the arts (every cloud... right?). When I started going to gigs in the 1980s, it was a time of high unemployment (unless you were living high on the hog in the world of finance) and my experience in London was that you could barely move for people starting up bands, setting up clubs and venues, making and selling clothes, writing fanzines, etc, etc. It seems to me that stable jobs are rather thin on the ground at the moment, and the situation is likely to get worse. So I am encouraging my children to work hard at pretty much anything they have a love and a talent for.

What's usually the biggest stumbling block to your happiness?

Anxiety—and too often pointlessly obsessing over the path not taken.

What celebrity, musician, or historical figure, living or dead, would you most want to be stuck in an elevator with?

I dunno. Is Michael Palin any good at fixing elevators?

What VHS tape or DVD did you wear out growing up?

I didn't get a VCR until I was nearly 20, and that was only because one of the people in our shared house had one!

If you could travel back in time, which historical or personal event would you most like to change and why?

I think I'd go along with the sci-fi rule that changing history might only make even worse things happen. Maybe I'd not be such a bitch to Nicola Bumpus when I was at school.

What deli menu item could you buy with your 2016 Spotify earnings?

A quail's egg.

What would be the worst punishment the devil could devise for you in hell, if he exists?

Locked in a very cold room with Moose's brother's mother-in-law while suffering a raging attack of cystitis.

What rock 'n' roll lifestyle cliché is truest?

The drummer is often the nicest person in the band.

What song would you like to be performed at your funeral and who would you like to sing it?

"Where's Me Jumper," sung by Jo Lenardi.

What's your strongest memory from elementary school?

One lunchtime when the entire school got given sago for pudding. There was a shower of small gelatinous pellets flying around the room and everyone shrieking in disgust. Brilliant.

What genre of music do you just not get?

Prog rock. But maybe I've just not had the stamina to get through the solos.

What's usually the first thing you do when you wake up and the last thing you do before you go to sleep, beyond the obvious tasks?

Panic first thing, stress last thing.

What's your all-time favorite movie?

A Streetcar Named Desire. The way the complex characters are a mass of contradictions, and as they develop your sympathies change—it's just genius. I first saw it when I was a teenager, and it made a huge impression on me. I felt it threw an exposing light on masculinity and femininity, and the tragic traps and cruelties of living in those stereotypes. Plus Brando was so beautiful it made me want to cry.

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