

# Lush, The Roundhouse

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It's peculiar seeing any band come back together after a serious length of time, but when that band were part of your adolescence the cognitive dissonance is exponentially increased. Along with the likes of Ride and Slowdive, Lush were a band linked to the “shoegaze” indie sound born in the Thames Valley at the very end of the Eighties, and my main experience of them was at ear-bleed volume in dangerously packed-out, toilet-stall-sized venues around the area, my fringe covering my face and all the hormonal intensity of youth amplifying the effect of the sound. So to see them after a gap of nigh-on quarter of a century, now a “heritage act”, on the stage of the Roundhouse jangled more than a few Proustian nerves.

In a lot of ways, nothing had changed. The cheeky-schoolgirl intonation of Miki Berenyi's lead vocals notwithstanding, Lush's sound was one built to grow old gracefully. While some bands rely on the energy of youth, with their reformations having the sadness of athletes taking one last trot round the track post-retirement, Lush were always about removal and transformation. Hearing their first few songs in the show, it became clear in retrospect how much they were an Eighties band at heart: their songwriting and textures were built around echoes of the [Bunnymen](#), the Banshees, [The Smiths](#) and most obviously [The Cocteau Twins](#), as well as dozens of more obscure indie janglers – but, crucially, they always drenched their songs in a particular brand of psychedelically layered distortion that took them away from where they'd come from and into a space all their own. And they quickly showed they could still do this.

Starting with “De-Luxe” and “Breeze”, a brace of songs from 1990, they managed to tap into the same sense of transportation as they ever did. The counterpoint vocals of Berenyi and Emma Anderson had the same tension between steeliness and untrained vulnerability as ever, and their skewed pop melodies rang out clear from the swaying sea of guitar noise as they always had, too. There was also the constant strange counterpoint between the otherworldliness of the songs and the distinctly earthy character of Berenyi's between-song chat. She's no longer the confrontational figure she could be during the band's rise, but she still has a knack for no-nonsense humour, as when she followed a line about “hanging out in Camden on a Saturday night, like the last 20 years never happened” with a quip about their guest list now being full of school governors.

But now, as before, it's a mark of their strength as a band that Berenyi's tendency to comic bathos couldn't puncture the musical atmosphere. On the punkier, Britpoppier songs like “Lovelifeline”, the personality of the songwriting and the directness of the delivery held our attention. But even more powerfully the hypnosis of the likes of “Undertow” or an absolutely stunning “Thoughtforms,” from their 1989 debut mini-album *Scar*, were enough to take me back not to a world of spilled cider and hopeless teen romance, but to the very-grown up dreamworld away from all that which



we always went to gigs in the hope of reaching. Even without the deafening volume and sea of bodies of those early experiences, Lush's music can still do that in its own right.

There was a touching, simple tribute near the end of the set to drummer Chris Ackland, whose death in 1996 precipitated the band's split, before a greatly intensified version of "For Love", followed in turn by new song "Out of Control", its swaying waltz managing to sound entirely in place in the set. In an hour set and two encores, there were very few lapses in focus at all, in fact. A band coming back after so long can't rely purely on the affection of a crowd to carry them: often audiences will turn out just to see a museum piece, or to say that they were there, so the band will still need to prove themselves. But looking at the audience around me, I could see people mainly reacting not to their memories or expectations, but to the sound being generated in front of them, and it was a delight to know that Lush can still do that.