

k.d. language of love

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FM for playing her latest single, "Summerfling."

Long sheltered by the wall-to-wall dykefest that is every k.d. lang solo concert, she has to persevere to whip this alien crowd into her mood. "C'mon everybody, get up and dance with me. I'm gonna show you the newest steps coming out of L.A.," she urges, beginning to vamp around the stage. As she launches into a rockin' version of her new song "When We Collide," it feels more like worlds colliding. The Sting crowd doesn't know what to make of her ditty antics and her dizzying, Elvis-on-acid moves, but the lang loyalists in the front rows willingly press toward the stage, following her uninhibited lead.

When I whined to her on the phone that we feel cheated only getting her as an opening act, she delivered the good news. "Not true—you're getting me twice! I'll be back in November during my West Coast swing," she promised. Indeed, she confirms on stage she's coming back soon. "I can't stay away from you," she insists in her sexiest voice. "It's the consequences of touring."

It must be rough to capture the focus of an audience when a steady stream of concertgoers stumbles through the rows, searching for their seats in the darkened hall, only listening to k.d. lang by default. Yet by the end of her set, the arena is about 80 percent full, and the Stingers give her a hearty show of support. Or perhaps they're just thrilled she's done?

So, what does she dread about going on the road again? "It's physically taxing. I don't get to ride my motorcycle, and I'll worry about my dog—I'll miss her the most," lang says earnestly. Her lab/shepherd buddy even inspired one of her new songs. "The funny thing is, I wrote 'Curiosity' with my dog in mind. My dog's name is Saylor, and we go swimming together a lot in the ocean. We're very fond of each other."

Then realizing that it sounds like she won't miss her girlfriend of four years, lang adds, "I can call her all the time, but I can't talk to my dog."

What a difference the right woman makes! Out with the old lyrics: "Love, thing of might and dread, stays the saviour and poison to all." And in with the new: "All my fears fall like tears of joy whenever we collide."

Eleven years ago, k.d. lang sang, "Won't someone save me from that full moon of love?" Clearly, that's no longer her plea. Where she used to lament love that "ran away with a will of its own," she now croons, "Love's great ocean came crashing down on me, overflowing with possibility." Now that she has finally found her "big, big love" in Leisha Hailey of the Murmurs, lang has found it necessary to forsake the yearning, melancholy moods of earlier albums to express her current bliss.

Talking about the cause of this shift, lang says the hardest part of being famous is "understanding how you fit in and what you need to be yourself. I didn't reward myself enough during the first 15 years." Once she committed to attaining more balance in her life, clarity came: "Life is my art, and music is my craft."

Back in her torch and twang era, lang sang, "I just want to be an ordinary girl," and after so many years in the music biz, she finally got her wish. By the end of her 1998 tour for the album

PHOTO BY ALBERT SANCHEZ



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lang says she lives very differently when she's writing songs. "I go into a very bohemian lifestyle—eat a lot more, drink a lot more, smoke pot, no exercise, sleep late." But she's quick to clarify, "I don't smoke pot when I'm in performance mode, and then I work out a lot."

The result of two years of indulgence is her new CD, *Invincible Summer*. lang describes it as a "culmination of enlightenments: I feel in love with my music again, my discovery of my core, my invincible summer...it's a youthful feeling." Helped along, no doubt, by the fact her girlfriend is 10 years younger than she is.

Her new album—which she admits is autobiographical, along with *Ingenue* and *All You Can Eat*—charts the course of a burgeoning relationship from first wonderings to joyous acceptance, then beyond the personal to universal love. It is undeniably upbeat and breezy, and except for "Love's Great Ocean," the one song written with longtime collaborator Ben Mink, the CD reflects a new direction musically. More pop, more accessible, with some Brazilian rhythms and retro '60s beach music influences for spice.

To fans who are challenged by lang's many stylistic detours, she explains: "The older I get, the more I see I'm a vocalist. I studied old-school vocalists who had the liberty to move around genres. I'm not a band; I'm not relying on a trend. My sound is my voice."

So with all the bliss in her life now, will we ever get another torch song out of her? "It's a common misconception that melancholy is better fodder for art—honesty and integrity and inspiration come from all emotions," she explains. "I certainly know this state of mind won't last forever."

And she's eager to assure her fans this record isn't a total departure. "I try to remain true to the k.d. lang sound: big, open-sounding melodies, long melodic phrases, strings and steel guitar."

Some of her special fans, however, might be saddened by the new monogamous lang. In an ode to the road girls, "Walkin' in and Out of Your Arms," lang used to warn she "can't be roped and tied down." So how did Miss Girl in Every Port, who must have left a "trail of broken hearts," finally get lassooed? It took Hailey, a brash young dyke brave enough to make the first move. As lang readily admits, "She just called me up and asked me out!" It seems no one else ever had the nerve.

And how many times has Miss lang felt the consequences of falling in love? "Infinitely! I fall in love every second." Does she have any crushes? Displaying spectacular taste, she replies enthusiastically, "Cate Blanchett!"

So, what about this tour—what's her mantra for the first port girl who chases after her? "I'm gonna run! I'm pretty much in love"—dramatic pause—"we'll just see," she teases. "It's probably the biggest challenge of my life, staying with one person," lang confides, acknowledging her history and the flirtatious nature of many of her songs. Sounding like she took advice from Jimmy Carter, lang reveals she has another way to cope. "Fantasy in yourself is one of the greatest places to go."

And fantasy is decidedly where legions of langsters go. These true believers erect shrines on the Internet and celebrate lang's birthday Nov. 2 as their high holy day, "langmas." They declare their undying love in chat rooms and post their passion on message boards. "She could sing me to sleep every night, and it doesn't matter if she's gay or straight—it's the human being that she is and her emotions and feelings," one sincere woman writes.

They also upload fantasy stories about their idol, often with an improbable happily-ever-after ending in which a certain singer and the

Drag, "I felt like I was on a treadmill." Her antidote was to buy a home in the Hollywood Hills, launch into remodeling it, learn the way to "Homo Depot," get a dog and get a life with her honey.

Lang does paint a picture of domestic bliss that any Northwest handy dyke can appreciate. "Leisha is a carpenter, and we hang out in the lumber section. I like the smell of the wood," she enthuses, adding that it's been good for her head to get back in touch with real people.

The move from gray Vancouver, British Columbia, to perpetually sunny SoCal also has been good for her. She's spent much of the past two years hanging out on the beach, channeling songs for her new album from the sand between her toes.

"I have a little suitcase I carry around with me that has paper, some pens and a tape recorder," lang explains. "The beach is a great atmosphere for inspiration, especially when you're trying to get in a summer mood."

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