

Rank Your Records: Emma Anderson Ranks Lush's Five Albums

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In *Rank Your Records*, we talk to members of bands who have amassed substantial discographies over the years and ask them to rate their releases in order of personal preference.

Of all the shoegazers left from the original scene that celebrated itself, the one reunion that seems most unlikely was Lush. Unlike My Bloody Valentine, Slowdive, and Ride before them, Lush actually had circumstances that suggested they would never get back together. The band split after co-founding member and drummer Chris Acland committed suicide. That devastating blow was enough reason to keep the band from ever reuniting, but co-singer/songwriter Miki Berenyi moved away from music altogether in the subsequent years. (The band's other co-singer/songwriter, Emma Anderson, went on to form indie-pop outfit Sing-Sing, while bassist Phil King continued to play off and on with the Jesus & Mary Chain.)

And so it was a pleasant surprise this past September, when the band announced they'd be reforming 19 years after they last performed (Elastica's Justin Welch will take over drums). In a statement, Berenyi explained their decision to reform, saying,

"The opportunities and practicalities of reforming Lush meant that [for 20 years it was an impossible undertaking](#). But we all loved what we did, and the time is finally right for us to do it again."

The time is definitely right for Lush to come back. Though to some, the shoegazing era of the late 1980s and early 90s has always lived on, the demand for the return of the original bands has been overwhelming. Bands like Ride and Slowdive, who split mostly because the music had fallen out of fashion, have both toured the world playing sell-out shows and promised new music in the future. And now the same is set for Lush. The band recently announced select shows in London, Manchester and New York, with more dates along the way, as well as an EP expected some time in 2016.

Now that everything's been made official, Anderson says it's very different being in Lush now compared to the 90s. "It's good, but a bit weird, and we're doing it in a different way, in that we don't have a record label," she says. "In some ways that's great, because we have more control. But it also means there's a lot more work. And we're also working, and we're all parents now, so things are a lot different now. We're also a lot older. But it's interesting to be doing it in the age of the internet. We're releasing an EP next year, and my favorite part of being in a band is making music."

When asked which of their albums this new EP resembles the most, Anderson teased, "If I'm only going by the four songs on this EP, I'd say probably *Split*. But you'll have to wait and see if I'm right."

Along with the band's reunion, their former label 4AD has compiled and released *Chorus*, a comprehensive [box set of the band's recordings](#), and also reissued the 2001 compilation, *Ciao! The Best of Lush*, on vinyl for the very first time. With all of this retrospective activity going on, Noisey decided to put Anderson to the test and have her rank Lush's five records.

5. *Lovelif*e (1996)

Noisey: Why is this your least favorite?

Emma Anderson: [*Laughs*] It's really weird doing this! *Lovelif*e is not a bad album, but it's not one I actually tend to put on. The sound of it is not my favorite, sonically. It hasn't got all of the delay and reverb effects on it. I think it's quite straightforward, indie guitar, which is fine. But I don't think it's stood the test of time so well. It did the job at the

time, especially in Britain where that sound was prevalent in the charts. But yeah, sonically and lyrically, actually, it doesn't resonate much with me. And also, another reason why it isn't a favorite is because, as you likely know, the time we spent promoting and touring it was a pretty dark period in history. So I have an association with that, unfortunately.

Yeah, didn't you tour America with Goo Goo Dolls and Gin Blossoms? That seemed like a terrible fit for Lush.

Ugh, yeah, that was the last tour we ever did. When I'm talking about the dark times that was a real rock bottom period. And actually what happened with that was we were supposed to do a second half but we were pulled off it because we decided it wasn't doing us any good, which is what I said before we left to do it. The tour was so wrong. So wrong. We had already been to America three times for that album, and it was just real desperation at that point. The label was so desperate to break us, they just said, "What can we do?" One minute they were saying, "We want to get you on female-orientated radio." Then it was putting us with the Gin Blossoms and Goo Goo Dolls. It was just so desperate times. It was so wrong and we shouldn't have done it.

That album was your biggest chance to break into the mainstream though. I still remember first hearing "Single Girl" back in 1996 and it was a bit of a shock. Was that something you were trying to do, surprise people?

It's hard because I think most people think we sat down and made a plan of action but we didn't. One of the things I would say about Lush is that even though our sound did change over time, there was always a thread that ran through it. Even if you go back to *Scar*, which was our first record, a song like "Bitter" sounds like something off *Lovelife*. It was very straightforward. "Hypocrite" [from *Split*] could also have been on *Lovelife*. So it's not like *Lovelife* was an absolute 360 change... or 180 I should say. I think we were a bit influenced by what was going on at the time on radio, so we may have taken some cues from that. But there was no plan to make a Britpop album, even though lots of people say it is.

Did you feel like Lush was a part of Britpop?

I mean, everyone tries to make it seem like they're on the outside of any movement. But we probably had similarities to other bands, but not as much as others. I mean Jarvis [Cocker] sang on "Ciao," but Pulp had been going since the early 80s. It's not like they were new either. And Blur had been around since 1989. So a lot of those bands had also been around for a while, and sounded quite different before. I think it was just that celebration of Britishness. There were some really good bands around, like Elastica and Supergrass, and I guess we were a little influenced by it. *Split* came out in 1994, which was kind of when Britpop was just starting, and we were a bit dismissed because we were just singing about fluffy clouds, while all of these new bands were coming along and we were pushed to the side. So maybe we even subconsciously said, "Let's have a go at this and write pop songs, I guess." And when *Lovelife* came out it was a time when [BBC] Radio 1 was playing that sort of music. So we got on there and *Top of the Pops*, which was some level of vindication that was nice.

4. Topolino (1997)

So this is a compilation of B-sides and leftovers from Lovelife.

Yes. It's not really a proper album. And it wasn't made like an album, it's a compilation, but I do quite like it. They're mainly B-sides to songs that were on *Lovelife*, so it is funny, but I actually prefer a lot of them to the majority of *Lovelife*. I do listen to *Topolino* more. I'm quite fond of it. And I think when you make B-sides, the pressure is off to a certain extent, so you can have a bit of fun and be a little more experimental. The reason why there were so many tracks is because at the time in this country the charts let us have three formats on a single. So we could have two CDs with three B-sides on each one, plus a seven-inch single. And they all counted towards one chart placing. So all three singles we had seven B-sides. It was insane! So it was quite pressurized to do all of them. The album came out in only Canada and Japan, but the one on *Chorus* is the Canadian one because it had a better running order.

So yeah, I'm really fond of these songs. The covers are good like the Vashti Bunyan one, and the Magnetic Fields

one. It's funny when you write B-sides after the album is done, mixed and mastered, and you think, "Oh, this is really good! It should've been included on the album."

It is pretty interesting that you prefer it to the actual album itself.

Well yeah, I have a very gut instinct to listen to *Topolino* over *Lovelife*. They're not my favorite Lush songs, those songs on *Lovelife*. And the songs on *Topolino*, I don't think we played any of them live, so maybe they're just fresher to me.

3. *Gala* (1990)

This was your debut, but not really.

Again, it's not a proper album like *Topolino*. It's a compilation that was put together for America, Canada, and Japan. And it was because when we started, 4AD put out a mini-album [*Scar*], an EP [*Mad Love*] and a single ["Sweetness and Light"]. *Scar* was a demo that we sent to Ivo Watts-Russell and he liked it, but he wasn't sure; people at the label said we weren't very good, that they'd seen us play live and blah, blah, blah. So he thought he'd put us in the studio with John Fryer to record three songs and he loved those songs. Then he suggested we do another three songs and put them out as a mini-album. So we did that, and then he said to do another record, which became *Mad Love*. And of course we did that all again. If we had gone to another label all of that stuff on *Gala* would have just been a studio album. 4AD just did things slightly different. So they ended up as individual nuggets. And it worked to a certain extent. In some ways it was annoying because people were saying, "Well, where's the album?" But actually we had just used up all of songs on these different releases. So when we did *Spooky*, which was our first studio album, it was more like our second album. Whereas most bands on most labels use all of their songs on an album, we didn't. And they all obviously sound very different because they were recorded with different producers: John Fryer, Robin Guthrie, and Tim Friese-Greene.

To me, *Gala* is the first Lush album. But since it wasn't intended to be an actual album, what it is like for you to listen to the compilation as opposed to a mini-album, EP, and single, which were all released individually?

I don't listen to it as an album. I've never, ever listened to it as an album. I think of them as separate records, to be honest. I sometimes wonder what it would have been like if all of those songs had been produced by, say, Robin Guthrie. D'ya know what I mean? *Scar* was just demos! We went in there and didn't think they'd be released. And maybe they could have come out better if we had gone in with Robin and thought we were making an album. So we did the demos thinking after we'd do an album. But Ivo was insistent that they were released as they were, and then do three more. And we trusted Ivo implicitly. He had put out *Come On Pilgrim* by Pixies! But they were so much more prolific, and released *Surfer Rosa* rather quickly. We weren't that prolific, so it was a bit of a job to go write a whole new album. People say *Spooky* was our first album, but in my mind *Spooky* was our second album. Because when it came to a body of songs, *Spooky* was the second body we wrote. *Gala* was the first lot. It's confusing, which is slightly irritating, that we did it that way. It has its pros and cons, how *Gala* was done.

Is it true that a lot of the songs on *Gala* were about shagging?

[Laughs] Some are! Not all. I'm just thinking about which songs were about shagging... I can think of at least two off the top of my head. I'd say less than half, I can tell you that.

2. *Split* (1994)

Why is this your second favorite?

I would put it second because it's a good album. It is a bit long. We were talking about this the other day, that in the 1990s, people were making longer albums because you could put more information onto a CD than you could vinyl. And I think that was a bad idea. *Split* is 52 minutes, which is too long. But it's a good record. I'm very fond of a lot of the songs on it. Again, it was quite a hard record to make. *Lovelife* was probably the easiest record to make, without hitches or personality problems; whereas *Split* and *Spooky* were quite difficult. *Split* was very expensive: it was mixed by Mike Hedges, and then the whole thing had to be mixed again by Alan Moulder. We did some of it in

Residential Studios, and I don't know why. Our manager at the time said, "That's what you do!" It's all sort of "legendary rock" to go to a studio like that, but we felt homesick. Still, it came out quite well. So I think it's good, just a bit long.

How important was it to have Alan Moulder mix it?

Well, basically what happened was we made it with Mike Hedges in Rockfield in Wales, and then Berry House in Sussex for a week, and Abbey Road for a week, and then Mike's studio in France to mix there. And I think he basically lost interest because it had gone on for so long. He ended up getting an engineer to come in and finish up so he could go down to the supermarket with his wife. We were in the middle of France in January and it was raining, and we had nothing to do. Everyone was going a bit stir crazy. And so the mixes went back to Ivo in London and he said, "These are terrible. They are really bad!" And we couldn't tell because we were holed up in this place. So then I went back to London one weekend and listened to them on my stereo and thought, "Oh my God! These *are* terrible!" [Laughs] They sounded like they were coming through a transistor radio. It was all quickly arranged with Alan, and I don't even think we had met with him. But we knew he had worked with My Bloody Valentine and Ride, bands of the same ilk. So he was a very good choice. He salvaged it and made a very good job of it. *Split* is the favorite Lush album for a lot of people. It's Ivo's favorite Lush album. I think it's technically a very good album. It was the first time we used strings on a record, and I would say Mike Hedges was really good with vocals, and making us sing in tune. He was very precise with the recording. I think that shows. And I think at the end of a day it was quite a good marriage to have Alan mixing it and Mike recording, even though that wasn't supposed to happen.

In *Facing The Other Way*, it says that you had spoken to Bob Mould about producing this album.

Oh, God! Everyone goes on about this! There was one idea that he was going to do something, and I had a conversation with him and that was the end of it. People seem to hold this thing with Bob Mould up like it was really important but it wasn't. I think after Robin and *Spooky* we had trouble thinking of producers and Bob Mould's name came up because I was a big fan of Hüsker Dü and Sugar, and it was just an idea. I was the one who spoke to him, and he was a really nice guy. But my problem with him doing it, was that it was another bloke from another band with a recognizable sound producing Lush. We already had Robin Guthrie from Cocteau Twins, and then Bob Mould, and I think we just needed Lush to shine through at that point without people putting their stamp on our music. It felt like we would become some sort of novelty act if we had. Like, who else could we get to produce us? Kraftwerk? We needed someone more neutral.

I remember Lush touring *Split* in North America with Weezer as the opening band.

Yeah, they did, yeah! Do you know what? I don't remember a massive amount about that tour. They were quite quiet, and I think Miki knew them much better than I did. I don't remember talking to them that much, but then they became much bigger than we did. [Laughs] But they were nice guys, yeah, and quite a good band. They didn't make a massive impression on me. I look back on a lot of the bands we played with, and I don't know who used to put these bills together, but I do think they might have done that on purpose. I mean, I didn't think Babes in Toyland were a good band to tour with us either. Do you know what I mean? They were a strange band for us. And in this country we had bands like Gallon Drunk. I think people felt it was better to have bands that were different. I don't know what the thinking is, but we didn't have any say in that.

1. *Spooky* (1992)

So why is this your favorite?

I mean, it's flawed. Again, I think it's a little bit too long, and again, we had some problems making it. Robin was going through a strange time. But it's more the pop record for me. I quite like the bubblegum kitsch to it. And it is very artificial sounding because that's what Robin does. If you want Robin Guthrie to produce your record it's going to sound along those lines. It's not going to sound like Steve Albini. Do you know what I mean? You know what you're going to get, and I like that. At the time in the press we were criticized that he swamped us with his effects, but I like how it sounds outer-spacey. There are obviously guitars, but the effects he used made them sound like synths. It's very weird sounding. And I think the songs we wrote were very good. There is a light-heartedness to it that I really

like, which maybe we'd lost a little on *Split*, which is a more serious record and some of the lyrics are very dark.

Robin said that Lush's ideas were "so far ahead of your capabilities."

Oh yeah. That really irritates me, that! And Miki picked that out and said, "Oh right, he's totally correct." But you know what? His job was to make that work. But because he was going through a tough time... He was basically a drug addict at the time. He was just absent. I mean, I love Robin, but he can be very, very uber-defensive. And because we had said that was a difficult album to make, he can't just sit there and admit he was going through a bad time. He gets defensive and says, "Well, they couldn't play." But that's his job, to make us sing and play properly! And yes, we aren't the best singers in the world. We're not Liz [Fraser]. But actually that's what Mike Hedges did. It annoys me, that quote. A lot of bands, especially back then, weren't amazing musicians. It's actually pretty arrogant of him to say that. I don't like that quote [laughs].

I first heard of Lush when the band took part in the Lollapalooza tour the year *Spooky* came out. What do you remember about that summer?

It was good! I'm sure a lot of people first heard about us because of Lollapalooza. *Spooky* was our most successful album in the United States, and that's because of Lollapalooza. And when we were first offered it, we were like, "Oh my God! We're gonna die a death on this tour with all of these rock bands and Ice Cube. They're gonna hate us." But yeah, it was really, really good. I think we were the only women on the bill too. It was fun and it wasn't pressurized.

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