

My interview with Lush | 'Split' 20th Anniversary

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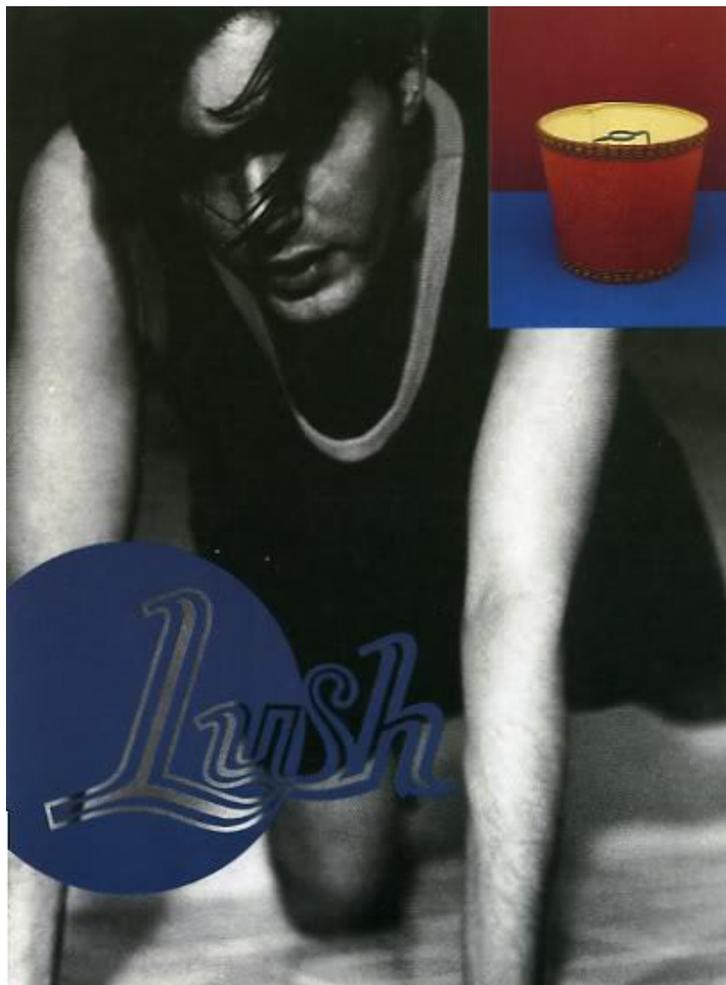
9/23/2014

Anyone that knew me in high school, or at least spent any time with me driving around in my old Toyota Corolla, will surely remember the English band Lush. In the very least, they may have some remaining hearing damage to help remember thanks to me blasting their 1994 album 'Split' – which also seemed to be on constant repeat – as loud as it could go. This album was epic to me, and it still is. Every little element of it, from the songs, to the artwork, to the tour dates I attended in Boston and Rhode Island that accompanied the album's release, the band's style, lead singer/guitarist Miki's always flame-red hair and even her half-Hungarian/half-Japanese background, it was perfection. Lush was like a beautiful art project with all the pieces and elements fitting together just right. I had found my band and they spoke to me right down to the rarest of B-sides.

So even if you *weren't* there with me in high school, now you know of them, and understand a wee bit as to why having the opportunity to ask them some questions regarding one of my top five albums during it's 20th anniversary is so very exciting for me. Lush were a big independent band from London, England back in the late 80s and through the mid to late 90s, with popularity on both sides of the Atlantic, and they continue to influence bands along with

their contemporaries from those days including the likes of Slowdive, My Bloody Valentine and many others from a scene dubbed as – for better or worse – “shoegazing”. From a spot on the main stage during Lollapalooza's second jaunt through North America in the summer of 1992, to scoring a top 10 album on the British music charts with their last album 'Lovelife' in 1996, to spending their entire musical career on legendary indie label 4AD (home of Pixies, Dead Can Dance, Cocteau Twins, amongst many others), they were a popular and important ensemble during their run in the British and American music scenes.

A few years ago the opportunity to write to Ms Berenyi came about, and despite her being busy with work and raising her kids, we struck up a short conversation. How comforting it was that she turned out to be the exact opposite of your average jaded, disinterested rock star. Just as funny and witty as she was in every other interview I've read or seen with her and the band, the idea came up that maybe I could conduct my own interview, and she agreed to devoting some time! I eventually found my way to finding Emma Anderson, the band's other vocalist and singer, and she was willing to give up some time as well. With everyone's hectic schedules, it took a few years to get everything together, but with the additional time I had the luck of having bassist Philip King on board as well. Drummer Chris Acland sadly passed away in 1997, but all remaining members were ready to go! I really couldn't believe it – here I was interviewing (well, more of a Q&A, really) one of my top favorite bands, one of English rock history's biggest independent bands, and they could not have been nicer, more pleasant and just downright fun to speak with over the



past few years. I came up with questions that I thought were a fair mix of your standard rock & roll interview questions, but with “a personal touch” – those I feel from my memory hadn’t been asked before, and were things I wanted to know – no matter how mundane they may be to the average reader. And while I’m at it, why not add a couple music videos from the album, *and* one of the best sounding live videos of Lush I’ve been able to find, which happens to be of one of favorite Lush songs? Time to crack on! I’d like to thank Miki Berenyi, Emma Anderson and Philip King for not only making a great catalog of music that is important to at least this one fan, but for also making one person’s small dream come true by willing to partake in this, and really for their genuine kindness to a complete stranger.

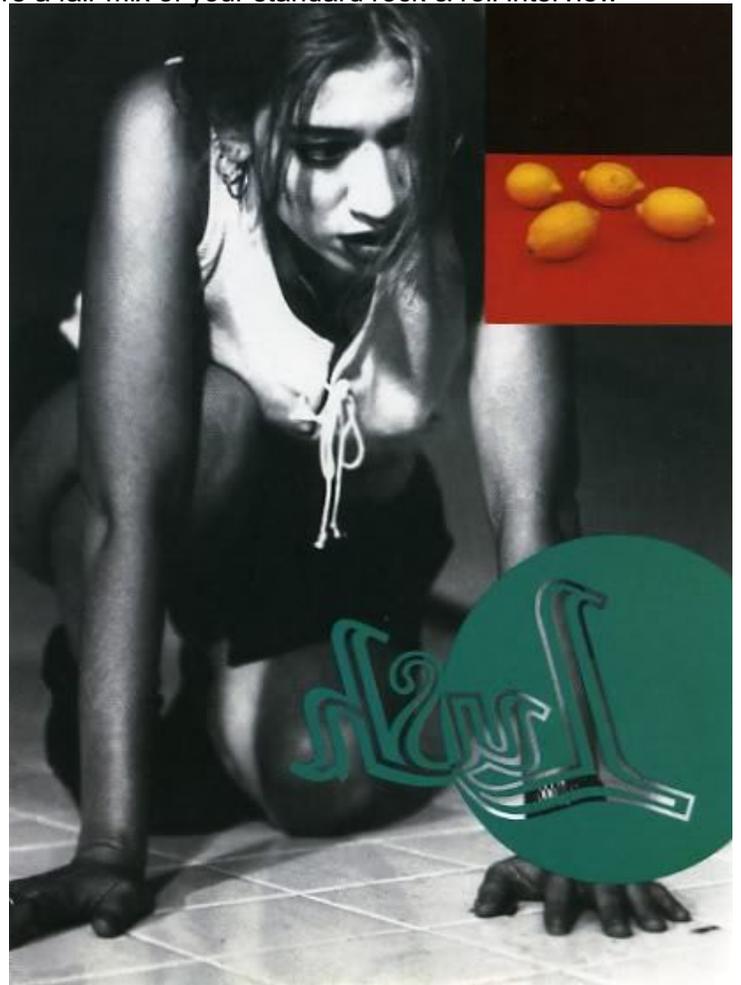
So here you go, my interview with Lush, regarding their 1994 album, ‘Split’ :

Now that 20 years have passed since the release of your second album, ‘Split’, where do you think it holds up in the Lush discography?

EMMA It’s always a little tricky with us as ‘Gala’ was not a proper album – it was a compilation of EPs, singles etc. that was put together for the US and Japan and only released in the UK as a limited edition, so I never know whether to include it or not when talking about our LPs. For argument’s sake I won’t include it here so I shall say that ‘Split’ is my second favourite album, ‘Spooky’ being my first and ‘Lovelife’ my last. I do like ‘Split’ but, to my mind, there are some weak songs on there (‘Blackout’, ‘The Invisible Man’ and ‘Starlust’ – all mine, interestingly enough) which weakens it as a whole. It’s too long as well. I think we were victims of that fashion at the time for making albums over 50 minutes because you could with CD. I also think it lacks some of the ‘fun’ sounds that were on some of our earlier records like the over-the-top choruses and flanges! It’s quite a serious album. A lot of the lyrics deal with quite somber issues so maybe it doesn’t make me smile as much as ‘Spooky’. But I do like it, don’t get me wrong. There are some great tracks on it and it does seem to be a lot of people’s favourite Lush album (including Ivo, who was the head of 4AD whilst we were on the label). To be honest, I don’t really like rating our albums! They all have their strengths and weaknesses.

MIKI It’s probably my favourite Lush album, but for very personal reasons. I felt more confident as a songwriter at that stage, and it felt good to be able to try new things. Emma was the Lush member who usually wrote the dancier tracks (‘Nothing Natural’, ‘Sweetness and Light’), so it was fun for me to have a crack at it with ‘Undertow’. Lyrically, I decided to just lay it all out there, and I think ‘Light From A Dead Star’ was where it worked best. Of Emma’s songs, ‘Desire Lines’ felt like something genuinely new for us – it had a dignity and sweep I didn’t think we were capable of, and ‘When I Die’ made me weep the first time I heard it (and still does). It’s not an easy record to listen to, but it is emotionally honest and that moves me.

PHIL Of the two Lush albums I played on it is my favourite. It certainly has a more consistent overall mood than ‘Lovelife’. Dark and brooding. Maybe reflecting the circumstances in which it was made? It certainly was a drawn out affair – from recording it in Rockfield studios, mixing it in Domfront and then having to have it remixed in London with Alan Moulder.



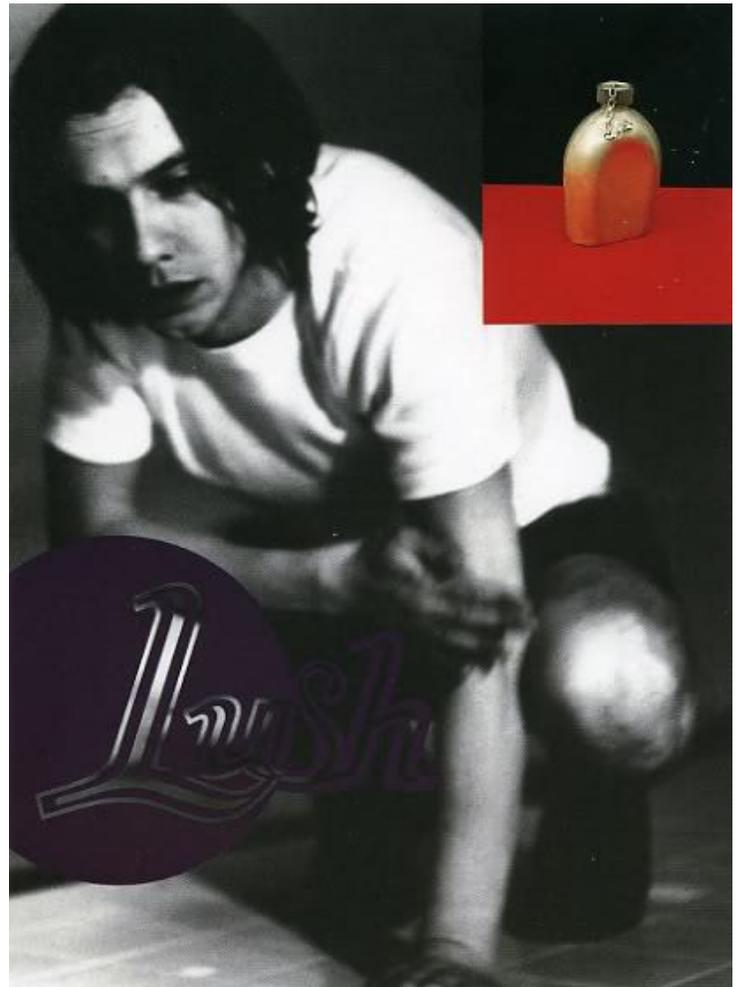
When reading the press from those days it seems there were more negative feelings towards the campaign for 'Split' than positive (focus on two singles being released on the same day, for example), which is interesting because I personally think this was your strongest album with the songwriting, the balance between the songs, the artwork – it all just fell into place. Looking back, what were the positives for you? It seems the highs, with Lollapalooza, etc., were so high for the 'Spooky' campaign that anything that followed would unfairly feel like a comedown.

MIKI 'Split' was a bit of a rite of passage, I suppose. The band's three main supports – Howard Gough (manager), Ivo (head of 4AD) and Tim Carr (Warners A&R) – were each having their private crises, and we were left to navigate our way through choppy waters without their previously constant guidance. There were so many opinions and interferences, producers, mixers, UK record label, US record label, video directors, marketing strategies, etc. Expectations were high but every plan sounded as valid as the next and we didn't know which direction to turn. I guess we survived, a bit battered and bruised, and ultimately became a much better band, both on record and live. It left its scars though, and we lost our innocence.

PHIL I guess by the time the album came out the press had moved on to 'grunge' and then to the early days of 'Brit Pop.' "Shoegazing" was out. Two years is a long time in music and for the music press it was out of sight, out of mind – even though we had been busy touring the 'Spooky' album, especially in the US and then working on the 'Split' album.

EMMA Well, I seem to remember there being quite a lot of negative press around 'Spooky!' 'Spooky' got slated in the Melody Maker for one, so I don't really remember there being a massive sea-change around the time of 'Split'. The two singles on the same day was a bit silly and was supposedly a two-fingers up at the mainstream UK charts (why? I don't know). What did happen, I think, was 'Split' was released during the period when Britpop was really finding a large audience in the UK. Oasis were pretty big by this time, Blur were riding high with 'Parklife' and bands like Elastica were really coming through so I think the press here thought Lush were 'out-of-time' to a certain extent especially with our drawn-out songs like 'Desire Lines' and 'Never-Never'. We certainly were not fashionable here in 1994. Furthermore, 'Split' didn't make the UK album chart Top Ten ('Spooky' and 'Lovelife' both did) and of course that was seen as some sort of failure. Yeah, whatever. Of course, I am talking about what happened in the UK, primarily, and I can't really say what the reception was in the USA (I can't really remember!). All I know was we had gained quite a solid following during the 'Gala' and 'Spooky' campaigns and I think we built on that with 'Split'. Yes, 'Spooky' sold the most of all of our albums in the US but that was down to Lollapalooza, for sure. We certainly didn't come away from the US feeling that anything had gone wrong. The 'Split' campaign was probably shorter than the other ones had been but it wasn't a disaster. It wasn't a very commercial album, I guess, so maybe the promotional campaign was never going to be long and drawn-out.



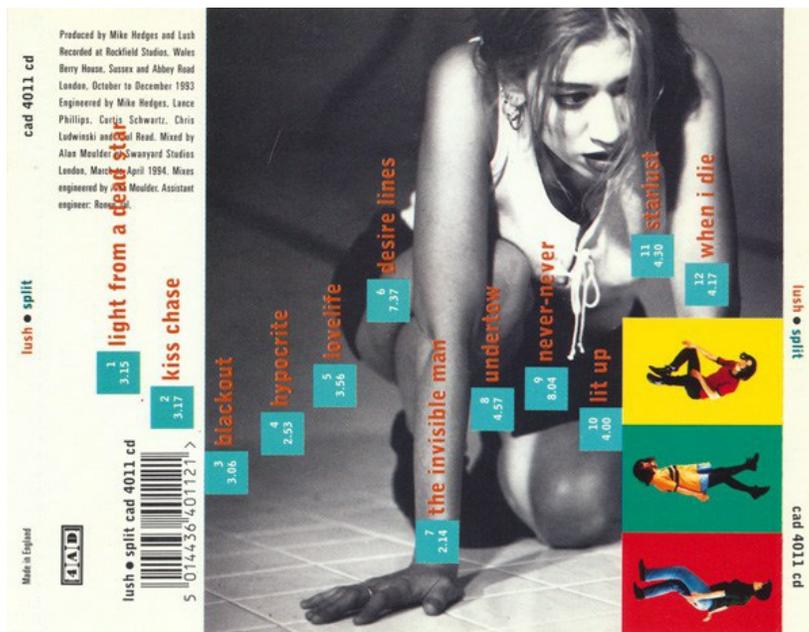




LIGHT FROM A DEAD STAR He lives his life in a world full of women And he takes what he wants from their love And he throws the rest away I cling to him and pray But still he slips away And now it's just too late To wish him back again She won't put up with this life so she leaves him And she finds someone else, falls in love And she travels far away I say that it's ok And swallow all my pain And now it's just too late To wish him back again They left me here on my own in a nightmare And I just can't forgive anyone So I smile and turn away Don't listen when they say They wish that I could stay And now it's just too late To wish me back again

KISS CHASE They children on their own they learn so fast How to make new friends, how to play their new games I remember a man he had shiny hair Always hanging around when you went away Little eight year old, she knows too many secrets Much too young to understand what it means I remember a woman with silver hair And the smell and the taste of the bed we shared And that's how I behaved Every time that you went away And now, though I'm older nothing's changed (playing the same games) And I keep every day Come a chance that you'd leave me So I found what I could to take your place Told me not to cry Said that I'd survive As





To me there was such a modern pop art/Scandinavian/art deco look to the entire ‘Split’ campaign that fit the music so well – solidifying the ‘art rock’ tag that I think fit your sound more than the ‘shoegaze’ or ‘dream pop’ tag. Did that come from v23, or from the band? What was the idea behind that, was there an impression you were trying to give? A mood you were trying to set?

EMMA All our artwork was directed by Vaughan Oliver and Chris Bigg at v23. We never had a lot of say until perhaps near the end where we might have approved a few bits and pieces but really – 90% of it was them (which we were all fine with – having Vaughan and Chris design your sleeves is pretty bloody brilliant). Yes, we really liked that artwork. It was quite stark and odd and I think fitted with the music which had quite a ‘brittle’ sound production-wise (I think). The items in the photos were all quite random (though food based!) but people, of course, read significance into them. The four lemons – well, that’s us? Ha. I am not sure if many people realise that the photos are by the same photographer (Richard Caldicott) that took the photos that appear in Nigella Lawson’s book ‘How To Eat’ – well the initial UK version of it. I think the only thing, with hindsight, that maybe we might have changed was the ‘new’ Lush logo that was designed for this album and campaign. No one ended up feeling a lot of love for that logo so it was never used again.

PHIL When Vaughan first showed it to us I thought “four lemons, what is he trying to say here?!” I don’t think any of us were that sure about it. I do remember at the time the lettering was more ‘Russian Constructivist’ as I put it to him. He then adapted it – but the photographic image stayed the same. By that time we had got used to the idea I guess. It certainly is a very strong image.





There's something about that reverbed, echoed guitar sound that just really speaks to a certain lot of people and I never seem to read of people speaking about the feelings that sound conjures up – so your thoughts would be interesting. What is it about that guitar sound that moved you so much personally back in the day? What emotions does it bring, if any? Was there a certain atmosphere you were trying to convey?

EMMA Oh God, I really don't know. It's hard to comment on things like that. I think when we started we realised that the delays and chorus covered up some of our inept playing in the same way as the buried vocals covered up our voices! Ha. No really, I guess there was a beauty to that sound which I kind of missed when we did 'Lovelife' actually. (Some) people say Lush 'copied' My Bloody Valentine but actually they don't use those sorts of sounds at

all...well, in the chorus in particular. They deal more with distortion. I was probably more influenced by The House of Love when we started and they used a lot of delay, etc. The layers are very pretty and they do convey a sort of dreamy feeling, I guess. Guitar sounds are so malleable and fun to mess about with. I wouldn't say though that we intended any specific song to convert certain feelings on 'Split'. I think it's best to leave the listener to feel or get what they want from any one song or track.

MIKI I had a bunch of pedals all linked up and I used to just piss about with them, turning knobs and having different combinations on and off with no clue as to where I was heading. Like cooking without a recipe. It was very instinctive and not at all professional, but it was quite good fun! It has its limits, though, which is why it's great to work with a producer who actually knows what all those buttons can do!

The music tabloids were calling Lush in the early days everything from "London's answer to Throwing Muses" to "The New Abba". Were they unable to label you because the songwriting was stronger than other bands with that "shoegaze" style? Seems they were grasping at straws, as witty as they thought they were being.

MIKI Well, it's just a bit crap, isn't it? Lazy headlines. Clickbait. The Mary Chain/Stone Roses are the new Pistols. Oasis are the new Beatles. Blonde is the new Black. Blah is the new Blah. And it's also a convenient way to shut you in a box which, at the time, was like a wardrobe you occupied with every other woman before or since who had ever chosen to write and perform music. A very, very crowded wardrobe with just one narrow door providing barely enough space for one woman at a time to join in with what's happening in the rest of the room, which is full of blokes having a party with loads of lovely food and drink, discussing how fantastic they are. I'm hoping the world has changed. To pick a different field, I think an author such as Zadie Smith would now get compared to James Joyce and EM Forster, as well as Toni Morrison and Alice Walker. If you get my drift...

EMMA Oh, what you have to understand about the way the music press worked back then was that two of them (well, three until about 1991 if you include 'Sounds') were weeklies, so they had to fill a lot of space a lot of the time. You are right to call them tabloids, though actually they were not strictly tabloids size-wise (I think). This invariably meant they had to write quite a lot of 'fluff' to fill space so there was the inclusion of a humour page and gossip columns, etc. The comparison issue for all bands was always there and I think the fact that we were a band with girls in was the reason for the Throwing Muses and Abba ones (the Abba comparison was very flattering but I can't really see much similarity to be quite honest!). Bands with girls in always invite comparisons with other bands with girls in (it's lazy and also a little sexist). I do think we definitely had more of a pop sound to us than say Slowdive and I also think we were quite pressworthy in the sense that we were probably quite entertaining in interviews. I think the thing about Lush was that even though the music was at times quite crafted and sometimes serious we, as people, weren't like that in interviews. We didn't take ourselves too seriously when we were doing press which might have been a mistake as I think the music was sometimes overlooked in favour of discussing us as people. Oh I don't know. We were who we were, you know? Also, because we were from and lived in London we knew quite a few journalists from just going out and maybe they felt they could be more chummy with us than say a band like [Editor's note: omitted] who were more mysterious as they had come over from the USA and didn't know the writers at all. I think all-in-all we did OK with the British music press though there were a few 'incidents' which were a bit 'over the top' and unfair. But then, yes, this is the UK music press in the 1990s we are talking about.





Were there any bands of that style and era – Slowdive, Ride, Chapterhouse, etc. – that you had feelings on, good or not-so-good? A lot of the albums from that time seem to have finally received the respect they deserve now thanks to a new generation of bands that are influenced by that original wave. Do you think with the shoegaze revival that’s been going on for a few years now that Lush has been given their due respect, or at least recognition of their influence? Lush doesn’t seem to come up in conversation which is utter blasphemy from my point of view.

PHIL Yes, Lush seem to more often than not get overlooked whenever “shoegazing” is mentioned. Probably because the last hits were around the time of ‘Brit Pop’ making it more difficult for the group to be so easily labelled. I remember the first time I saw Ride – supporting Swervedriver at The Borderline – the thing that struck me most was how good Loz their drummer was. He almost seemed to be the centre of attention. I never saw Slowdive or Chapterhouse live and only caught Ride again when Steve Rippon (Lush’s first bass player) played his last Lush

show supporting them at ULU.

EMMA I liked Ride and bits of Chapterhouse and Slowdive but this idea that we all hung out together and swapped ideas etc. is way off the mark. In fact, I don't really think our music is like those bands at all! I think what was always frustrating was that people thought that all we were listening to were the bands you list when, in fact, I was quite unfamiliar with a couple of those bands' work! It's like when Britpop was around and we were lumped in with Echobelly and Sleeper (again because there were girls in the bands) and I never owned one record by either of those bands. During the early to mid-90s I was listening to a lot of different stuff e.g. Saint Etienne, Sugar, Teenage Fanclub, Belly, Bjork, The Auteurs. God, the list is too long so it's really not true that just the "shoegazing" bands were in my CD player. I was also listening to a lot of older stuff ... Laura Nyro, Beach Boys, Big Star, Tim Buckley etc. So are you saying that you have read interviews with newer bands that have name checked Slowdive, Ride and Chapterhouse etc., but never Lush? Yeah, I have to admit that we never really came up as a name that new bands cited as an influence though I do know certain bands or members of bands did like Lush a lot – Mogwai and Ladytron to name but two. Maybe people think it's embarrassing to mention us! I don't think we were ever as 'cool' as certain other bands. Maybe one day in 30 years that will be different.

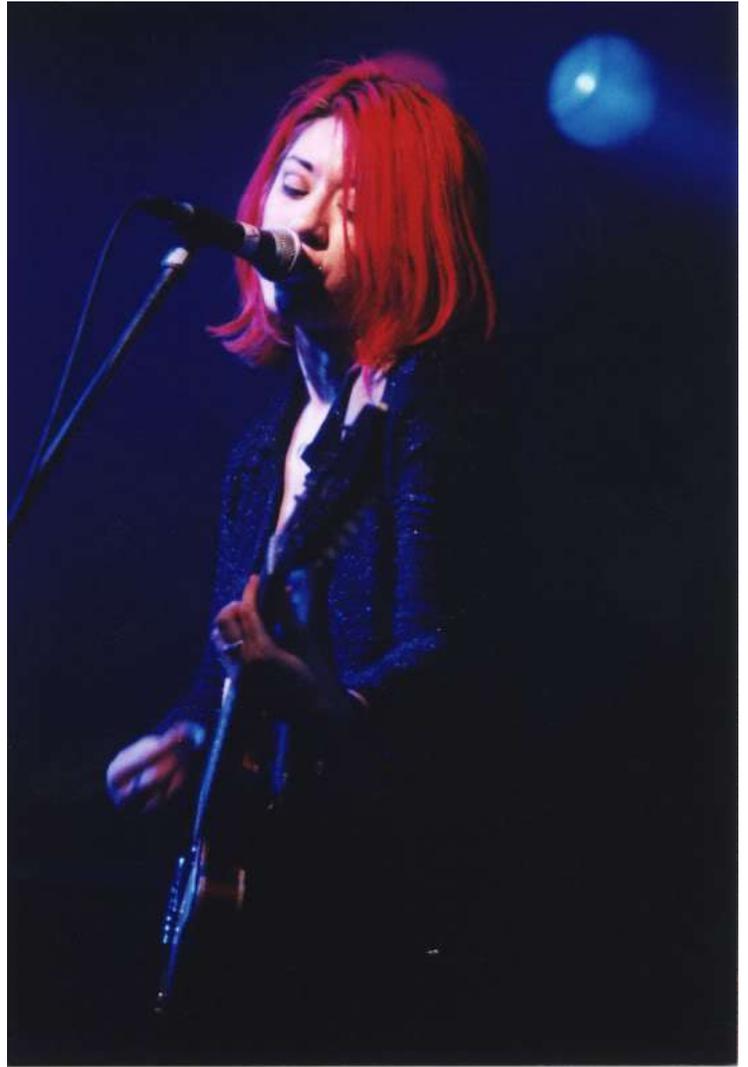
MIKI Oh, I'm middle-aged a mum now and I say Marge Simpson stuff, like "if you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all". And, "Saying you hate something just shows how limited you are". So I'm afraid I'm not going to talk about the bands I thought were crap because I was probably just jealous of their success or wrote them off before I'd given their music a chance! As for not getting namechecked, hardly any interview I ever did mentioned the bands I cited as influences, unless it happened to gel with what the writer had already decided would work in the article. So Blondie, Abba and any shoey bands were fine, but The Buzzcocks, The Specials, The Shangri-Las, Donna Summer, Thee Headcoats or any other mention that didn't 'fit' got excised. I imagine it's much the same now (well, that's how I console myself!). My favourite mention, however, was when the NME ran an interview with Extreme Noise Terror and one of them was wearing a Lush t-shirt.

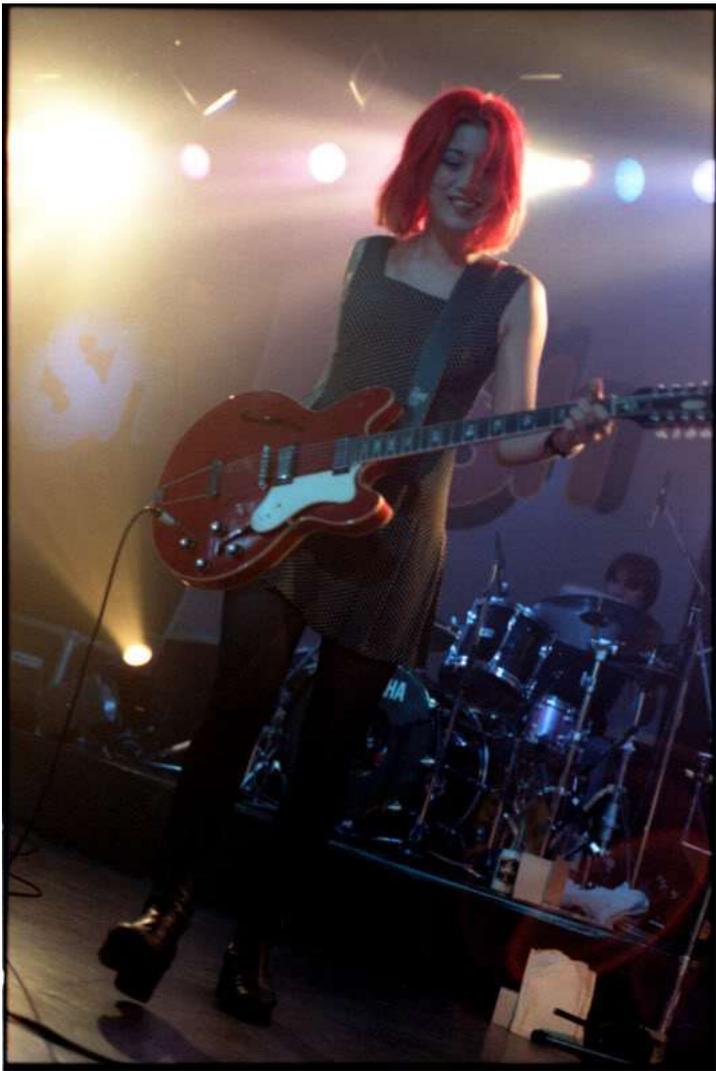
As a longtime Boston and Massachusetts resident, I was curious – what are your impressions of Boston from playing so many shows here (below: Miki and Chris in front of the “Cheers” bar in Boston during the ‘Split’ tour)? I remember seeing Emma & Miki at the Paradise during a Wolfgang Press gig in '95. I think you were in the area mixing ‘Lovelifе’ perhaps. Do you recall being at that show? Suddenly, Tammy opened up. I remember Wolfgang Press singer Michael Allen coming out with his long coat on with a rose in his mouth and a girl came up and took his coat off, followed by Michael throwing the rose into the crowd. What a great gig.

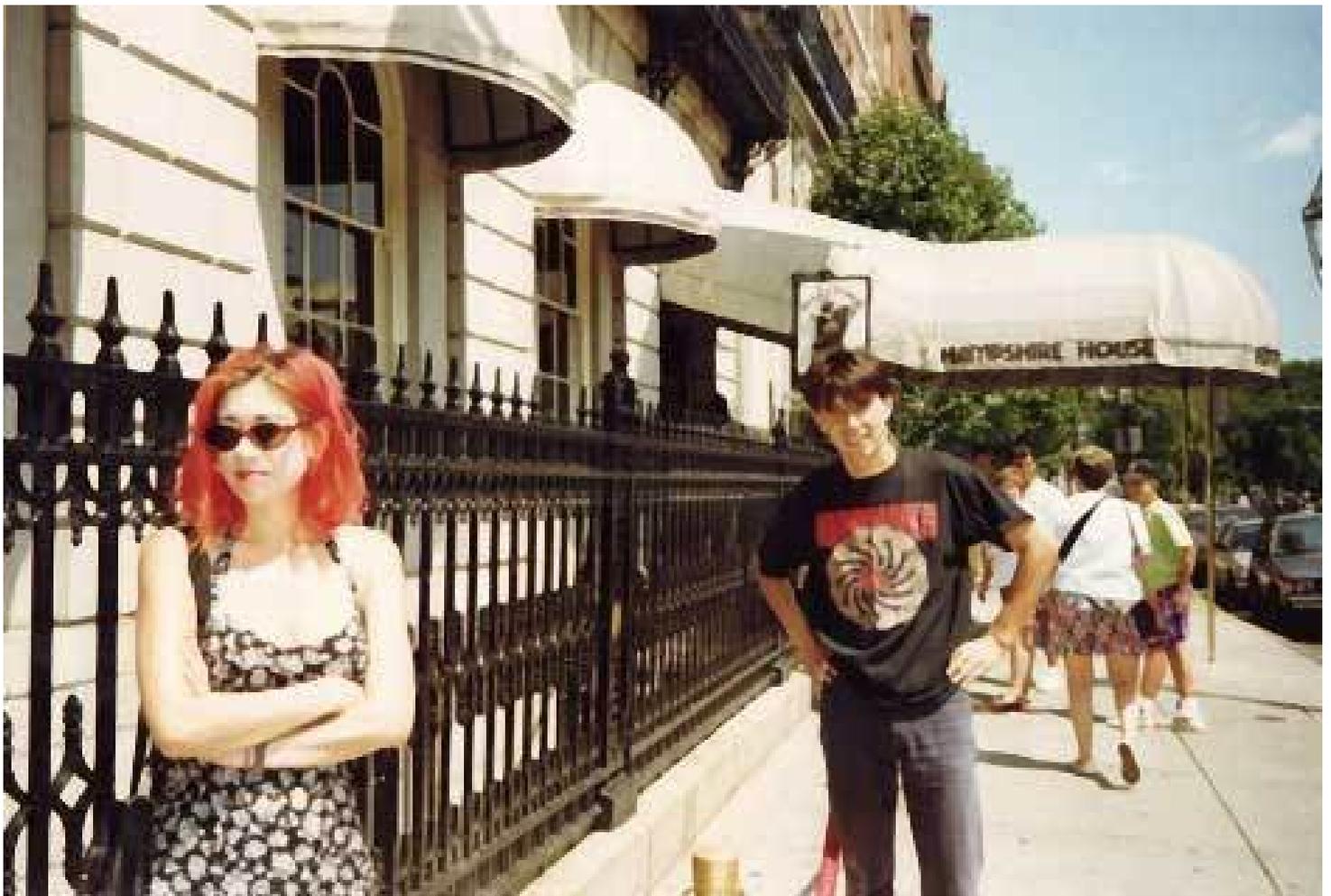
PHIL I seem to remember we were in Boston having dinner before our show when the OJ chase happened live on TV. Have always enjoyed Boston a lot. Especially the record shops – although there aren't so many any more.

MIKI Newbury Comics. Was that In Boston? I remember buying a comic called HATE which I LOVED! I could spend hours in that place. Boston was always lovely!

EMMA 'Not a big college town'. No seriously, I always liked Boston and, yes, Miki and I were there for a couple of weeks when we were mixing 'Lovelifе' with Sean Slade and Paul Q. Kolderie. You know – I don't really remember that Wolfgang Press gig but I do remember going to see Tricky and going backstage afterward! Other memories of Boston...I have just looked at our gigography and it seems we played at the Paradise a lot. I don't remember it much but then my memory is going! I do remember when Sing-Sing did its only tour of the North America, Boston was quite well attended. In fact, outside LA it was the only well-attended show. The others were pretty dreadful – about 10 people coming to each show and that's including New York – no joke! Boston was always a good show, I seem to remember but I can't remember the Paradise. God, when i was younger I could remember venue halls, hotel rooms, dressing rooms, people's names etc., but all that's gone. Just shows what age does to the brain!







What music are YOU into these days? Any favorite albums? Artists you are impressed by?

EMMA Oh – I am quite out of touch. I like John Grant A LOT; 'The Queen of Denmark' is amazing. I like Tame Impala especially the 'Lonerism' album. Cate Le Bon is great. I also like St. Vincent. The War on Drugs are good too. I find quite a lot of new British alternative acts a bit bland though. I won't mention any names again though! Some of them they seem to be products of music colleges and are too fully formed for my liking. I am looking forward to getting the new Aphex Twin album.

PHIL Two of favourite groups at the moment are both from Los Angeles and have a rather '60s sound – The Allah Las and Beachwood Sparks. The other group I really like are from Rome and are all called Giuda. They are more '70s junkshop bover rock.

Lush has been my favorite band for a few decades now, and Björk has been my top solo artist. A crossover opinion of sorts would be most interesting. So any thoughts on the former Sugarcubes vocalist?

PHIL I did go to what must have been The Sugarcubes first London show – at Drummonds across from Great Portland Street tube station. She certainly did stand out and it was understandable why she ended up going solo.

EMMA I have always loved Bjork (though I will admit I haven't followed her movements ardently in the last few years). I actually saw her when she was in the K.U.K.L supporting Psychic TV back in 1985. I didn't know much about K.U.K.L. at the time apart from the fact they were on Crass Records but they came onstage and I was immediately struck by this amazing female vocalist whom I thought at the time looked about 12 years old! She totally blew me away. I saw The Sugarcubes pretty early on too at a working men's club in Camden. Bjork was and is pretty special; one of a kind and totally unique. What a voice and she always chooses really interesting

people to work with. I have never met her though and I can't imagine she is a massive Lush fan! Ha, who knows though?



I lost both my parents in the recent years at ages far too young, and what I've realized since they have passed is how much they have impacted me in ways I had never noticed before. To give us a sense of what Chris was like as a person, instead of his musical talents that all fans are already aware of, how do you find Chris has impacted your life after all these years? What qualities or aspects do you see from him that rubbed off onto you?

PHIL Chris was the least likely person to take his own life. He was always so outgoing and friendly and a lot of fun. It was only during the last year of his life that towards the end he seemed unusually quiet and at times down. I thought it was just because he was hitting 30 and was re-evaluating his life. Little did we know.

MIKI I miss him and I wish he was here. You'll get the same answer from pretty much everyone who knew him, I guarantee. He was an exceptional person – extremely funny and very kind and self-effacing, open and honest and lovable. He had his weaknesses, like everyone, but his very considerable plus points outweighed them by far. I noticed there was some kind of row that erupted over the suicide of Robin Williams, about how some people were saying 'free at last' and others were saying that it was an irresponsible act. My input, for what it's worth, is to say that if you're leaving behind anyone who loves you, your suicide will devastate them and will cause them pain forever. That said, if you find life unbearable, you can't just carry on for the sake of others. But just be sure that it really is unbearable, and that you've tried everything and you're sure there's absolutely nothing you or anyone else can do to change that. Ever.

Lastly, are there reissues planned for the old albums? I assume a reunion show or two is still, understandably, off the table without Chris?

PHIL We did have a meeting with 4AD – must be at least five years ago now – and there was talk of a boxset and then later on expanded CDs (or was it the other way round?). Anyway it seems to have all gone quiet on either front.

EMMA No plans for reissues as far as I know. I don't think there is a lot of point. Reunion? People keep asking! Nothing to report, as yet.

'Split' is available directly from [4AD](#).