

INVASION OF THE CRADLE SNATCHERS

RIDE and LUSH may be familiar names in Britain, but the Americans are only just beginning to see the light. TED MICO joins both bands on their co-headline tour of the US and sees the pride of

new British pop make Hollywood shiver. Pics: STEPHEN SWEET.



THE IDEA WAS TO ALLOW TWO of our finest young bands to cut their teeth in the land of liberty, playing larger, more attractive venues than either group could possibly hope to fill back here in Britain. But hell, it was a risk. No-one knew if either band could stomach switching places on the bill each night. Similar plans have failed in the past because ego inflames the weaknesses in the great and the greatness in the weak.

Much to everyone's surprise, though, the Lush/Ride tour has gone better than the most rose-tinted optimist had any right to expect. After three weeks on the road together, not only are both bands still delighted with the arrangement, they make sure they see each other's shows every night.

Every night, Miki?

"Every night," the Lush singer confirms. "We just really enjoy it."

Four years ago, Echo & The Bunnymen and New Order played a co-headline tour of the States and, although some aspects of the natural inter-band competition for each night's laurels helped both groups to aim higher (Bernard Sumner may never have crawled out of his introverted shell if he hadn't had to compete with Ian McCulloch's stage excesses), the strain on both bands by the end of the tour was pretty obvious to everyone. According to Lush and Ride, their tour has worked so well because they share a mutual respect for each other and a healthy disrespect for most everything that happens around them. It's fun being the new gang in town... every night!

RIDE plunge into a howling version of "Kaleidoscope", the Roxy crowd heaves and Lush's drummer, Chris Acland, looks away from the stage and smiles.

"Headlining above Ride is one of the scariest, most difficult things we've ever done," he confesses. "They're just made to play live."

He's right but he needn't worry. Lush take the baton and pirouette around "Breeze" and it's clear that, with every tour, Lush are becoming tougher, more abrasive. One savage review once said a Lush gig was as barren as sterile sex, but now they're more dangerous and more alluring. Strip away Emma Anderson and Miki Berenyi's close-knit harmonies, remove the Cocteau-flavoured guitars and Lush songs bear more resemblance to Jane's Addiction than ABBA. The four new pearls they show tonight are all less frantic than, say, "De-Luxe", but they're far more

punishing. Lush have always known they can preen with the best of them, now LA knows they can prowl and when they gatecrash the halls of delirium with "Scarlet" and "Thoughtforms", even the ritual catcalls for "Chirpy Chirpy Cheep Cheep" are silenced.

LUSH have always been about bright colours, now they've added a touch of black'n'blue. Ride gave Lush a mountain to climb and, if they didn't actually get near the summit, at least they didn't fall off the face.

After the show, both bands compare notes, share drinks and decide on which Tinseltown adventure to pursue first. They're joined at the bar by Ian Astbury, Rick Rubin, the odd Red Hot Chili Pepper, The Pixies, Tanya Donnelly from Throwing Muses and all manner of other interested parties. Hell, even the Wolfgang Press are here. Mark Gardner sips his margarita and smiles incredulously as he surveys the melee.

"This trip, everything..." he says "it's been so wild. So very, very strange."

As ever, Miki is more direct: "It's been f***in' brilliant," she sings. "All of it."

Everyone tells the same story; both bands are having the time of their lives, or at least they would be if they hadn't already abandoned their ordinary lives a week ago somewhere outside Chicago. They've become exiles from reality—the bands' British passport pictures may still resemble their faces in feature and

form, but neither foursome will be the same again and they know it. Even the LA Times' rave review of Ride the next day noted that the band "looked like young teenagers stumbling onto something almost beyond their comprehension". More stumbling than the Times could possibly imagine. Six months ago, both Ride and Lush expressed concern about their well-being if success came and tour-madness started. Now they're worried about it all stopping.

"I just can't believe it's all gonna end in a month's time," says Acland. Later that evening, the drummer joins Astbury and Rick Rubin for a pizza.

"I used to follow Southern Death Cult around the country," he recalls the next day. "I can't believe I was actually eating with the same guy."

IN the capital of make-believe, all things are possible. As night turns into dawn, both bands disperse—separately. There's been much speculation about liaisons between the two bands with people predicting that Mark and Miki may be the new Jim Kerr and Chrissie Hynde. I'm here to state that it's all hearsay, and may God cut out my tongue and serve it as a flame-grilled Mexican fajita if I'm lying.

"I THOUGHT Ride blew Lush away last night," says one fan outside The Roxy the following day. The LA Times thought so too, but tonight Lush are supporting Ride and are determined to rise to the challenge with a less cute, more acute performance. This time, "Thoughtforms" nearly blisters the skin and even Miki's voice cracking up on "Etheriel" can't spoil it. It doesn't matter that Miki fluffs the final echoing chords of "De-Luxe" either or that she can barely croak the harmonies of "Sweetness & Light", or that various members of the audience keep shouting out homeopathic remedies for sore throats—Lush have had their pride restored.

One reason for Lush's fast-growing success in America is their approachability. Miki seems quite content to carry on a conversation with any and everyone in the throng; like the bloke who shrieked, "Say something brilliant!" and was then suitably impressed when Miki blurted, "What the f***?" Evidently this was brilliant enough and tonight, so are Lush. The band amble back on stage for their encore and dedicate "Babytalk" to The Sisters Of Mercy, who they're due to support in a couple of days.

"We're so looking forward to supporting them," Miki says sarcastically. Ride turned down the opportunity, just as Ride have rejected almost all offers of publicity. No KROQ interviews with smackheads asking for advice, no record store signing sessions and precious few interviews. Ride's world may be spinning faster, but the band is in no hurry to get where they're going.

Lush may have the on-stage intimacy, but it's Ride who have the monopoly on mystery. They say virtually nothing on stage and hide behind cloudbursts of guitars. No wonder The Cure's Robert Smith likes the band so much. The shy but affable Mark Gardner recently told the Maker that he thought people who met Ride backstage after a concert must be really disappointed, but none of the people who mingled last night looked crest-fallen—especially the girls. Comments like "What an angel" and "He's so gorgeous" were well common and far too accurate! One girl casually shook Mark's hand and calmly strolled to the exit. She made it all the way to the door before her hormones ran amuck and her entire body shivered as she let out a fierce yelp.

RIDE start their second night in LA where they left off 24 hours before, with the scorched-earth rendition of "Seagull". If last night saw Ride glow, tonight they're determined to explode from the off. Even the watching Lush, who are, by now, well-seasoned Ride experts, glance at each other, draw breath sharply and brace themselves for the wailing assault.

No-one has to wait long: "In A Different Place" is a blizzard of guitar fury and all traces of the song's love-struck melancholy are blown away by the sheer abandon of the attack. "Breath" is a mind-crushing inspiration—the sound of a thousand sherbet grenades detonating inside your head. It's the kind of delicious caterwaul that only Crazy Horse, The Pixies and the Mary Chain have ever achieved. The feedback frenzy keeps coming in waves, strobes flash, arms are raised in salute and surrender, but the band are now possessed, totally immersed in a noise that's every sound they've ever heard colliding in front of them. Ride have lost control of their own songs and it's brilliant.

By the time they reach the jarring rapids of "Dreams Burn Down", it's obvious that Ride are capable of playing the perfect jet-turbined soundtrack for a party on the eve of oblivion. What's remarkable is that Gardner and Andy Bell's Byrds-tinged harmonies strain but never buckle under the weight of white noise. The stage-diving increases to the point where the venue security can't handle it anymore, but Ride are ignorant of most everything that goes on around them. They're soaring.

In a recent interview, Gardner politely stated his desire to "engage an audience". This audience is engaged, married and has already had kittens when the vibrato holler of "Polar Bear" eclipses everything that's gone before. It's easy to see why Lush occasionally feel nervous about Ride supporting them. They are, say Lush, different enough from Ride to get away with it and besides, as Emma rightly points out after the show, "Ride aren't always that good." Just to highlight the point, a minute later two fans approach Miki for autographs.

"We've come all the way from Phoenix," they explain. Miki just beams: devotion can always be measured in distance and Phoenix is 1,000 miles away.

AFTER a week of partying with everyone from The Cult to Faith No More, it's not surprising that the second night fades quickly. In fact, it's the only thing about this tour that isn't surprising.

"Where shall we go now?" someone asks.

"To hell... or at least to bed," says Ride's Andy.



Ride



Lush