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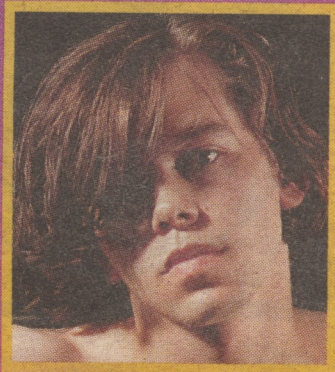
Lushed with success



NORTHSIDE's bid
for telly stardom

The Gig Of Your Dreams?
The stars reveal
their fantasies

RIDE
Tripping
the flight
fantastic



ARE LUSH THE NEW ABBA?

Probably not, but they're pretty damn good anyway



● Total recall! From spending the high summer of punk in Bognor, to writing scurrilous fanzines at the College of Punk 'n' Sins & Football . . . LUSH chew up and spit out the past 20 years of rock history. STEVE LAMACQ reels in the years with the 'new Abba'. Sweetness and lighting: DEREK RIDGERS.

ABBA

Where were you in 1974? Sixteen years ago, when a few of you weren't even born, Noel Edmonds—the nauseating '70s blueprint for Jeremy Beadle—was presenting Radio 1's *Breakfast Show* and a dance troupe called Pan's People appeared on *Top Of The Pops* every week. It was a weird time.

In 1974 a different kind of monster stalked the earth. In the wake of the rock dinosaurs, the Top 40 heaved under the influences of the '70s answer to Stock, Aitken and Waterman—The Glitter Band, Marc Bolan, The Tartan Bay City Roller Army and a gruesome twosome called Nicky Chinn and Mike Chapman, a SAW-type songwriting team who produced endless hits for Sweet, Mud, Suzi Quatro and, erm, Smokie.

In the pre-punk, pre-'formatting', pre-picture disc daze, Terry Jacks' 'Seasons In The Sun' vied with Mud's Elvis Presley pastiche 'Lonely This Christmas' for the title of best selling single of the year. Making records in '74 had all the indulgent finesse of a toddler filling its nappy. It was a piece of piss, really.

Lush were all about seven years old in 1974, except bassist Steve who's the old sod. Sitting in guitarist Emma's cluttered front room (full of videos, bits of equipment and ageing kids' annuals) in a forlorn block of flats in west London, the band are delving into their memories for bits of the '70s.

Chris (drums): "Wasn't there a World Cup in 1974? West Germany beat Holland . . . actually I was hanging out with Iggy in '74."

Miki: "Was that the year Abba won the Eurovision Song Contest? Yes, it was, that's all I remember I think."

That's enough! 1974 was the year of the Swedes! Abba and Lush both have four letters in their name, so there's a connection already. In Eurovision terms, Abba had the classic formula (later ripped off by Brotherhood Of Man and Bucks Fizz): two blokes and and two girls. Having won the Euro-Battle-Of-The-Bands with 'Waterloo' they followed it up with

some of the tackiest hits of the decade. Then they got hip, they became respectable . . . they went off and married each other and bought half their country.

Lush are two blokes and two girls as well, but they aren't, what's the word, *intertwined*. Even so, there's some nice similarities between them and Abba—both of whom, for a start, did their growing up in public. Abba as the cheap, silly-looking, manufactured side of pop in the charts, Lush as the press darlings of 1989 playing gigs to crowds who were itching for them to fail, to fall on their arses.

People are so cynical these days, they don't want to believe in great bands.

Lush, however (like Abba, who emerged with a perverse credibility) pulled through. Following the initial rave reviews and the self-confessed 'iffy' gigs, they released their elegant debut mini-album 'Scar' and made the Top 50 with the 'Mad Love' EP.

And all this after widespread scepticism towards them. Even Howard, their manager of six months now, told 4AD when he was working at the label that they'd be off-their-perch to sign the band. But his boss Ivo persisted and Howard later saw the error of his ways.

Lush's new single 'Sweetness & Light' is released this week. Somewhere amid the heady, swaying rush of guitar, Miki's vocals are half-hidden, sumptuously caressing the lead melody. The very fact that they've played down the lyrics again symbolises Lush's withdrawn, cunning way with pop: their reluctance to become a *blatant* part of the current 'indie' rush to the charts.

'Sweetness & Light' is a less surging song than they've released before but (after numerous plays) its impact is ever harsher and more lasting. Only not in an obvious way. It's not their 'Waterloo', more their 'Super Trooper'.

Emma: "In our first line-up, if you took all the first letters of our surnames it spelt Abba . . . because you know Abba took their name from the letters of their first names."

Chris: "Spookeee."

Emma: "We've recorded an Abba song for a compilation album, 'Hey Hey Helen', it's from 'Abba—The Album' . . . it's an old favourite, we've played it live in the past, but their version is much heavier than ours, theirs is like Judas Priest. Liz from the Cocteau Twins is a massive Abba fan as well, we had *Abba The Movie* out on video. They made brilliant songs, brilliant harmonies."

Lush for life (l-r): Chris, Miki, Steve and Emma

ABBA HEY!

They also stayed the course like Lush will. In fact Lush would've been the next Abba—but then along came punk rock.

IN 1976 the Monster of the early '70s, the glam pop/rock star mutant, met its match with the snidey, spitting adversaries Malcolm McLaren—The Joker—and the Sex Pistols.

Elton John and Kiki Dee were at Number One for 186 weeks with 'Don't Go Breaking My Heart'. Lush, meantime, at the outbreak of punk, were changing schools and taking holidays.

Steve: "That really long hot summer of '76... my family had been away on holiday to this caravan site in Bognor—it was Whitsun week—and we had a really good time so we decided we'd go back later in the season. Anyway the people there said there was only one week left free and that was the start of September. But we thought 'Oh that'll be all right'."

"Then we had this really hot summer and we were all really looking forward to going away... and the day before we left the weather broke. A whole week stuck on this miserable caravan site in Bognor with nothing to do and it's pouring down. That's where I was for the 100 Club Punk Festival!"

Emma: "I was at this really dodgy school off Fulham High Street and all I remember was... do you remember that Malcolm McLaren shop 'Sex'? There was a boy at the school whose mother worked there. And my mother was so outraged by this that she took me away from the school."

"The other thing was that I used to go and stay with my best friend's godmother in Hampton Court and on the way there in the car we'd go down the Kings Road—and we'd be sitting in the back trying to spot punks... 'There's one! I've seen three now, how many have you seen?'"

Chris: "I was into Darts, I think... and I was the front end of a cow in a pantomime. It was great because I was really shy on stage and the only way I could lose my inhibitions was to get inside something (mass hysterics from the rest of the room!)."

"And so I got inside a cow. I was Jessie The Jersey, the Cow With The Cud... I can still remember a few of my cue lines."

Miki: "I had to be a kangaroo once in a school play and sing 'The Kangaroo Down'... dreadful. What else happened in 1976? I'd just moved to Windsor, I remember the drought... and rabies. I used to be scared stiff of rabies because they used to advertise it on telly... well, not advertise it."

Chris, in his salemen's voice: "NEW! RABIES! It's spread by dogs... All the TV programmes had plots with rabies in, didn't they? Like *Z-Cars* and *Survivors*. "I hated being told to go to bed

around this time. The only time I was allowed to stay up late was on Saturday for *Match Of The Day* and every time it came on I used to fall asleep."

Chris and Miki support Tottenham. It explains a lot: though neither of them have any Gazza mementoes.

Meanwhile, back in '76, punk was putting its oar in. It might sound stupid now but it did alter people's perception of who could be in a pop group, ie ABSOLUTELY ANYONE, and in turn the new attitude of punk spawned a myriad of independent record labels, releasing whatever the hell they wanted.

Years down the line Lush are part-product of punk, among the bands christened in the office 'Indie Kids With Attitude'. If Mega City 4 describe themselves as Hardcore Beatles then Lush are

Chris, Lager Man, with his drawling northern accent and football fixation, isn't the new Budgie and Miki isn't the new Siouxsie (her vocals don't sound as panicked for a start). But in spirit there's a link between the bands.

If punk was the snotty new kid in town in '76 then at the opposite point Elvis Presley was the deteriorating star back in the States. Chris is a big Elvis fan.

"I really liked him when I was a kid, then I got into punk and you forget about all that. But then I read the Albert Goldman book and got back into him again. I mean I think Goldman's a wanker but that's how I got back into it. Presley was just a really interesting character who got totally f—ed up."

Are you attracted to the casualty angle then?

"The middle of the '80s were just a complete bollocks... there was nothing like the Mondays in the charts — no unifying thing like them which you could go out and see." — Emma



Hard to believe this woman was once a kangaroo!

... something brittle and indignant to one side of them (Hardcore Abba?).

I like to think of them as having the same sort of punk sense as The Sundays or Bleach or Teenage Fanclub. Bands who have a singular idea of how they want to make music and how they want it presented.

The result is the most confrontational and demanding material on 4AD at the moment. Emma baulks when Chris says they're a little like Siouxsie And The Banshees, but 'Scar' was as beautifully stark as a chilling left-field adventure which took a rag-bag of alternative sounds and gave them a frosty, icy sheen.

"Um, yeah, but when he sang it was brilliant. That video, the '68 Special, was brilliant. But there was a point where he just made records for films, just churning them out, but that's why '68 Special is so good because he just turned round and said 'F— this, I'm going to do something I want to do'."

SO WHERE were we? Oh yeah, The Rock 'n' Roll Years Part Three: 1980–'81. As the decade turned the mainstream became flooded with influences, the leftover of 2-Tone and the Mod Revival, the New Romantics and the machinic popsters. Punk transformed into Hardcore and Or

(supposedly street-conscious versions of the Sex Pistols) and Chris Tarrant took over the Beatle mantle from Edmonds.

And in the alternative sector there was the industrial funksters, the continued mobilisation of Factory Records (a good name back then) and another new breed of bands like the Delta Five, The Raincoats and Girls At Our Best who gave a new slant to the way you could use female vocals. No more Bonnie Tyler! The Raincoats in particular were a stark breath of realism with singles such as 'Fairytale In A Supermarket'.

Lush's Miki and Emma remind me of the 'Coats' belligerent 'Not Your Little Girl' 45. They're determined and bolshie, but they're also fallible and real—potential pop stars, even. Miki's piercing laugh punctuates the tape of the interview like something from a BBC sound effects cassette while Emma sits ranting away in the corner about how crap the '80s were for growing up in. She's right.

"The middle of the '80s were just a complete bollocks, it was really scraping the bottom of the barrel, because there was nothing like the Happy Mondays in the charts—no unifying thing like them which you could go out and see."

Chris: "When there was a mod revival, I got backstage at a Secret Affair gig and Ian Page said I looked really sharp (*Cue more laughs!!*). And there were lots of sproggy kids there and one 14-year-old kid in a suit top and a parka."

Steve: "And that was you, was it?"

Chris: "And that was me looking like a dickhead. But I was only a mod for a bit. It's just something you go through at a certain age."

Miki: "All mods seem to be 13-years-old, y'know what I mean? And there's always one who's about 17 or 18 and he's the leader because he's old enough to have a scooter. And he's got a girlfriend who's 11."

Chris: "But '80/'81, that was the transition period when I turned into a skunk, which was a cross between a skin and a punk and I was into all that crap... but we won't talk about that. Discharge were good. When was 'Big A, Little A' by Crass? Everyone at school knew the words to that."

The indie music of ten years ago, though, was still seething with good groups. A good test of how bands have progressed and how good they really are these days is to pluck them out of the '90s and slot them back into the '80s. The Mondays and New FADs would've been hailed as Gods then next to the presence of Pigbag; Lush would've been like a large bomb going off in a music journo's trousers.

Emma: "In that area, there was quite a lot of good dance music

around as well, stuff like The Pop Group, but that just got lost during the '80s."

Chris: "Gang Of Four, was that 1981? I sort of liked their rockier stuff but not the weird beats and funny basslines. That was the difference between all that stuff and the new punk thing which was more... chunky."

So what happened to all the Shite Rock and The Career Minded Middle-Aged Romantics of the '80s? Oh, it all got stuffed in a crate and sent to the States. They loved it. Lush have been in America recently, sorting out a US record deal with Warner Brothers. They got a nice hotel in LA for five days and scrounged loads of records.

Emma: "You watch MTV and it could be 1990 or 1980... nothing ever changes over there, it's just rock, it's sick. We went to a rave over there and it was just sad. It was like a kids' disco. They even had one of those bouncy castles in there. And there was one girl, skirt up to here, bouncing up and down on it with all these blokes, leering at her. I mean you can't translate what's happened here in attitude to over there... most of the kids are so f—ing rich as well. Someone threw something at me and shouted 'Hey, you kids suck'."

America's top-selling 'alternative' act at the moment is INXS. I think we'll leave it there.

PART FOUR: 'C86'. It was hell out there in the trenches.

Chris: "We started at college that year, that was crap. It was the College Of Punk 'n' Sins & Football... no it was North London Poly."

Miki: "Me and Steve got a 2.1 and Chris got a 2.2—that's why he's the drummer."

And that's how Lush met. Three of them were at college together and Miki knew Emma from school. But 1986 for the most part was an anonymous year. Even Steve, Lush's memory man who can tell you what year the Iranian Embassy siege was and when Ronald Reagan took office, struggles to find anything newsworthy from 1986. Instead, he settles for this.

"Elvis Costello put out those two LPs, 'King Of America' and 'Blood & Chocolate'. I really liked him when he first came out but then he went really rosey. But those LPs were really good and he did some good live shows as well."

There was some influential tape going round and skirmishes within the NME between the Radical Dance Faction Mk 1 and Insubordinate Shop Assistants Fan Club (since disbanded). Miki and Emma were writing an 'irreverent' (ie disgusting) fanzine called *Alphabet Soup*.

Miki: "We went to see My Bloody Valentine... and I used to go and see The Milkshakes and The Prisoners. I was at the Prisoners' last gig."

Which brings us bang up to date with Lush as they are now. This year has been one of consolidating their position among the ranks of the Independent Top Flight. The

interesting thing about Lush—the reason for all this history—is that they have so many interesting reference points with the past, but they're still a band who sound ahead of their time.

Cracking the Top 50 with 'Mad Love' was a reassuring sign that people are packing away their misconceptions about the band and giving them a chance to breathe. After the suffocating attention that surrounded their first three months in the spotlight, Lush are emerging as *bona fide* ground-breakers.

And they're destroying a few myths along the way—like the one about all 4AD bands being pretentious and arty, which has gone on for years and still lingers in people's minds today. Even after the arrival of Pixies at 4AD, a rock 'n' roll band for God's sake, punters and critics seemed intent on perpetuating the vision of 4AD being based on a CS Lewis-style other-world full of mystery and talking animals.

Emma: "Yeah, that's annoying, everyone's so normal really, the arty image is bollocks."

Miki: "People think that you're going to come on stage in some sort of shroud..."

Chris: "It's like 'It's time to pray. The band will be on in five minutes, all bow down to the stage'."

You're good at taking the piss out of that, though.

Miki: "Yeah, but that works against us as well, some people want us to be really ethereal, or something. People who've interviewed us and wanted to focus totally on the music, they get a bit upset when we start pissing about."

No matter. The new Lush single will surprise even more people again with its looser, lighter air, its spacey mood and obtuse strummy catchiness. It ends a low-profile spell in the UK after a patchy summer which included not-so-notable performances at London's Borderline and a nervy Glastonbury set.

Overall though, Lush are improving—and that includes the gigs, which used to let them down badly. The game-plan for the coming months is to tour the UK, then play a few low-key American headliners before heading off to Japan—and then back to Britain to start demoing for the next LP.

Emma: "We are better now. The ironic thing was that after we headlined at ULU earlier this year, which I thought was a good gig, all the reviews were saying 'they've got a bit arrogant now', y'know just because we'd got a bit confident and we were talking to the audience. You can't win in the end, can you?"

Check for yourself when they tour this month, taking the Sundays-ish Faith Over Reason out as support.

Chris: "We're only touring with bands who've got Faith in their name now. It was Th' Faith Healers on the last one, Faith Over Reason this time... next time we'll have Faith No More supporting."

Steve: "Or Marianne Faithfull." The future's so bright we've got to wear shades.