

THE PV Q&A: Miki Berenyi on Reforming Lush: "We could actually do a good job at this, and it would actually be fun"

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By Tom Lanham

It should have been a banner year for British alternative combo Lush. In 1996, the group issued its third album, *Lovelife*, a Britpop-embracing effort that quickly became its most popular, and sweeping make-it-or-break-it tours of America were scheduled with mainstream acts like the Goo Goo Dolls and Gin Blossoms. But in October, founding drummer Chris Acland committed suicide, and co-frontwomen Miki Berenyi and Emma Anderson wound up arguing so contentiously about their future that they actually stopped speaking to each other. By 1998, Lush had officially disbanded, with Anderson launching her own outfit, Sing-Sing, bassist Joel King joining The Jesus and Mary Chain, and the scarlet-maned Berenyi retreating from show business altogether with a comfy 9-5 position in publishing. It seemed as if they would never perform together again. But now, unexpectedly, the three members have reunited – backed by new drummer Justin Welch – for a string of concerts and an EP called *Blind Spot*, issued on their own Edamame imprint. And Berenyi was even granted a six-week job sabbatical to make it all happen. And judging by ethereal, cumulus-fluffy perambulators like “Out of Control,” it’s as if Lush never went away. Berenyi, now a mother of two at 49, with a business-like brown hairstyle, spoke to PureVolume after punching out from her day job one

recent evening.

PureVolume: It's interesting to note that your mom Yasuko Magazumi was a film actress, who even appeared as a Bond girl in "You Only Live Twice."

MIKI BERENYI: Yeah. And I guess when she first came to the UK, there weren't that many Japanese people in London, really. But I think my dad was hell-bent on turning her into some sort of superstar, and then got jealous when she managed to make some headway with it. And she was in a Wombles movie, which was hilarious. I got to go on the set of that, and I was really excited. I was about eight at the time, and the guy who played her husband was the dad in *Mary Poppins*, so as far as I was concerned, he was a real superstar. And she was in the TV show *Space: 1999*, as well, and I got to go on that set and run around in the moon dust. That was really great.

PV: But she wound up in modeling and print advertising out in Los Angeles?

MB: She had a tough time. She remarried, went out to America, and then she divorced and she was really stuck there, so she had to start all that business stuff in her 40s. And I'll be honest with you – that kind of modeling and photography world? I just couldn't fucking bear it, the few times I went to photo shoots with her. I think the one time I was really impressed was when Linda Evangelista was in the photo shoot, and Kyle MacLachlan turned up because he was going out with her. And I had just watched all of *Twin Peaks*, so I was completely dazzled by this. But on the whole, it wasn't that inspiring. Because by then I was a bit older, and I was probably annoyingly politicized and a bit feminist, brandishing my opinions. So all of that model-y , photographic, darling-darling stuff? I just really didn't like it, and I don't think I had much of a sense of humor about it, either. I mean, I always admired my mom for actually being able to tolerate these people on the whole. But the fact that she was in a creative industry and enjoying herself was a great thing to witness. And also, that made her very accepting of me becoming a musician. She was never saying, "so when are you going to get a real job?" Even right at the beginning, she was always like, "Oh, that's great!" And she would come see me play. She was always incredibly supportive, and that was really important actually.

PV: You and Emma met at 14. And you actually had your own fanzine?

MB: Yes, we did a fanzine. We were probably about 15 or 16, and it was because we'd go out to see a lot of bands, and we'd go to these gigs, and everyone was older, and they all seemed to know each other, and we were very shy. And back then? Honestly, you couldn't go to a gig without about eight people trying to sell you a fanzine – whether they were a fan magazine, or anarchist things, or poetry or feminism, they were covering every sort of subject. So we thought, "We'll write a fanzine, and we'll use that as an excuse to go up and talk to people!" But it was appalling, very snotty and silly. But actually, in those terms, I suppose it was quite honest. It was exactly what you would imagine two 16-year-olds would come up with.

PV: Did you interview anyone?

MB: We did interview! And we were absolutely awful at it. I think the first interview we did, we forgot to turn the tape machine on, so I had to try and remember everything and I got everyone's name wrong. It was just dreadful. But we didn't really know what we were doing. So the best stuff we did were those kinds of quizzes that you get in girls magazines, except it would be like, 'Are you a Goth?' Or, 'Diary of a...whatever.' You know, some sort of tribe from the London scene at the time. It was very silly. But my dad was a journalist, and he used to photocopy it for me, so we'd sneak into his office and come out with reams of copies, and I used to staple it all together myself. So it was virtually free to produce, so we sold it for five pence, which is like eight cents in America. So people couldn't really refuse to buy it, you know?

PV: But there was always this cool creative spark between you and Emma.

MB: I think when we first did stuff together as teenagers, it was just that we were friends. And probably because we were girls, as well, we had less confidence than a lot of boys would have about playing in a band. I mean, I can remember many, many young blokes in bands who were actually fucking awful. But they thought they were amazing. But we never had that kind of confidence. So actually, if you're going to form a band with your friends, that's much easier, because you're immediately trusting someone. But when you join a band as a woman, you never know if the boys are just saying that what you're coming up with is rubbish because they're threatened by you, or they say it's good because they think you can't handle honest criticism. So it was quite liberating to know that we had a friendship, and that we were both into the same things, and that we both really wanted to be in a band. And then we started writing, and everything that came out of that was totally unpredictable. Who knew that we could write songs? Neither of us did music at school, neither of us played an instrument. So it was really just luck. And Lush is partly why I never did do anything as a solo career – none of us is a virtuoso musician, we are not these amazing, prodigious talents. But when you're lucky enough to meet people where something can be sparked, I think it's a pretty precious thing. And I'm not sure that you can easily repeat that with other people.

PV: But now, at long last, Lush is back. Was it tough to reform without Chris?

MB: Certainly for the first ten years (post-breakup), it was completely out of the question for me. The Chris thing completely pulled the rug out from under everyone. I mean, Emma carried on with Sing-Sing and Phil was in the Mary Chain, so they stayed in music. But I just absolutely had to vanish from all of that. People said, "Oh, you should try to get work at the NME." And I just thought, 'No – I don't want to be anywhere near that world – it's too raw, really.' And the thought of actually trying to play music without Chris? I just couldn't even entertain the thought, to be honest. And then I had my children, and when they're small, it becomes almost completely impossible. I know some people do it, but God knows how. But there murmurs of (reforming) about seven years ago, but it was a bit of "Oh, we've had this offer, and people are apparently interested," so we sort of looked into it. But my heart wasn't really in it. So it's taken me this long to feel like there's enough of a distance – not that you ever get over something like that. And initially, I worried about the legacy of the band being tarnished – what if we're not as good as we were? People have got a real fondness for Lush, and I didn't want to piss on

that by exploiting it in any way. But I started to feel like, You know what? We could actually do a good job at this, and it would actually be fun. And also, it's pretty much like, if I don't do this now, I'm never going to do it.

PV: Did you also think, 'Yes! I can finally dye my hair flaming red again!'?

MB: Ha! You know what? I still had red hair when I had my daughter. But the reason I stopped dying my hair red was, I actually got to a point where you think, "I don't want to be the person whose hair looks younger than their face! That would be completely jarring." So I wouldn't hold your breath over the red hair. My mom actually said, "Oh, why don't you wear a wig?" And I was like, "Mom! I'm not going to wear a fucking wig! They're totally uncomfortable!"

