

“Sweetness And Light”- The Miki Berenyi Interview 2008

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by Andy Von
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***“If you want heroes keep them safe.
They don’t stand up to life.
So lock them in your soul and lose the key.”***
-Miki Berenyi

Certain bands or songs will forever be intertwined with particular events or certain times in people’s lives. Lush are one such band, whom, in my case, will always have a special place in my heart. There was no world shattering event in my life, no personal catharsis; I can’t even entertain you with a tragic “Our Tune” type story of heartbreak and redemption or the agony of unrequited love... It was quite simple, I heard their music and thought it was F***ing brilliant, I can remember the thrill when I first heard their thrashing swirling guitars, the thunderous drumming and the evocative wispy vocals. Some cite hearing Hendrix, The Beatles, the Stones the Sex Pistols, or Nirvana etc as their musical “JFK” moment, but it was Lush for me, I can recall it with perfect clarity (although I certainly won’t reveal what I was up to!) It’s true to say Lush was underrated and unappreciated by certain sections of the music press in the early 90s. A press that, like today’s NME, liked to pigeonhole bands into easily identifiable categories or ludicrous genres. (Hipcore- tranceopera-emotrip- skagospel-doomgaze-jangle thrash-zzzzz) It seemed the press didn’t quite know where to put Lush, which of course just wouldn’t do, I mean how dare they transcend the arsey classification system imposed by the style gurus and genre makers! Where they shoegaze? Well not really, were they Brit-pop? Erm nope...

Still despite the confusion, indignation, snobbery and sexism in some quarters of the press they gathered a cult following in the UK, and seemed to be going from strength to strength. 1996 had seen Lush release their biggest selling album yet “Lovelife” complete with top 30 singles and numerous high profile TV slots. They also had just finished yet more successful dates in the U.S..... Then ...everything fell apart..... As Joe Strummer once said *“Whatever a group is, it was the chemical mixture of those four people that makes a group work. That’s a lesson everyone should learn, “Don’t mess with it! If it works just let it... Do whatever you have to do to bring it forward but don’t mess with it”... However the tragic the death of drummer Chris Acland meant Lush really had no choice but to disband, it just wouldn’t have been the same without him.*

I won’t retread old ground here, for those unaware of all things Lush they can find an earlier article [HERE](#) which goes into a little more depth about the bands history, their beginnings, triumphs and their eventual break-up. Suffice to say they are a band who remain incredibly special to me even more so than the way in which The Clash, The Smiths, Siouxsie, The Jesus and Mary Chain, Blondie etc are. I, like many others, just totally connected with their music and although I still miss Lush, their music sounds as amazing and as vital today as it did some 10 years or so ago I was lucky, I got to see them live twice and those shows remain the highlights of my many musical adventures

So what happened post-Lush? Well, Emma Anderson formed [Sing-Sing](#) with Lisa O’Neil,(who, incidentally, have recently called it a day) Phil King stayed within the industry playing with The Fallen Leaves, and Jim Reid amongst others, and is now a member of [The Jesus and Mary Chain’s](#) current line up. Miki Berenyi sang on The Rentals 1999 album Seven More Minutes (track “The Cruise”,) she sang lead vocals on Mitsuo Tate’s lovely [“Lost In Blue “- Flat 7](#) album (track-“Smile” later remixed by Robin Guthrie) she’d had a drunken conversation with [Patrick Fitzgerald](#) of The Kitchens Of Distinction recorded and released on Fruits “Hark! At Her” (Track “Starring Relationships”) album and then....well then she just seemed to disappear! Rumours were rife, she’d started a business with Kim Wilde as musical landscape gardeners called “Songs, Shoegaze N’ Shrubs,” she’d joined that diminutive but rather scary little fellow, Tom Cruise, and his wacky scientologist chums (Hey maybe that’s what [The Rentals](#) track “The Cruise” was

all about?) Others suggested she'd ran off to enroll in Mr. Whiffle's Big Top to become a trapeze artist . Aside from the latter none of these absurd rumours were true...so where on earth was Miki? What was she doing?

Now I'm sure it's apparent that Miki is a huge hero of mine, and I was as surprised and saddened as anybody that she had apparently left the musical community completely. She's talented, intelligent, beautiful, she produced some wonderful songs, which covered an amazing range of subjects, as well as being one of the coolest, nicest people, in music, and she also genuinely seemed to enjoy being up on stage. She always had a laugh with the audience, and could render the tedious Neanderthals (who seem to plague female fronted bands) speechless with a cutting quip or the more basic *"Oh do fuck off."* Underneath that iconic red barnet there appeared to be genuinely warm, kind, caring person who loved what she did. I'd heard via the wonders of the internet that she was happy and enjoying life, away from the music biz, which was obviously great to know but a part of me also still, felt it was a shame that such a talent wasn't still writing songs and performing. I wondered if others felt the same.

I therefore resolved to set up a ["We Miss Miki"](#) website and [myspace page](#). Soon messages where pouring in from all around the world *"What's she up to?" "She was a rock goddess...come back" "I love Toni Basil, where the devil is*





she now?!”,-“You get the picture ? ” People shared tales of meeting Miki, what Lush’s music meant to them and, reminisced about favourite gigs. There were also messages from musicians such as [Robin Guthrie](#), The Kitchens of Distinction, The Wallflowers, music mags and numerous record labels hoping to sign her up. The message was clear, she was and is, much admired, respected loved and missed.

Within the many missives received was a message from Eric Matthews, a musician and composer who’s been producing high quality albums for well over a decade, from his early days as one half of Cardinal to his solo albums on Sub Pop and Empyrean Records. Eric informed me that he had joined forces with Ohio based guitarist Christopher Seink and that Miki had agreed to provide guest vocals on a couple of tracks for their “Seinking Ships” project. Apparently Miki and her partner [Moose](#) were long time fans of Eric’s work. I was delighted to know that the “majesty of Miki” would be heard once more and obviously keen to know how things had gone, kept in touch with Eric. In due course he informed me he was delighted with the results of Miki’s work in the studio. I can only assume that at some point he must have assured her that I was no wild eyed, gothic loony toon whose calendar still read “4AD” and who sat at home stroking a red wig whilst pretending Miki and Emma were guests of honour at some sort of weird freakish Miss Haversham type dinner party involving an imaginary Andrew Eldritch as the butler and.... (Ahem!)...Erm...quite!..... and Miki agreed to an interview with The VPME. Several somersaults and no small amount of jiggling for joy later (including a rather lame “Dancing Homer” impression and a moonwalk) I actually contained my excitement long enough to talk to Miki, Eric and Christopher and discovered that sometimes heroes really, really do “*stand up to life*”

VP: After the tragic circumstances that surrounded the break up of Lush did you make a deliberate decision to get out of the music business completely?

MIKI: No – not really. It’s not like I heard the news of Chris’s suicide and thought, ‘I’m never playing in a band again’. It just happened that way – my life simply changed as a result.

VP: When “Lovelife” was released some critics rather predictably started to use the old “sell out” angle. Did this reaction surprise you?

MIKI: Not at all! By the time Lovelife came out we were pretty well used to being treated with contempt and ridicule by most quarters of the music press. HA! I remember the Melody Maker reviewing Split and slagging us off because (apparently) all our songs were light, jangly things about fluffy clouds and fairies. Meanwhile, reviewing the same album, the NME complained that our lyrics were too depressing (covering child abuse and parental death) and didn’t fit the sparkly, light melodies. I guess what I’m saying is that we couldn’t do right for doing wrong. I, of course, don’t

agree with the sell-out accusation. I mean, is Ladykillers more commercial than Hypocrite? Is Desire Lines more shadowy than Last Night? Is I've Been Here Before a throwaway exercise in jazz lite whereas Lit Up is a trawl through the underbelly of dischordancy rivalling the darkest periods of Miles Davis?

The production on Lovelife is a little zappier and more upfront. Beyond that, I just think we got a bit more attention. When Split came out, the world was grunge and you had to search hard to find a niche in English pop, so I guess we seemed rare and obscure. By the time we released Lovelife, Britpop had lightened the mood a little and radio and TV were receptive to melody-driven pop songs so our version of that felt commercially acceptable. (i.e., if you stick around for long enough, you eventually become fashionable)

VP: "Ladykillers"? Was this song biographical? There's been much speculation in the past with regard to who the "Ladykillers" in question may have been...

MIKI: Yes, it was biographical. Three verses, three men, three experiences – and all united by a baffling attitude to women. I'm probably being deeply unfair – after all, I didn't know any of them particularly well and – god knows – I've acted like an arsehole on occasion and could similarly be hung out for ridicule. Still, it was great fun writing it and I remember Ivo Watts-Russell (the then head of 4AD) laughing his head off when he first heard it in the studio. (So much for the enigmatic Svengali image.) As for who it's about – I've definitely heard bachelor number 2 (pretty obvious – see the video) and bachelor number 3 correctly identified, but never bachelor number 1.

VP: Recently bands such as The Jesus & Mary Chain and My Bloody Valentine have reformed, given that a lot of music can now be made using a laptop and reach a huge audience via the likes of Myspace, have you never been tempted to dip your toe in the murky waters of the Biz again. If financial constraints and time were not an issue could you see yourself writing and playing again?

MIKI : Hey – if financial constraints and time were not an issue I'd be on my 10th LP and recording a Greatest Hits compilation with the Royal Philharmonic by now. I would love to make music again, but it's precisely those things that are stopping me! Also – I know people out there who are too young to have – or simply don't want kids, HATE this answer, but when I do have some spare time (which is rarely) I really, really just want to spend it with my family and friends. I just had nine days (NINE!) off for Christmas and New Year, and – believe me – the very last thing I wanted to do with it was lock myself away in a room with a keyboard, guitar and a computer to wrestle with my tortured soul. I'm 40 and my metabolism is slowing. Meanwhile, the children are small and cute and not yet slamming doors, stealing cash from my wallet and mugging our neighbours. So I'm quite content to savour the moment by sitting around playing 'Balloon Lagoon' and stuffing my face with "Quality Street."

VP: Do you still play the guitar, and do you still have your guitars from your Lush days such as the Fender Telecaster, Rickenbacker 370-12, Epiphone Riviera, Firebird II etc?

MIKI: No – I don't play I'm afraid. I was never a proper guitarist – only in the context of Lush. I played the guitar to write songs on and to play live. That's probably why I was so crap! To be honest, unless someone is really good, my heart always sinks a bit when you're in a public place (campsite, party, holiday) and someone whips out a guitar. My least favourite phrase in friendly company is "Here's a song I've been working on..." I still have the guitars, though. Sentimental reasons.

VP: How did you hear about my "We Miss Miki" campaign, did it freak you out or did it make you realise how much you have been missed by many fans and how much your music meant to them?

MIKI : Hmmmm. I can't remember. Maybe Emma told me? I was very flattered. And also slightly frightened. Still, having exchanged a few emails with you, Andy, it turns out you're not a frothing psychopath who wants to abduct my children so, yes – it's rather lovely to know that anybody cares!

VP: Are your work colleagues aware of your iconic, guitar playing, cider guzzling rock n roll past?

MIKI: Oh god, yes. I talk about it all the time. They LOVE hearing about my rock 'n' roll anecdotes. I'm like Les

McQueen in The League of Gentlemen – always handing out my old records and warning my workmates about the pitfalls of the music industry – “It’s a shit business” – that’s my catchphrase.

VP: Have you heard any news with regard to 4AD re-mastering and re-releasing of Lush’s back catalogue, (it’s been rumoured there will also be a DVD?)

MIKI: Yes, I’ve heard that too! I seem to remember a bunch of emails about it last year where Emma and I were trying to rack our brains over every hard-to-find release in the Lush back catalogue but I honestly don’t know what’s going on with that. Ask Emma or 4AD!

VP: You are guesting on Seinking Ships album, which will hopefully be available in 2008, did you enjoy the process,





you've said you're an Eric Matthews fan, and also that his songs were difficult to sing could you expand on this? (For Eric's sake!!)

MIKI : Eric got in touch with me through Simon Raymonde (formerly of the Cocteau Twins and now running Bella Union). He just asked me if I wanted to sing on his record and after reassuring me that he had literally no expectations of the shoddy state of my vocals after a decade away from the mic and that I would be required to make virtually no effort at all, I agreed. He was very patient with my numerous delays due to various family crises and really understanding about my total ignorance of the technological revolution regarding music and computers. I guess what I meant with the 'difficult to sing' comment is that the vocal line and harmonies are quite unusual – not obvious. It reminded me of some of Emma's songs like Thoughtforms, Lit Up, Olympia and Tiny Smiles (Christ, it nearly killed me trying to get the pitching right on that damned song). The vocals work brilliantly within the track, but it's not the obvious vocal line or harmony that you would pick, given the notes that surround it (if you get what I mean!). Plus there's a pretty big range – hitting those high notes is fine when you're young but after 25 years of Silk Cut I'm finding it a strain to get up there!

VP: *If as mentioned you didn't feel able to make a big commitment to music again, would you consider occasional musical ventures such as this (Seinking Ships) in the future. For example if Jarvis rang you and said lets write "Ciao 2" – would that sort of thing appeal?*

MIKI : It's funny, actually, I was in Paris last summer and we went to a fairground at the Tuileries and who should I bump into while trying to cram chocolate crepes into my kids' faces but Jarvis Cocker, also out with his kid. What a coincidence! I was actually rather touched that he remembered who I was! But no – no Ciao 2. I guess I would consider anything so long as I had the time and it seemed like a fun thing to do!

VP : *Do you miss anything about the music Industry , has it changed much since Lush ?*

MIKI : I miss the excitement and energy of playing live and the camaraderie of touring – being with the band and crew in a foreign country is like going on holiday with your mates but even more fun because it's free and there's a party every night! To be honest, I was never crazy about the studio. That was much more Emma's environment. I enjoyed writing, and got a real satisfaction and kick out of creating a song. But, to be honest, rehearsing and demoing and recording it seemed like a bit of a drag. Once I'd written the song I just wanted to get out there and play it!

VP: *What's your fondest memory of being a member of Lush?*

MIKI: Loads of memories – well, there would be! Most of the best are from playing gigs. Even supporting The Darling Buds when we were crammed three in the back of an ex-British Telecom Dodge Commer going from York to Glasgow at 3am on a damp mattress with my legs up on the bass drum and an arm keeping the guitars from falling on my head. Even that was fun. Right up to supporting Jane's Addiction at a fucking hockey stadium in America

where I thought we were going to get bottled off and murdered and was virtually in tears I was so scared but the kids crowd-surfed and cheered and were very sweet and gentle with us! Actually, as much as recording always seemed a bit of a drag for me, I really did enjoy doing “Loveline.” This is no slag off of any of the other producers we worked with, but I think because Pete Bartlett (our live sound engineer) recorded it, there was no nervousness and I didn’t feel so self-conscious about making suggestions (and being a crap musician and singer!) so I could actually relax a bit and have fun. I loved that we got our friends involved (doing back-up vocals, Jarvis duetting, our mate Melissa doing speaky bits on Last Night, Dan from Kitchens of Distinction coming in to do a load of percussion, etc) and mucked about with silly instruments (the toy harmonica keyboard on Ciao, the dripping water on Papasan etc). It was a proper laugh!

Eric Matthews

VP: You have a new album out yourself very soon which is getting rave reviews and the Seinking Ships featuring Miki in the pipeline do you have titles as yet

ERIC: My album is called The Imagination Stage. The Seinking Ships debut LP is called Museum Quality Capture

VP: With regard to The Seinking Ships project how would you describe the music ?

ERIC: It’s basically a new wave cinema score. By new wave, I mean to reference the early and mid-80’s UK stuff. I am quite a bit older than Christopher but for a kid, he was pretty hip with his love of Siouxsie and the Banshees, the Cure, Cocteau Twins, etc... So, he came out of his teens with some of the same influences as me. Together we are making a brave new kind of instrumental music. And with Miki doing the featurette vocals, on those songs it really comes off as new wave adventure pop.

VP: When you writing the songs did you have Miki in mind, or once the songs were completed did you then think “wouldn’t it be great to get Miki Berenyi to guest on these tracks?”

ERIC: More of the latter. We had the songs written and done more or less and then we decided that it would be cool to have a lady singer on a few of the songs. We made a short list of singers that would be great for the project and contacted Miki first. Thankfully, she already knew about my music and was “honored” to be asked. So, I picked the 3 songs that seemed best suited for a lead vocal and wrote the vocal parts especially for her, in her range, etc. I felt like Burt Bacharach and Miki was my D. Warwick.

VP: I reckon you’ll certainly have the eternal gratitude of fans of Miki for tempting her back into the studio. Given that Miki’s been away from the biz for quite a while, where you confident in your powers of persuasion?

ERIC: I am a pretty good pitchman but no, not exactly confident. I didn’t know the conditions of her retirement at the time. So, looking back, and now knowing her situation better I am pretty shocked that she got on board. We are honored to be the project to bring her back. But what can I say; she more or less agreed to do it without even hearing the music just based on my reputation. I think that’s how it was. But when I sent her the package of music she really came back flipped out and in love with the sound.

VP: Yourself and Christopher (Sienk) seem to be big fans of British music, who would you say are your fave Brit bands?

ERIC: Christopher will have his own list but my top faves are –
The Damned, The Cure The Smiths Depeche Mode Joy Division New Order Killing Joke Japan Cocteau Twins
Dead Can Dance Kissing The Pink Duran Duran Tears For Fears ABC Tones On Tail Adam and the Ants Gary
Numan ...all that genius shit

Christopher Seink:

VP: How did you and Eric hook up?

CHRIS: I knew Eric had done session work in the past; so I reached out and asked if he would session in on a few tracks I was working on. I figured three things could happen. He'd ignore me, he'd decline, or by some miracle he'd listen to the sessions which happened to be the case.

VP: *What other musical projects have you been involved with in the past?*

CHRIS: I played in and around the Cleveland/Akron area with a few bands in the 90's. It was lot of fun back then. I kind of miss those days of recording on a TASCAM 4 track, making demo cassettes recorded on a boom box, and then doing the sleeve artwork at the 24hr Kinko's at 2am. If I had to do that now I'd be hating life. Kids have it easy these days. Uh-oh.... I am sounding old.

VP: *You've previously stated you where a big Lush fan how does it feel to be involved in working with Miki.*

CHRIS: It has been a real exciting moment for me. It's still a little hard to believe that Miki sang on a few tracks that I was a part of. If someone would have told me, while I was watching Lush play live in Cleveland back in the 90's, that Miki would be singing on some tracks of mine that Eric Matthews co-wrote and produced I would have laughed and laughed.

VP: *Eric's described the music of Seinking Ships but how would you describe it?*

CHRIS: Cinematic, dreamy, jazzy, dark, pop

VP: *Are there any future plans for Seinking Ships, I believe this is a studio only project, is it a one -off or may there be other projects in the future? and what are your own musical plans?*

CHRIS: Yeah I am sure there will be more Seinking Ships tracks in the future but we're taking it once step at a time. I am looking forward to a 2008 release of the Seinking Ships LP.

VP: *Which other British bands would you say have been a major influence on you?*

CHRIS: RIDE, PULP, SWERVEDRIVER, CURE, WIRE, IRON MAIDEN, early VERVE, JOY DIVISION

Don't miss Part 2 – – **EXCLUSIVE**

"A Pictorial History Of Lush." Miki has kindly shared her personal photo collection with us, complete with notes and anecdotes . PART 2 [HERE](#)

Links

[Myspace](#)

[We Miss Miki](#)

[Light From A Dead Star Lush Fan Site](#)

[Lush/Sing- Sing Yahoo Group](#)

[Sienking Ships](#)

[Eric Matthews](#)

[Under The Radar Interview](#)

[CD's/Downloads](#)

All releases available on the [4AD website](#)

Videos

Nothing Natural By Lush

Ladykillers By Lush

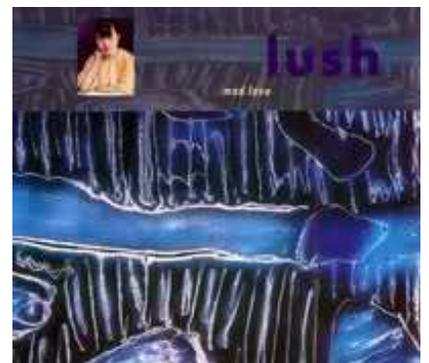
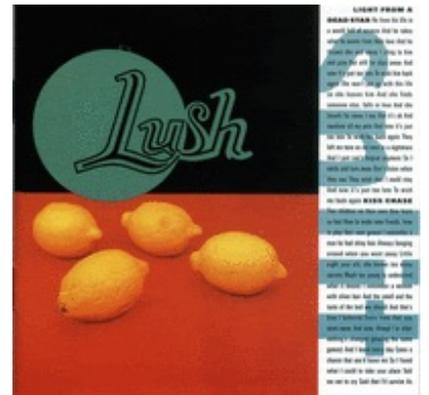
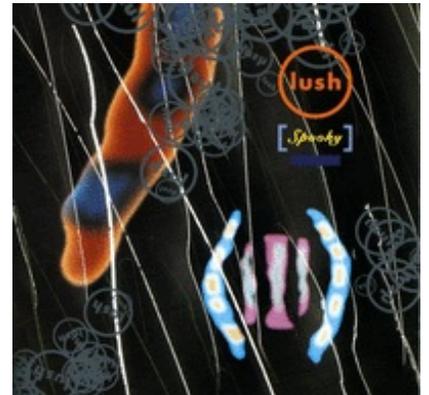
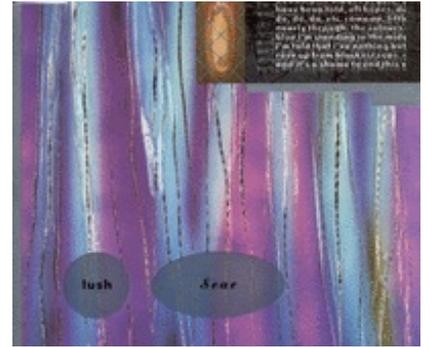
“Smile” Flat 7 & Miki Berenyi

Sweetness And Light By Lush-Live

Interview with Davina McCall

Miki: “With the middling chart success of Single Girl and Ladykillers, we found ourselves appearing on the kind of TV shows we’d never before been invited onto. There was an absolutely horrendous show called Pyjama Party which we had to endure, the premise being a girlie sleepover with gossip and beauty tips in babydoll nighties – like, basically, my worst f*cking nightmare. We had to have face packs put on us by a pair of transvestites. Originally they wanted us to try out tantric sex exercises, but we decided that whoredom was one thing – rape and buggery another. However, Katie Puckrick, the presenter of that desperate programme, was actually a very likable and friendly woman who came into the dressing room for a chat and was very charming and welcoming. Our appearance on Dear Davina was just as reluctant, but just to add to the misery we also got to experience the famous Davina charm which basically doesn’t exist until the camera gets switched on. No interaction, no hello, no nothing. And then ACTION and you get the chummy, cosy façade. Frankly, I can’t bear the woman. Her entire interview technique is geared toward making herself look good and she clearly doesn’t give the slightest shit what your answer will be. No wonder she got so famous!

Chirpy Chirpy Chirpy Tweet Tweet By Lush(from the “Alvin Lives In Leeds- Anti Poll Tax Album”)





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