

# Lush - Miki Berenyi and Emma Anderson on 1996 Album “Lovelife” and the Last Days of the Band

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**"Lush was so tied up with Chris, and without him, it's just really, really difficult to consider [a reunion]." - Miki Berenyi**

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The year was 1996. [Lush](#) had released its third full-length album, *Lovelife*. Although their shoegaze-crossed-with-pop songwriting never truly fit into Britain's chart-centric musical atmosphere, the band was finally getting its due, with *Lovelife* cracking the Top 10 on Britain's album charts and spawning three charting singles, "Single Girl," "Ladykiller," and "500 (Shake Baby Shake)." The band was in demand for concerts across the U.S. and Europe. On the surface, it seemed like things couldn't get any better. But within a year, it would all be over.

Lush formed in London in 1988, fronted by school friends [Emma Anderson](#) (guitars/vocals) and [Miki Berenyi](#) (vocals/guitars), along with Chris Acland (drums) and Steve Rippon (bass). After releasing a series of EPs that garnered Lush attention in the U.K., including 1990 cover stories for both *Melody Maker* and *NME*, Rippon left and was replaced by Philip King just prior to the release of the band's full-length debut. *Spooky*, released in 1992, was an album that showcased the dream-pop soundscapes and ethereal melodies of the band's two frontwomen and propelled Lush to recognition in America with a gig on 1992's Lollapalooza festival.

Lush returned with its 1994 sophomore album, *Split*, which met somewhere in the middle between shoegaze and the sounds of the burgeoning Britpop scene. It was an exhausting album to make, with the band struggling to find the right sonic mix across different producers, engineers, and studios, and dealing with management that was increasingly assertive in its push for the band to hit it big in America. Despite the strength of singles "Hypocrite" and "Desire Lines," critical and popular opinion on the album was mixed. By the end of the *Split* tour, the band was fed up. For its third album, the band needed a change.

"We'd gotten so battered by the experience of *Split* that we made it a bit smaller," says Berenyi from London, where she now lives with her 13-year-old daughter and 9-year-old son. "We weren't quite as tossed about by the will of record companies trying to get us to work with big-name producers and pushing us and prodding us in different directions. We felt a little bit more like we could assert how we wanted the record to go, and that meant a much more stripped-back sound."

*Lovelife* is an album that, on the surface, seems to skew closer to the Britpop sounds of the day than the band's previous albums, and the album was received as such. "Single Girl" and "Ladykillers," the two singles that preceded the album's release in Britain, were jubilant slices of driving melodic guitar pop that could have easily bested any Oasis or Blur single to date. And on "Ciao!," Berenyi duetted with Pulp's Jarvis Cocker, who himself was riding a Britpop wave on the strength of 1995's *Different Class*.

"Probably more than anything, people were appreciating that we were a bit more commercially successful over here, because back then, people used to really look at chart positions," says Anderson. "Maybe there was a sort of sigh of relief, like, 'Lush is actually on [British weekly television program] *Top of the Pops* at last.' We were on daytime television. We were playlisted on Radio 1. The press acknowledged that and gave us more press. It was kind of that domino effect."

Yet at the same time as the accolades came in, especially in the U.K., Lush's motives were being questioned. With the increasingly guitar pop textures of *Lovelife*, somewhat to the exclusion of the hazy shoegaze soundscapes of past records, some in the media wondered whether Lush had jumped a trend.

"I'm not going to say that we were trying to be Britpop," says Berenyi. "Because that's just horrendous. I think the world went Britpop, or certainly Britain went Britpop. I think we just carried on doing the same thing, actually. I don't think there's a huge amount of difference between songs like [*Split* track] 'Hypocrite' and 'Ladykillers' in terms of spirit."

"It was annoying," adds Anderson, "because people go, 'Oh, *Lovelife*, they've gone all pop.' But actually, we've always had pop songs. 'For Love' [from *Spooky*] was a pop song. And so was 'Sweetness and Light' [from 1990's singles compilation, *Gala*]. It wasn't obscure music. It was always really accessible, songs that were written in a very traditional manner. We were never an experimental sonic band."

Add to this mix the pressures of touring, and the powder keg was getting ready to explode. From the days of *Split*, Lush's management pressured the band to do whatever it took to "break" America. Aside from The Cranberries and a handful of other artists, becoming a huge Stateside hit was in the '90s was relatively unprecedented for European bands. And even with a change of management prior to *Lovelife*, little changed in the attitude toward the band, the house of cards finally tumbling in an ill-imagined tour with Goo Goo Dolls and Gin Blossoms in the summer of 1996.

"They were totally obsessed," says Anderson, who makes no secret about her adversarial relationship with the band's management at the time. "They used to sit in meetings and say, 'Oh, next album we'll just do America. We won't even bother with Britain.' Just to wind me up. I thought, 'Well maybe there won't be a next album.'... By the time we did that Gin Blossoms/Goo Goo Dolls tour, I think everyone had just retreated into themselves. It was just a nightmare."

"We were just being told what to do and we were doing it, and it was a mistake," she continues. "You get to the point where you sort of go, 'Why am I doing this?' We were actually doing quite well in Britain. We had a Top 10 album and three Top 30 singles. 'Maybe we should be planning to go back there and do some festivals, and capitalizing on that.' But it was like, 'No, you have to go back to America. You've got to go back to America.' And at the end I thought, 'Fuck this. I'd rather work in an office.'"

"I think I'd completely lost my mind by that point," says Berenyi. "I wasn't in a very good place. We'd been tossed about in so many different directions that I just thought, 'Alright, I'm just going to do what they fucking tell us to do.' Which wasn't great, because actually then I think Emma felt completely unsupported in the fact that she really wasn't happy with the direction that we were being pushed in. And she was right. But I just don't think I had any fight left in me. It was ludicrous, but it was just chasing that prize."

Finally, Anderson had enough and sat down with Berenyi and King to state her intentions. The band had one more European tour on the books, and Anderson was committed to finish her obligation, but after that, she was out.

"I actually did think they could carry on without me," says Anderson. "Suede carried on without Bernard Butler. And other bands carry on without a guitarist and it's fine. When you're really unhappy, there's nothing to argue with. I was really unhappy. That's the end of the story. And that's where it stopped. Obviously, I did feel a lot of mental anguish over it. I wasn't like, 'Fuck them.' It was like, 'If I leave, it's a big deal, but at the same time I can't really go on like this.' The management had presented us with a contract and it was really hardcore, and I thought, 'I'm not signing that.' I think Miki and Phil were a bit more, 'Well, it's best to carry on and maybe things will be different.' But I thought, 'I can't. I can't take a chance and do this again.' Chris wasn't there. I told Miki and Phil. I said, 'Look, I really think I want to leave.' They weren't surprised."

Says Berenyi of the pressures that led to the band's dissolution: "I remember Tanya Donnelly, when she was in Belly, saying that she just wanted to sell to the however many hundred thousand or something people who bought her records. That's quite a lot of people. I'm quite happy with that. But of course you're not really allowed to do that. You have to keep pushing and pushing and pushing, and hope that you're going to become a billion selling act, without really acknowledging that to become that billion selling act means knocking off quite a few corners from the way you operate and the kind of stuff that you write, which we didn't really want to do. If anything, after *Lovelife*, when we considered whether we were even going to carry on or not, Emma just said, 'I can't just make another *Lovelife*. I want to go right back and make something quite small and personal.' And we were like, 'Yep, well let's do it.'"

Of course, it was not meant to be. Just days after Anderson spoke to Berenyi and King about leaving the band, tragedy struck. Acland was found, on October 17, 1996, hanged in his parents' home in Cumbria. The death was ruled a suicide. Acland was only 30 years old.

"When I first heard, I didn't believe it," says Anderson. "My friend told me. It was the days before mobile and I had been out all day, so I turned up at my friends' house. People couldn't get a hold of me. They'd been leaving messages on my home phone, but I'd been out shopping and I went straight to her house. She opened the door and went, 'Chris is dead.' And I thought, 'Who's Chris? Is this one of your mates?' A second later the penny dropped. That's how little I expected it to happen. God. There's not a lot else you can say. It was awful and it still is awful. Sometimes I think, he'd be 49 now or something. Maybe he might have had children. It's really, really sad. The thing is, he was such a funny upbeat guy. He was the popular one in the band. He was always such a pleasure to be around because he was so funny and quick-witted and likeable and popular. No one could really say a bad word about him. He was just a brilliant bloke."

"None of us was aware," she continues. "I think we thought he was mentally exhausted, like we all were mentally and physically exhausted. We thought it was a phase that he'd hopefully.... Basically nobody knew how bad Chris was. We just thought, 'Oh he's having a bit of a moment.' We thought he'd go up north to his parents and basically have a rest. And hopefully feel better. And then we'd do this European tour, and that would have been the end of it. God, if we'd have known. No idea. No idea. No. I don't think his parents knew. I don't think anyone did."

While Lush did not officially announce the band's dissolution until 1998, they did not perform again after Chris' passing. Since Lush's disbanding, King has played in various bands, most notably The Jesus and Mary Chain, for which he still plays bass. Anderson released two albums in the early '00s as one half of the duo Sing-Sing but has done little musically since. Berenyi retreated from the music business altogether.

For many, the thought of a Lush reunion died along with Chris in 1996, and to some extent Berenyi and Anderson felt the same. The band looked into reforming a few years ago but the offers were not good enough to lure Berenyi and Anderson from their jobs—Berenyi, a production editor for a magazine and Anderson a bookkeeper—and current life obligations.

"It's so difficult," says Berenyi. "There's part of me that thinks that it would be nice or it would be fun. I don't know. I feel very confused about the issue, if I'm honest. I don't play music. I'm not in a band. I haven't been since Lush. The actual logistics of getting it together are pretty phenomenal. It scares me a bit, because it's been an awfully long time.... It's difficult as well, because Lush was so tied up with Chris, and without him, it's just really, really difficult to consider. It's not to say I wouldn't consider it. I don't know."

As for Anderson, currently a single mother of a four-year-old daughter, she acknowledges the occasional desire to play. "Sometimes I get the urge. But I'm very tired a lot of the time. A young child is very, very time-consuming and exhausting, and there's not a lot of brain space for anything else right now, especially since I'm a single mother. I've moved house a lot in the last few years, and it's been a very unsettled time. But who knows? Maybe one day, when she's a couple years older or something. Never say never. I still feel young enough. I think."

*[Note: This article first appeared in [Issue 51](#) of Under the Radar's print magazine. Check back tomorrow for an additional interview with Berenyi and Anderson on their album Split.]*

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