



Lycia

Empty Space



When we started Silber, we were inspired by Lycia, a band from the desert in Arizona, one that was changing the way we felt about & listened to experimental music. Lycia combined ambient, & sometimes harsh, soundscapes with a punk aesthetic in a way that no one had ever done before. Their unique sound became a part of who we were & remain to be today. We are pleased to present the final release by our long time mentors.

Empty Space is a work of dark, atmospheric, post-punk, comprised entirely of treated guitars, bass, & drum machines. It is perhaps Lycia's closest brush with making a pop-oriented album, though the cold rhythms of the vintage drum machine are just pieces of a much larger picture. Mike's whispered, desert-parched musings duel with Tara's more ethereal vocals & land atop shimmering, melodic, treble-boosted guitar lines. The result is a sound that's more Durutti Column than Cabaret Voltaire & more Chameleons than Joy Division, but always recognizable as Lycia.

In this way, *Empty Space* is a return to the original atmospheric post-punk style Lycia helped birth back in the late-80's, before 1991's groundbreaking *Ionia* & 1993's apocalyptic *A Day In The Stark Corner*. The return to form was made authentic by the involvement of original member John Fair (drum programs) & long time member David Galas (bass), who once again teamed up with Mike VanPortfleet & Tara VanFlower to create what would be this, the final Lycia album.

Unfortunately, work was stopped on the release and Lycia actually broke up before it was completely finished. The result is a work more minimal than planned, but still boiling with the beautiful chemistry Lycia always had & will have.



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Lycia - Empty Space



"This is Lycia's unfinished symphony -- the last recordings by a band that helped pioneer the genre known as darkwave. In the late 80's & early 90's, Lycia created an ethereal segue between gothic & atmospheric music genres without even intending to do so. With the new century well underway, Lycia is no more. But thanks to Silber, their fans can experience once again the thrill of a new album from the group. Although the band broke up before Empty Space was completed, it certainly holds its own among contemporary ambient pop releases. It also measures up equally among other Lycia releases, though it is lighter & happier in its overall sentiment. Michael VanPortfleet's intense whispery vocals alternate with Tara's edgy, pretty voice; all even numbered tracks are purely instrumental, showcasing beautiful guitar melodies, haunting effect based echoes, & full-bodied distortion. Such is Lycia's signature sound: the eerie combination of the clear melodic line & the echoey tonal backdrop to those melodic riffs. The mechanized percussion on Empty Space is more upbeat & the harmonics are more joyful than on prior recordings -- perhaps this is an ironic twist to the concurrent fate of the band? With Empty Space, Lycia had the chance for a graceful & dignified goodbye, & they did not waste the opportunity."

-- Lara Haynes, Outburn

"Lycia has traveled a long way in their career. Not only have they made increasingly cold and introspective works becoming darker despite the filtered sunlight permeating their sound but they have also traveled literal miles. They have crawled the landscape from Arizona to Ohio and back again and their music has changed because of it. By the time of 'tripping...', Lycia has explored every dust-filled corner of our psyche and has filled our minds with melodies that were both frightening and comforting at the same time.

Comprised largely of Mike VanPortfleet and Tara Vanflower, who have become the heart and soul of Lycia, this band's original sound was never duplicated because, quite simply, music this complex cannot be duplicated without being torn apart at the seams and inspected by the children of our souls. What Lycia could do in terms of misted introspection requires an immensity of effort, an effort that even worked at the fabric of Lycia. With VanPortfleet's grasp and control of the eerie components of his instruments and Tara's incredibly floating ethereal voice, Lycia becomes a whole creature that knows the clothed and hidden parts of our lives because it has lived them.

The work of Empty Space is embryonic because it is a return to the genesis of Lycia, a back pedal to the rhythm pulse of a heart that refuses to die and yet won't wake up. Called the final release from Lycia, Empty Space reveals a yearning to become a happier entity if even for fleeting moments. Its rawness is exhilarating despite the fact that it is an unfinished work.

With cascading guitars and whispered lyrics, Empty Space explores the past with stop-overs for Estrella and Cold. Where Cold was iced fear in a limitless and vast arctic spread, Empty Space is a thawing place with shafts of sunlight breaking through the battleship grey clouds. The tap, tap, tap that begins "Not Here, Not Anywhere" lurches into a fast and happy merge of a trip that culminates in extinction. It has the feel of a knowledgeable run to a void that subtracts. Perhaps fitting in that Lycia plans no more music as Lycia thus a run into an unknowing void.

I'm especially intrigued by "You Can Never Go Home Again" as the title suggests, rightfully so, that once you're away, the home you return to has indelibly changed and is no longer home. You're relegated to grasping at wispy remembrances that are almost there but can never be intimately held and cherished again.

Tara is first heard in a beautifully sung song that is amongst their best short song efforts. "Persephone" offers the signature Lycia sound while her vocals explore pop styled tones. Her ability to effectively capture a moment as heard on "Persephone" is talent. The song is extraordinary in its presentation.

The album ends with "This is the End", a deliberate finish to a great band who would finish on their own terms.

The song itself is nicely structured work with the haunting "I remember..." The rest of Empty Space is pure Lycia with its hands dipped into the heart of Estrella as can be heard by "Bloody Basin" as compared to Estrella's "El Diablo".

Lycia's music is the soundtrack of the spirit. Lycia's ability to explore the full psychology of our hope, dreams,

depressions, and disappointments is extraordinary. Lycia itself is the unexplored beauty of humanity and its frightened child. And while Empty Space may not represent their best work, it nevertheless is a necessary visitation of their existence and a glimpse into their own hopes and dreams."

-- Matt Rowe, MusicTap

"Originally recorded in 1999 as Lycia's final studio album and shelved for years due to various factors (including problems with their former label), Empty Space is now getting the release it deserves on Silber Records. Picking up after Estrella (Tripping Back into the Broken Days technically being a release by side-project Estraya that was released under Lycia due to label pressure), this 42-minute disc is an epic career-spanning release.

Featuring something of a reunion lineup of Lycia members past and present, Empty Space returns to the ethereal layered guitar sound and intricate retro drum programming of the band's earliest days (I'm talking Wake-era) while retaining the more upbeat melodies and song structures of their more recent material, most notably The Burning Circle and Then Dust and Estrella. Despite blending elements of some ten years of history, all of the pieces fall into place, creating a comfortable, familiar blend. John Fair's drum programming seems to have changed little since Lycia's early days and sounds perfectly at home here. David Galas provides the usual competent bass anchor. Mike VanPortfleet's trademark layered processed guitars and moody semi-whispered vocals are as strong as ever. Tara Vanflower's vocals sound fairly close to her work on Estrella, but with a slightly altered timbre and vibrato that's slightly reminiscent of Miranda Sex Garden's Katharine Blake. The nine songs that form Empty Space consist of five tracks with vocals and four instrumentals. They maintain a somewhat moody atmosphere overall but also have a fairly consistent upbeat vibe and occasionally even showcase pop sensibilities and almost catchy melodic content. Despite the album's somewhat retro Lycia sound, fans looking for another bleak offering along the lines of Ionia or A Day in the Stark Corner won't find it here. Instead, Lycia fans will find a happy medium between the past and present, effectively rolling the band's diverse catalogue into one all-encompassing, definitive Lycia sound.

In a way, Empty Space is the perfect final album, bringing the band's work around full circle and allowing their evolution to take them back to their roots. From the atmospheric opening of "Not Here, Not Anywhere" to the fadeout of the appropriately titled "This Is The End", Lycia's short-but-sweet swan song is the album fans have been waiting for, flawed only by the fact that it leaves you hungering for more that will likely never come."

-- Joshua Heinrich, Grave Concerns

"If you liked Lycia's first two releases, Ionia and A Day in the Stark Corner, then this is a compact disc that you'll

fall in love with. This being the album that was recorded for Projekt records before the band broke up, and never quite having been finished, is still a much more polished and stimulating piece of work than many of the 'fully finished' albums that I've heard recently.

Track number 4, Fur and Thistle, and track number 8, The Long Drive seem to be the standout tracks from this album. This is a CD that bears repeated listening from beginning to end to get the full effect of the emotional whirlwind.

Mike and Tara taking turns at lead vocals is a very refreshing sound, even fifteen years after first hearing Lycia. This goes to prove that many times less really is more. Please support Silber Media and add the final Lycia release to your collection."

--Azrael Racek, Gothic Revue

"I suppose it's a bit strange to review a CD that is essentially unfinished. But such is the case with this, Lycia's "longlost" final album. Although work originally began on what was to become Empty Space back in 1999, various setbacks and problems ensued, eventually resulting in Mike VanPortfleet (who was Lycia's driving force

throughout its existence) dissolving the band for good. In 2001, VanPortfleet finished up the final mixes, but the album sat on the shelves for another year and a half before it was picked up by the longtime fans over at Silber. Because of the album's rather truncated recording, it's pretty raw and unfinished in places, more a work in progress suspended in time than anything else. Songs like "Persephone", "Violent Violet", and the aptly-titled "This Is The End" feel less like complete tracks and more like rehearsals or demos that were recorded as the band was feeling out different lyrics, melodies, guitar effects, and programming patterns. As a result, one wonders if Empty Space might not have made a better EP, rather than a full-length.

However, even the songs' rough forms contain a few surprises that hint at what might've been had the album been completed. Curiously infectious melodies coalesce during "Fur & Thistle"'s bridge, sounding vaguely Lush-esque and practically begging for an ethereal female voice to coo alongside them. Likewise, "The Long Drive"'s downward spiralling guitars create some very evocative moments.

"Hope Is Here" features VanPortfleet's best vocal performance on the album - which is somewhat ironic because his whispers are best when they're barely audible, instead just floating there on the song's periphery, tickling your consciousness like tiny little fingers. And "Bloody Basin", as befitting the rather morose lyrics, is shrouded in icy synthwork so chill-inducing it might lower the room temperature by a few degrees.

Even in this skeletal form, there's a primal, almost timeless quality to Empty Space that I find rather captivating. Although the lyrics can sometimes get a bit on the pretentious side - in some circles, such goth-y lines as "Catching the corpse before she falls/Watching her crack apart the china doll" are bound to inspire a black eyeliner joke or two - the music has a darkly beautiful pull all its own, with its shimmering, serpentine guitar melodies, chilly synths, and VanPortfleet's spectral vocals breathing down your neck.

It's unabashedly backwards-looking (even moreso than those young pups in Interpol), hearkening back to the late 70's/early 80's, when post-punk bands were delving into darker atmospherics and textures and producing some truly timeless music. And I'm not just referring to Joy Division's Closer or The Cure's Faith and Pornography, but also to the nascent recordings of 4AD groups like The Cocteau Twins and Dead Can Dance (whose influences on Lycia have been well-documented elsewhere, I'm sure).

I can't imagine there not being some disappointment with the album, if only because of what it could've been. But even so, it should serve as a healthy reminder to any fan (of Lycia and/or any of the aforementioned groups) of what draws them to this sort of music in the first place. "

-- Jason Morehead, Opuszine

"Lycia began life in 1988 in Tempe, Arizona as a solo project of Mike VanPortfleet. Soon becoming a band, Lycia recorded several albums over the years, experiencing several lineup changes, until 1999 when VanPortfleet ended the band and retired from music during the recording of Empty Space, which now sees the light of day thanks to the folks at Silber. Joining VanPortfleet (guitar & vocals) on Empty Space are John Fair on drum programs, David Galas on bass and Tara Vanflower on vocals. I've not heard any of Lycia's other albums but the promo sheet notes say that Empty Space is the closest Lycia has come to making a pop-oriented album.

The music in some respects recalls 80's synth-pop, but by that I don't mean fluffy Flock Of Seagulls or that kind of crap. The melodies are indeed catchy, but Lycia have a darker, gothic sound, heavy on atmosphere and with a spacey ethereal vibe. There's a simplicity to the music but the melodies are completely absorbing and the soaring guitar notes inject a cosmic edge into the music that can only be called pop because of the melodic style. Mike sings on some tracks and Tara on others, both making their mark on the songs while retaining the distinct Lycia sound. Tara's vocals have a punky but pleasant feel which (particularly on the song "Persephone") reminds me of Deb Young from Architectural Metaphor (that'll attract the space rock fans attention). The songs with Mike's vocals tend to be heavier on the gothic influences, "Hope Is Here" being a highlight and one of my favorite tunes of the set. Lycia also excel at instrumentals, a standout track being the spacey "You Can Never Go Home Again". Overall a good mixture of spacey gothic influences in a pop context. If these are among their

more pop-oriented songs I'd be interested in hearing some of their other work."

-- Jerry Kranitz, Aural Innovations

"Lycia is a music project of Mike VanPortfleet that's been rolling (sometimes more smoothly than others) since 1988. While its sound has evolved a lot over the years, Lycia has always been dark, both musically and lyrically. The most recent incarnation of Lycia features John Fair, David Galas, and Tara Vanflower as well as VanPortfleet, most of whom have been involved with Lycia and assorted other VanPortfleet projects since the mid 90s.

Most of the music on Empty Space features heavily processed vocals, guitar, and drums alongside droning synth noises and repetitive melodies. The track order repeats a basic lyrical song/instrumental song/lyrical song pattern that explores the sound of Empty Space thoroughly. All of the instrumental tracks feature repeating, looping melodies and synthed-out ambience. Lyrics are usually (read: always) dark, with a strong sense of melancholy, futility, and a disaffected attitude. The title of the CD is highly indicative of the emotional content of the album.

"Not Here, Not Anywhere" opens the album with a long exploration of the alienation that human beings tend to feel when our immediate social group is not made up of our peers - the sort of intense antisocial separation most predominant during puberty and the teenage carnage that follows. For some it ends, for others, it is merely the start of a long downward spiral. "Persephone" seems to smash pagan worship, sex, physical violence, and self-confidence issues into one bloody, nasty mess. "This is the End" repeats the line "I feel nothing" over and over as a chorus.

There is a layer of cold, modern indifference and apathy smeared across every note on this album. Perfectly dismal ambient and gothic music that never misses a beat on its march through Death Valley by moonlight.

-- Delusions of Adequacy

"A good way to describe some music is by saying that it's like a certain object. For instance, later-era Pink Floyd sounds like a battered, faded old military uniform. Radiohead sounds like an amorphous lump of pale, waxy plastic, and Sigur Rós sound like a grass-covered mountain peak in a sea of mist. Lycia, on the other hand, sound like nothing. Well, not nothing, but something, that something being nothing. Or the complete absence of anything at all. That's what Lycia sound like.

"Empty Space" is the latest album from Lycia, a rotating-member project that centres around Mike Van Portfleet. Like previous outings by the band, the music here is dark, bleak, and austere, each piece of music having only enough substance to convey an aura of hopelessness and despair.

The first track on the album, Not Here, Not Anywhere, pretty much sets the tone for the rest of the album.

Echoed synths and a frantic, unnerving beat coalesce together, while Van Portfleet's vocals hover around the periphery of the song, suggesting more than they actually say. Songs like Persephone have more than a dash of early punk influence with its female vocals, and This Is The End hits new depths of despair with its constantly repeating mantra "This is the end, this is the end, this is the end", producing a genuinely chilling effect.

Unfortunately, while there are a few good ideas on this album, they are eclipsed by tracks that sound as if they're only half-finished. Lycia went through quite a lot of chaos while this record was being recorded, and split at the end of it. The album was shelved for a few years before it was finally mixed and released, which might account for the fact that some of the songs here sound more like demos than fully completed songs.

Still, from the good moments that you hear here, it's obvious that if the band had stuck together, they would have

had another great album on their hands. As it stands, "Empty Space" is full of potential, but it's potential that will now sadly never be fulfilled."

~ Michelle Gallaway, Halo 17

"I'll be the first to admit that Lycia is not everyone's cup of tea. They have a definite song and production style and they stick pretty steadily to it. Those familiar with the work of Jesus & Mary Chain will know what I'm talking

about here. Even when I first heard them, I was less than impressed. Awash in reverb and often-indecipherable whispered vocals, their songs seemed to simply melt into a homogenous sound with one track indistinguishable from the next.

It wasn't until I listened further that I realized that, despite their ambient and ethereal feel, these were not songs you could just simply gloss over. That their attraction lay in the intricate details of the song. Like a fine wine, where you need to appreciate not just the grapes, but the undertones brought about by the soil and the climate in which they were grown, and the barrels in which they were stored. This was mature, rich music, not for the cheap drunks.

In an odd turn, it's the sparing use of these subtleties that makes "Empty Space" such a great album, especially for those just getting into the band. Though only recently released, "Empty Space" was actually recorded back in 1999, shortly before the band broke up and, because of such, it lay incomplete until Silber Records picked it up, dusted it off, and released it in late 2003. Since the album is, in fact, unfinished, it has a certain raw power that I was pleasantly surprised by.

It's also far more pop-oriented than their previous works. The melodies and hooks are pushed to the front, portending a direction I would have really enjoyed seeing the band explore further. But, it's also feels very unfinished at times, with substitute nonsense lyrics still intact and often meager production values making it come across as a dark 80's garage band, instead of long-running act. In many ways, I think this gives the album a certain endearing charm, but others might be less sympathetic.

When it comes down to it, I'm ecstatic that this album was given a chance to see the light of day. Fans of Lycia will love the chance to savor one more album from them and it's also an excellent entrance point for newcomers to discover what they were missing out on. Thank you Silber Records!"

~ Patrick Coleff, Blog Critics

"I can't say I was ever the world's biggest goth fan. I'll give credit to the hardcore kiddies that love the stuff, however; the look that went with the love certainly alienated me as much as a devoted punk's aesthetic might drive away a disco freak. Not that the fashion drove me away completely. I had friends in high school who were into the goth scene, and in my college days I certainly spent enough time at my favorite dance club, even on Monday nights, which were the designated goth night of the week. But the whole dressing in black thing (which I

actually did quite a bit at one point, but I must give credit to James Spader playing the character Graham in sex, lies, and videotape for inspiring that fashion choice and not the Goths), wallowing in a kind of self-centered apathy that was more put on than pure, and listening to the likes of Peter Murphy, Siouxsie Sioux, et al. only went so far to bringing me any satisfaction.

Not that I haven't dabbled here and there in goth music. I still own my "Bela Lugosi's Dead" single by Bauhaus, and I do own both of the Siouxsie compilations. I've always been a fan of the Cure, but I prefer their poppier stuff

over their melancholy work, and will always feel that Boys Don't Cry is their best album. And I've always loved the Cocteau Twins, though again, more for their work from blue bell knoll to Milk and Kisses than most of their early, gothic-tinged work such as Garlands and Head over Heels, though I will confess a secret love for their early EPs over those first albums.

And that brings us to Lycia. The band was formed back in 1988, with Mike VanPortfleet being the constant throughout the years. Band members come and go, including John Fair, Will Welch, David Galas, and perhaps most importantly, Tara Vanflower, who joined the group in 1994 and added the female spark to the group. However, the band was always ridden with personal conflict, and the members would often quit and rejoin, only

to quit again in the middle of album projects. Empty Space was such a project. Recorded in 1999, the sessions fell apart due to more personal woes and was not completed until 2001 by VanPortfleet, remaining shelved until December of 2003 when Silber released the album after Lycia parted ways with their original label, Projekt. So what we have here is an older release of sorts, but I must say -- and I may be completely wrong here since I'm not an expert in the genre -- that I've often found that the whole goth genre has its own sound that sort of self-contains its groups and creates this musical vacuum. That is, just because this work was recorded a few years back doesn't make it sound dated. After all, do the Cocteau Twins' first albums really sound like anything else before or since? That's exactly what Empty Space is like. In fact, a number of songs here, such as "Not Here, Not Anywhere" sound like a sort of mid-period Cocteau Twins, where the band was weighing the goth with the lush pop they would embrace later.

The instrumental "You Can Never Go Home Again" sounds like something that crept out of gothland circa 1985 with its insistent electronic drums and jangling doom-laden guitar notes. Tara Vanflower makes her first appearance on "Persephone" and sings lines like "Catching the corpse before she falls / Watching the crack upon the China doll shatter the time" as quasi-tribal beats and minor keys play out their sinister tones in the back. OK, so maybe that's another thing that pushed me away from liking this kind of stuff as well; the lyrics and the whole haunted house atmosphere.

It's certainly a quality that drowns songs like "Hope Is Here", where VanPortfleet whispers his words as the band cranks out another spooky atmosphere. But how much of this sound can one enjoy? Especially when there

are other instrumentals on here, like "Fur & Thistle", that sound no different from "Not Here, Not Anywhere" and

"You Can Never Go Home Again". And really, that's the problem with this album. Everything just sounds the same. By the time you've reached such obvious tracks as "Violent Violet" and "Bloody Basin", you feel like you've sat through the same song on repeat.

The right folks will undoubtedly love this kind of thing. For me, I need a little more variety if I'm going to bend an

ear towards this genre. Overall, the sound is just too repetitive and skeletal at best to even warrant keeping this disc in my personal collection. But, if you go for this kind of confection, then it would probably be straight up your

alley. So chalk another one up for the goths who will continue to keep a large group of music fans at bay with their insular ways"

~ Jason Thompson, PopMatters

"Raro disco, el inicio de "Not Here..." tiene tintes de electrónica ambiental (gracias a efectos en la guitarra y sonidos sintéticos), algunos chispazos progresivos, una voz susurrante a cargo de Mike VanPortfleet. Una batería bien programada y un mood muy oscuro... goth. No sabes qué es lo que va a pasar y no hay más que esperar a lo que depara el disco, que continúa con una interesante instrumental en "You Can Never Go Home Again" que de nuevo parecería llevarte a un "ambiente electrónico", este track ilumina un poco el mood dark del track anterior, dije "un poco".

Los lamentos y de Tara Vanflower en algunos pasajes de "Persephone" regresan lo goth, lo dark al sonido del disco. Sigue otro track instrumental que intenta iluminar el ambiente gótico (que muchos disfrutarán) del disco. La casi monótona "Fur & Thistle".

El disco continúa con "Hope Is Here" con los siseos de VanPortfleet susurrando y envolviendo el track. El tono cambia de manera casi imperceptible, pero mantiene el sonido que está tratando de manejar la banda (en ocasiones puede llegar a haber algo de Persephone's Dream en el ambiente, aunque sin el progresivo).

La percusión de "Violent Violet" alcanza a cambiar el mood otro poco. Un track más comercial y más radiable,

siguiendo el patrón de track instrumental después de escuchar las voces de VanPortfleet o de Vanflower... curioso. Sería bueno saber qué tono hubieran manejado las voces en este track.

"Bloody Basin" y la voz de Vanflower continúan generando ese ambiente oscuro gótico que maneja como sello Lycia). Seguido por otro instrumental "The Long Drive" que vuelve a una tendencia monótona -que dicho sea de paso aumenta la sensación de oscuridad del ya "gótico" ambiente.

El disco finaliza sin cambios en el mood del disco (que insisto varios disfrutarán) con la oscurísima "This Is The End".

~Ciro Velázquez, Eufonia