

## Lydia Lunch

by Daniel Mitchell

Lydia Lunch, in a word, is fascinating. She's tackled everything from music to art, film to photography, acting to performance art, poetry, and spoken word performances. She's also found time to write books, as well. With the dawn of punk rock, Lydia Lunch was in New York to help nurture and excite the no-wave community with the legendary Teenage Jesus & the Jerks. She's starred in horrific indie gore films by Richard Kern, started her own production company (Widowspeak), and toured the world countless times. To give her a title or label is impossible. While she has become more known over the years for her incredible spoken word performances, she has never stopped making music that both questions the insanity of life, and mocks the ignorance of human beings. Her latest release is titled *Smoke in the Shadows*, and it takes cues from her classic *Queen of Siam* album, and ups the ante. Her unmistakably full, purring, and dissatisfied voice growls and rants over music which sounds almost out of place for her dark subject matter. Songs jump from Portishead-esque dance beats, R & B grooves, to mumbled, clamoring spookfests. Overall, the album presents itself as overtly sexual in mood and tone, and it reeks of sensuality.



I had the ridiculously exciting opportunity to speak with Miss Lunch over the phone, as she lay in a bed, somewhere in Los Angeles, this past December. It should be noted that Lydia Lunch is the coolest, most down-to-earth person I have ever interviewed, and I ended up talking to her for 45 minutes. She is quite the opposite of her dark and almost gothic public look, and I enjoyed speaking with her more than words can express. What follows is a section of our conversation.

••

**How would you describe your latest album, *Smoke in the Shadows*?**

It's basically an alternative to all of the bullshit out there! It's a groove-oriented, seductive female revenge album. I usually have a concept for every album, and I kind of wanted this one to have a Jazz Noir film feel.

**Did you have any specific intended audience for this album? It seems a lot more loose and warm than your previous albums.**

No, I don't really do anything with an intended audience in

mind. I just make music for anyone willing to listen to it. When I first started doing music, I always tried to contradict myself, but it's really getting hard to do that.

**"Gone City" is my favorite song on the album; it reminded me of the stuff on *Stinkfist*, and it sounds like it would be awesome live. What are your favorite songs to do live?**

Thanks! Yeah, I really like that song a lot, too. It's what I like to call "illustrated word." I don't know... I don't really have any particular "favorites..." We don't tour in the States anymore, because people in the States just don't seem to "get it." -bq The writing on the album tends to focus on the deeper and darker aspects of life; is there anything in your life that's just too dark to tackle in writing? For me, knowing someone who commits, or tries to commit suicide is just so devastatingly numbing and incapacitating that I can barely speak of it.

I write about my problems, and the problems that I have are universal. I talk about pain because people can relate. I want to explore the various traumas out there, and there's really no taboo with me and my writing. Whenever something is bothering me, it makes me less miserable to talk about things. I feel that there's forever to be dead, and I've never really thought about killing myself. You've only got "x" number of years to be alive. I just think people who are feeling depressing haven't learned the first act of rebellion, which is to find a vehicle to get out your emotions, like boxing, sex, music, drugs, drugs, art, or whatever. I would never want to be my own victimizer. I won't batter myself.

**The public perception of you tends to be "dark and brooding," but after talking to you on the phone for just five minutes, you're actually quite the opposite!**

[laughs] Yeah, I don't know how the public perceives me. I don't care about how they perceive me. I am actually a very positive and encouraging person! I don't think I'm negative, although I'm not a person that can be pissed off!

**My favorite Sonic Youth album is *Bad Moon Rising*, an album on which you help sing on "Death Valley '69." What was it like recording with them, and do you still keep in contact with any of the band?**

I was friends with Thurston Moore from long before we recorded that song. He used to come to Teenage Jesus gigs and just hang out. Last year, he and I actually did a little tour where he was doing instrumental stuff and I was going on after him doing illustrated word. I love him! He's really fun and he's like a little kid that never grew up!



**What do you think of Sonic Youth's last few albums? They've developed a more tonal sound that's quite different from their first few albums.**

I actually haven't heard any of their most recent releases. There's just so much music out there that I don't have the time to listen to everything that I want to hear. I really liked Thurston's improv stuff, though!

**If you weren't Lydia Lunch, what profession might you like to be doing?**

I thought I would be a psychologist, which is what I kind of do anyway. So many of our problems are reactionary, and I like to take action rather than be reactionary!

**I'm an English teacher, so if you were going to recommend books for me to be covering with my students, what might you like me to have them read?**

That's funny, because I quit high school because of the bullshit that my teachers had me reading. I wanted them to upgrade me, but they wouldn't, because they considered me a threat or something, so I just quit. I would recommend Selby, Miller, and Swift, and non-fiction.

**Do you have any kids?**

No. I love them, but I don't think I would have the time for them.

**Do you ever get recognized in public as "Lydia Lunch, cultural icon?"**

No, not too often. Although a while back, I was in Barcelona, walking around and shopping, and I happened to notice that some guy was watching me. I kept wandering around and shopping and he just kept watching and following. Finally, I went up to him, because I was getting annoyed, and he told me he was a fan of mine, and we talked for a while. It was

interesting!

**Of what contemporary bands would you consider yourself a fan?**

I really like this band called Noxghat; they're made up of viola, bass, and drums, and their sound is really intense classical stuff, without vocals. Their music is intense in the same way that The Swans are intense. I also like world music. Also, I a big fan of Monster Magnet, especially the "Power Trip" stuff; I love it! Actually, let me ask you a question: how do you feel about the state of music, you being in your late 20's. I have a few friends about your age, who say they can't really identify with any sort of music at all. Do you feel the same way?

**Ummm... For me, I just find it depressing that all of my favorite bands are getting old, like The Cure, Sonic Youth, Morrissey, and Bjork. It's fairly comforting that there are majestically talented younger bands out there, like Modest Mouse, Muse, Radiohead, but it still makes me sad that all of my favorites are getting old. You've been relevant for many years, since basically the dawn of punk rock in New York. What would you say is your greatest accomplishment thus far?**

I'd have to say it's probably just existing and surviving on my own. I've also been able to remain extremely stubborn throughout my life. Everything that I do is just a piece in the greatest picture.

Lydia Lunch: [www.lydialunch.org](http://www.lydialunch.org) ■

**MUSIC > MEDIA > THOUGHT**

© 1991-2004 Nineteen, Inc. | [Back Issues](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [More Info](#)