



# FILLY SPECTRES

## LUSH

### Spooky (4AD/All formats)

AFTER A good run of press encouragement as luxuriant as their name, it seems Lush are now due for a good kicking. After a lot of waiting (bar the teaser compilation LP 'Gala'), this proper debut album had to be top dollar, no excuses. We scratched their back . . . But hang on—Lush are an easy, soft, succulent target, Shoey, fey, wistful, eth\*r\*al—guilty. But the poor lambs have got Mummy Cocteau and Daddy Valentine looking over their shoulders, so the least they deserve is to be treated gently.

Perhaps they were rightly vilified for their apparent lack of assertiveness, sense of purpose or willingness to passionately justify their existence. No scams, no slogans—guilty. But dig beneath the surface and glimpse the Lush who are more than mere self-satisfied genre surfers.

Granted, on first listen, 'Spooky' sounds like a bunch of Sixth Form Common Room demos. When the business of serious listening begins, however, there comes the thaw, the gentle melting away of preconceptions. It warms to your further attention, and attention becomes affection; you hold hands with it, embrace it . . . until, infuriatingly, it drifts from your grasp and drowns in an ocean of producer (and Cocteau Twin) Robin Guthrie's making. Did they lose the will to fight?

Lush is obviously no democracy. Miki Berenyi and Emma Anderson are joint queens, responsible for all the words and music, some jointly, most separately. Chris Acland and Steve Rippon (this is his swansong) are left to work out their own masculine underpinnings to the fragile upper atmosphere the girls create. I wouldn't want to suggest that they're not strong enough personalities to argue with their producer, but a little less lushness from him would have lifted the fog and made it easier to make out who Lush really are.

'Spooky' opens with the eldritch basslines, the swirly guitars swamped in effects and the drifting, otherworldly harmonies of Miki and Emma in the short but sweetly bursting 'Stray'. The basic ingredients are unchanged throughout. The driving 'Nothing Natural' juxtaposes dynamism with delicacy, Emma's voice floating in the background, often becoming submerged in the pea soup wall of sound.

But, oh, how I wish you could hear the words. They're not on the sleeve and not even a speech therapist could make them out after several hours under the headphones. Lush apparently don't think their words are important. So why not just recite your shopping lists?

My plea to Miki and Emma is this: come out and reveal yourselves! Don't hide behind the fringes, the flangers and the

floaty harmonies, stand up and be counted in all your feminine glory! Have the courage of your convictions! There are few enough women in rock bands writing about their experiences, so let it be heard. These are valid, sensitive, simple, resonant words about women's experience of men, sex and relationships, without resorting to pornography. Neil Tennant wouldn't hide his words, and these are just as direct and relevant.

I have all the lyrics; that's good for me, but not for you, because the words make sense of the whole thing, of Emma singing "I was so small and vulnerable" in 'Nothing Natural', Miki whispering "You won't understand me/I can't let you try/Still I dream/Of the day you discover/I am the spy" in the chiming, folky 'Covert', then striking to the heart of how women fool themselves in love in 'For Love', "She'll pretend that this was really love/She'll make their fall seem beautiful". Or the world-weary account of the messy break-up of a relationship in the nearest they get to a great pop tune, 'Untogether' ("You don't have to remind me of why you dislike me"), or the line that will strike a chord in any woman who's suffered it: "And sometimes I think if I stand by the 'phone it may ring," in Emma's floating, lullabyish swayer 'Monochrome'.

'Tiny Smiles' is adorably playful despite the leaden chord changes; those angelic voices highlight a child-like atmosphere of innocence and vulnerability about to be corrupted, but still it gets a bit lost in the mix. 'Ocean' (a liquid sexual metaphor?) makes you want to rush into the control room and tell Robin Guthrie to take the vocals up and stop trying to be so bloody epic.

'Superblast!' is a welcome razor-sharp stab of thrash-punk, a cruel cut into Emma's soft and private world; there's a bit of hurt here, perhaps, but the hurt is masked by a welter of confusing noise and heat. Stop hiding! She gets far too shy in 'Fantasy', where her lovely, yearning lyrics are let down by a doomy tune and the usual wall of sound. Only in 'Take' is the balance redressed, where Bansheesque guitar figures whirl round Miki's tale of a sexual power game ("He claimed his prize/I had my price/I know it's cruel/But I refuse to be the only one to lose").

It seems accepted that Lush are great people, the sort of group we need to have around, but they're yet to make great music. 'Spooky' proves we've got to be a little bit more patient, but with some coaxing and gentle encouragement they should stop being caterpillars in jars and become the butterflies they've long threatened to be. This is a fragile one; it needs nurturing. Bear with Lush and the mellow fruitfulness will come, I'm sure of it. (7).

Betty Page