

LUSH

AFTER DARK, READING

ONE of the reasons why Lush are so easy to love is that they're *casually* transcendent. There's no conceit there, no pomp. Miki Berenyi collapses in giggles at the end of "Thoughtforms", their first flourish tonight — and when you can use such an irresistible whirlpool of sound as a curatin raiser, you've got plenty to laugh about.

The songs that follow give Lush a chance to flex their muscles and show the fighting force behind the sweet voice. "Second Sight", where Chris Acland stars on fluttering percussion, starts by hovering like a heat haze, then chills out to end up battering away like a heavy hailstorm. The biting, brisk "Bitter" fully lives up to its title, and "Downer" is a breathless, exhilarating sprint.

But the spiralling "Scarlet" suffers from a problem that may always haunt Lush live. Given the right conditions, the fragility of Miki's voice can be a positive asset. It's a delicacy *because* it's delicate. Lush on record can seem like the quiet one's revenge — like seeing some shy, gentle girl suddenly explode and shout down all the bullies and boors around her. Sadly, tonight sees a repetition of the problems that marred the band's TV debut the other week, as PA practicalities muffle Miki's careful whispers.

The bolder, deeper vocal thrusts of "Etheriel" allow Miki to reassert herself. A new song follows, its title — "Breeze" — belied by its uneasy mood. By the time the foursome sway and swagger through "De-Luxe", magic has triumphed over temperamental technology — so on "Leaves Me Cold" Miki's dreamy words easily fly above the turbulence whipped up by Emma Anderson's crystalline guitar.

They return to mop up any remaining resistance with "Baby Talk", Emma's guitar surges lashing out violently once again, and then a final encore of "Hey Hey Helen" provides the rare spectacle of people moshing madly to an Abba song. I'm dazzled. They've climbed so high so quickly that it's hard to believe — but, trust me, this band is Lush as in *luscious*.

DAVE JENNINGS

Lush: transcendence comes to Reading



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