



PIC: MIKE MORTON

# WHEN LUSH COMES TO SHOVE

## LUSH/GALLON DRUNK/ STEREOLAB

THE TABERNACLE, LONDON

IS there any point in summarily dismissing a new band who are as yet unsigned, who have yet to show their worth, who still don't know exactly or even roughly what they're doing or where they're going? Probably not, but who cares? Without doubt, charity does not begin in the music press. And so it is with heavy heart and a weary resigned sigh that I must report the truth about Stereolab's performance tonight.

Here goes: The sound is atrocious, due at least in part to the poor acoustics (we're in a church, for - ha! - God's sake) and a shite PA (what was that about bad workmen always blaming their tools?). The four boys in this indie supergroup conglomerate (Russell Moose, Tim ex-McCarthy, Martin ex-Chills, Joe Faith Healer) are squashed so tight on the tiny stage they're almost playing each other's instruments. And the two girls, the French Laetitia and the Mancunian Gina, look like a couple of Camden waifs and strays who've been given the break of their life and dragged off the street to appear as their all-time heroines, Miki and Emma Lush, on "Stars In Their Eyes". The pathos of it all is quite stunning.

On record Stereolab are fine, if a little studied (let's face it, this noise-pop-with-ethereal-warbly-bits was designed for one label, and one label only), and some of their songs have great melodies and rhythms to spare. And if it takes a producer like Robin Guthrie to knock them into shape in the studio, well, I'm sure we'd never be so old-fashioned as to suggest that a band have to Do It All For Themselves for the project to be of any value. Just don't expect us to get excited about it, that's all. We simply cannot afford to let groups feed our often desperate desire for something/anything new and so get away with murder.

No such worries for Gallon Drunk, a band whose idea of a future world paradise is probably 1956 or thereabouts. Gallon Drunk mean nothing to me, and they won't to you if you consider men with slicked-back quiffs and Hawaiian shirts playing anachronistic rockabilly grunge to be the very antithesis of all you have ever loved about pop. The first tune is an instrumental that gets people whispering "The Shadows" and "Telstar" in their neighbours' ears. Mueller reckons the singer's impression of a diseased blues-wailing cabaret wreck on the Lee Hazelwood cover is pure Cave, but then he f\*\*\*ing loves rock'n'roll, him. Me, I just wish I'd got the Maker's roving crusty-goth epicurean Cathi Unsworth to write this bit. No compremendo. Sorry.

Lush seem permanently on the verge of proving themselves and Making It Big, and it's to their eternal credit that they've managed to keep our attention for so long

by doing so little. Of course, we'll take quality over quantity every time, but what does Lush's comparatively meagre output - one mini-LP and three EPs - since their arrival in late '88 really say about the band? What are they afraid of?

One theory about Lush is that, well before the days of Ride and Revolver, they were purpose-built as a way of taking the radical musical advances of the Cocteau and The Class of '87/'88 (AR Valentines 3) and turning them into immediately accessible POP. Shooting into the charts, appearing on "Top Of The Pops", chatting with the teen glossies, these are all an integral part of What Lush Are Supposed To Be About.

But Miki, Steve, Emma and Chris have, thus far, patently failed to achieve what seems to be their ambition of bringing Lushpop to the masses, which begs the crucial question: what if they don't happen this time around? Can they survive without the commercial success that may well be their *raison d'être*? And, if not, do Lush have a role as Just Another Experimental Indie Band?

With any luck, we won't ever have to answer these questions. But on tonight's showing I'd say that Lush's forte is less yer avant-noise explorations and more the sort of succulent, juicy pop songs Chapterhouse, to name just one, are currently promising, though clearly not managing, to deliver. New tracks such as "Laura" and "Covert" have the instant thrill factor so essential to disposable-but-throw-it-away-and-I'll-kill-you pop.

Best of all is "For Love", which is everything (dizzy, swirling, ahem, mesmerising - take note, Reading bands) you could want from a potential Number One hit single. This almost, but not quite, makes up for the sweltering conditions (it's like being trapped in a lift shaft with a bunch of sumo wrestlers in here), Miki and Emma's extremely ropey harmonies throughout, and the fact that Lush's older "Scar"/"Mad Love" material has dated badly and long outlived its usefulness.

As we're always saying, a week's a long time in pop. What, then, must a band do if they want to sustain their impact over a three or four year period? In Lush's case, it's obvious. As David Stubbs pointed out last week, we've seen them grow under incredibly close scrutiny (we're the Pete Bests of Lush, all of us), now it's time for them to blow away our whinges, stop lazing around and GO. Some of their songs are still too C86 cute for their own good, I still get the feeling they're not pushing themselves, and by Christ they should have moved onto bigger, better, more glam'n'glitzy places than this by now. I'm still not even sure if they're as good as their name. But they can do it. Yup, we're still waiting.

PAUL LESTER