

# A Lush Little Interview... Miki Berenyi talks art and noise

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2016 has been a crazy year for Lush. A reformation, a record, and a breakup. The 90s shoegazers rose to prominence in the first half of the nineties for their beautiful ethereal melodies, and their ability to suck you in to a dreamlike state - a cliché, I know, but clichés like that exist only because of bands like Lush.

A couple of days after they played their final show at Manchester Academy, before the band disbanded. I caught up with Miki Berenyi, the band's frontwoman and guitarist, to reflect on 2016; a year that's been a bit crazy for everyone, but for Lush; completely and utterly batshit.



**So you just have played the very last Lush show. Do you feel like this year has been a success for the band?**

I'd say it was a massively successful year for the band – less so, maybe, for the individual members!

My panic from the outset was that reviving Lush could tarnish the band's past achievements and confirm what our harshest critics had levelled against us, and I wasn't sure how coming back without Chris would impact me emotionally. So there was a lot at stake.

Emma and I set out with high ambitions, determined to make music and play shows that were as good – hopefully better – than ever. And the input and enthusiasm we got from the talented people who worked with us was inspiring, as was the response of the fans, which made the hard work we put in really worthwhile. I think all that paid off and it all went rather well!

But on a personal level, there was a lot of stress. So yes, a great year for Lush but maybe not such a great year for Miki, Emma and Phil.

**Do you think the Blind Spot EP is adequate endstop for the band?**

Not on it's own. An album, obviously, would have been better. And I never got the chance to write any music. But

together with the whole reunion and the gigs, it feels good to have added a coda to the story of Lush, which had ended with the nightmare of Chris's death.

When we first discussed the Lush reunion, I was the most reluctant to reform and the one who insisted that it was a 'one-shot deal' – a year and that's it, I'm out. It's ironic that in the end, I was the one who was least willing to finally close the door.

**Retrospectively, what do you think of the original wave of shoegaze. Do you think it sounds ahead of its time?**

Not really, but it fell out of sync with the times in which it existed – not commercial and confident enough, and muscled out of the way – so maybe it didn't get mined and exhausted in the way other genres did.

**Do you think the laddishness of Britpop replacing the more effeminate shoegaze as Britain's trademark indie music genre reflects the attitudes of the time?**

The 'laddish' and 'effeminate' tags are unfortunate, because they aren't accurate unless you apply them to the worst cliches of both. Pulp were never laddish, were they? And I don't think of My Bloody Valentine as effeminate. To me, Britpop at its best was exuberant and recklessly fun and had a whip-smart edge; while the best Shoegaze was unsettling and cerebral, and explored the soul inside. So the fault was never in the (good) music – more about the external factors. Britpop got twisted into a tabloid lads-night-out loadsamoney boorishness, borne on the crest of *Loaded* (which itself morphed a long way from what it started out as), while shoegaze got bullied out of the playground and trampled into the dust.

**What's your favourite memory with the band from the early 90s? Which release are you most proud of?**

My best memories always involve Chris – he was a brilliant person to have around to enjoy the moment. I've always loved playing live – when you can lose yourself completely in the experience of performing the music you've created. The studio was always more tricky for me – it's difficult having your performance put under a microscope when you aren't a confident musician. There seemed to be a lot of pressure and it was isolating. Although being involved in a surge of creativity – writing a song and having it all come together – is an amazing feeling.

I guess I always say that my favourite album was *Split*, but it's been a long time since I listened to any of our records all the way through so my opinion might change if I did!

**Seemingly shoegaze is going through a huge revival at the minute. Do you think this is because it didn't get the praise it deserved first time round?**

Well, as I said, I think it got crushed before it had a chance to burn out. Maybe that's the key – there's still room for exploration.

**Are there any new artists you're a particular fan of?**

I managed to catch a few bands live during our festival stints and the one that stands out is Fat White Family. My 15-year-old daughter Stella is a huge fan so I made sure I watched them (not least because she wanted to see them at Green Man, which would have entailed her making her way back to the tent on her own at 1.30am). But they're not really new, are they?!

I watched a bit of Sleaford Mods at Route Du Rock in St Malo, and was entranced by their performance, but it was 1am when they were on and I was looking after Ivan (my 12-y-old son) who was exhausted and started to get quite freaked out. I guess in his eyes it was late and dark, there were a load of scary drunk people around and a very, very angry man on stage shouting “fuck” a lot.

We played our US shows with Tamaryn, who were fabulous (and all absolutely lovely). I’m always captivated by a distinctive voice, and she was an incredible performer, too.

**Do you have any musical future plans?**

I’ve really enjoyed playing music again – I had forgotten how much FUN it is. But whether I can find any time between the day job and the raising of a family to create any is definitely questionable.

**Lastly, when you look back on your time as a member of Lush, what are your overriding feelings?**

For all the stresses and disappointments, I’ve had a brilliant time. Just being in a rehearsal room, working at playing music, the power and the noise and the feeling as the music comes together... it’s like nothing else. I think that with Lush, Emma and I created something together that we couldn’t have managed separately, and I’m very grateful to have had that wonderful experience.

But it wasn’t worth losing Chris over, and if I could erase it all to have him back, I would – in a heartbeat. Plus, I’m not sure I’m really resilient enough to be in a band – or at least, not this one. The highs were life-changing, but the lows were and have been very upsetting.

(Words: Cal Cashin)