

Twenty Years After They Split, British Shoegaze Band Lush Still Knows How To Put On A Stellar Show

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Eddie Jorgensen



- Raymond Ahner
- Miki Berenyl

Lush

Sunday, April, 24

The Warfield

Despite the fact that the band broke up almost 20 years ago, London's short-lived queens and kings of ethereal and psychedelic pop fare, Lush, returned to San Francisco to play for an at-capacity crowd of much older, but no less enthused fans. Before the band's split in 1998, the group only released a handful of full-length albums and extended plays, yet they still managed to make an indelible mark on both the indie and shoegaze scenes as evidenced by the crowd at last night's reunion show at The Warfield. (In addition to playing the United States, Lush will be heading back overseas to play the festival circuit followed by yet another round of dates in major markets.)

The stage was adorned with moving lights and a circular Lush banner that served to accentuate patterns when projected upon. Many of those in attendance were also the very same show-goers who went to Lush's original shows in small clubs and theaters over 20 years ago. However, thanks to both nostalgia and social media, the band was able to graduate to the much larger 2,300 capacity venue.

The four piece group took command of the stage by doing just the opposite. Lead singer Miki Berenyl engaged very little with the crowd and used the space in between songs to let the band tune up and, more importantly, remember the running order. With a set list totaling 19 songs and spanning several different releases, it was customary to play a note or two of each song beforehand to remind all the players which song was coming next.

The quartet had played Southern California's Coachella festival the day before, but I'm of the belief that their sound is best suited for an indoor stage. That notion was fully evident by the band's inclusion of more introspective numbers like "Stray" from *Spooky* (1992) and the always meandering guitar lines of "Desire Lines" from *Split* (1994).

Tonight, Lush sounded much like fans remembered them during their heyday. Highlights included set opener "De-Luxe" from *Mad Love* EP (1990), which was met with rounds of applause following the closing chords, as well as nearly everybody's favorite, "Sweetness & Light," which closed out the band's set just before a generous, three song encore.

Also of note was the addition of "For Love" — also from the lauded *Spooky* record — which received moderate success as a commercial single, landing at No. 9 on *Billboard's* Modern Rock charts (no small feat during the early '90s). And, if "Kiss Chase" didn't make everyone smile in tandem, perhaps the audience was silently enjoying with some celebratory shoe-gazing of their own.

Berenyi and Emma Anderson carried the group with their well-layered and thoughtful guitar lines juxtaposing the rhythm section which, at times, seemed rushed when compared to earlier years. But even a few faster songs couldn't take away the fervor of their delivery and, of course, the fans' excitement at hearing songs from so long ago.

What Lush may sometimes have lacked in musical prowess on this particular night, they certainly made up for in song and spirit. Nary a person in the crowd seemed to notice anything amiss as attendees all appeared elated and wholly fulfilled upon exiting.

Critic's Notebook:

- San Francisco's resident DJ and program director for Live 105, Aaron Axelsen, kept the music interesting between sets by opener Tamaryn (who played mostly in the dark much to the chagrin of fans and new listeners) and Lush. With a keen sense of musical history and, more importantly, San Franciscans as a whole, his inclusion on the bill was a smart choice of behalf of the promoter.
- The line for the band's merchandise stretched to the front door upon entry and many fans were buying multiple items. Additionally, handfuls of mega-fans walked around the venue with records and other Lush goods to get signed. Even more gathered near the tour bus at the close of the show. Who couldn't help but smile seeing 40 and 50-year old male and female fans alike acting like a bunch of giddy school kids upon the show's closing notes?