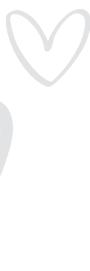


After being seduced by the trappings of success, k.d. lang has literally had a Watershed moment – professionally and personally, writes **Sally Browne**

CHANGE OF HEART



TURNING 40 is a milestone in many people's lives, but for kd lang the magic number was 45.

"Apparently a woman's voice is in its prime at 45, so it was a big musical moment for me, but I am quite comfortable and into the process of getting older," she says.

Lang, now 46, is on the phone from her home in the hills of LA promoting her new album *Watershed*, an appropriate title. It's early evening there and her two dogs, Lucas and Sailor, are staring hungrily at her.

She is about to hit the road to tour in support of the album, which will bring her to Australia in April.

Los Angeles is where she lives with her partner of almost seven years and it's where she recorded the album – some songs at the studio, some in her dining room and some in her painting studio.

Lang paints abstract canvases, although she doesn't exhibit them. On an average working day, after getting up early to walk the dogs, she might have anything from one to five canvases going on the floor.

Then she will work on music alone or with a collaborator and "make a concerted effort to put out the lightning rod so inspiration can strike".

As a woman for whom travel is part of her work, Lang loves spending weekends at home.

"My favourite weekends are weekends where I'm at home, when it's sunny and I can swim," she says.

"We go to the farmers' market on Sunday morning and buy local organic produce and I cook."

"If it's football season, I watch football. And if it's not, I probably ride my motorcycle or just hang out."

"I love to sleep in the sun. I love having a

little nap in the sun, listen to my favourite radio station. It's a luxury for me, being at home."

Lang says her life is pretty much as she expected it to be.

"I definitely had a focus, I definitely had my eye on the ball," she says of her early ambitions to be a singer.

Growing up in the Canadian prairies, she began singing at the age of five after her piano teacher, a kind but stern nun, suggested the instrument was not her forte.

Her rise from country music star to four-Grammy Award-winning mainstream artist has afforded her a comfortable lifestyle. She says the LA she knows is very different to the one people often imagine.

"When you live here it's completely opposite to what people think it is. It's very private. It's very low-key. It's very nature-oriented. It's funny because it's completely different to what you'd expect."

"Whereas New York is New York, it is what it is, but LA, once you get home and you get up into the hills and you get your friends, it's very different."

Watershed is Lang's first album of original material since 2000's *Invincible Summer*.

Not that she hasn't been busy. During that time she has released an album with legendary crooner Tony Bennett, a collection of songs by great Canadian artists called *Hymns of the 49th Parallel and Reintarnation*, a compilation of her early country songs.

She began writing songs for *Watershed*, which she also produced herself, about six years ago, which was also around the time she became a practising Buddhist.

Lang says she called the album *Watershed* because "to me it means a beautiful natural ability that water has to flow around obstacles, and I really felt a great deal of

inspiration from that". After working on albums of US and Canadian standards, Lang said she found it intimidating to be song-writing again, but she soon shrugged that off.

"I realise that's ridiculous to put that sort of pressure on me, and once I let that go I really felt the freedom to just write for me and just write songs that I would enjoy singing. So it was actually a delightful process."

Many of the album tracks were recorded on their first take, such as *Shadows and the Frame* and the album's closer, *Jealous Dog* (*Jealous Dog*) was recorded very, very early in the morning," she explains.

"David Piltch (bassist) and I had written a song and I wanted to go record a version of it. And I just started recording it and I didn't finish until I had done what you hear, and I just went 'Whoa, that's kind of crazy,'" she laughs.

"Then I sort of went, 'Well yeah, it is pretty essential'. It's got lot of imperfections and the timing's crazy, but it did have an essential quality to it and it really conveyed the lyrics and the story and the emotional thrust of the song. That's the kind of thing that I was looking for."

Does she feel that songwriting reveals things to her about herself?

"No," she says. "Songwriting is extremely precise. To be able to formulate the contemplative thought into a rhyming, very condensed scheme is a lot of work. I think I probably learn more about myself doing interviews."

The questions she is most often asked are, "Why do you render your name in lower case?" (a tribute to poet ee cummings) and "Are you sick of talking about being a lesbian?"

"Sometimes. And sometimes not," is the answer to the second question. Lang says she

is proud of any contributions she has made to society for the acceptance of the gay lifestyle. She remembers her days of having a hit record with 1992's *Ingenue*, winning a Grammy for the song *Constant Craving* and starring on the cover of *Vanity Fair* magazine, posing provocatively with Cindy Crawford (Lang was seated in a barber's chair, while Crawford pretended to shave her) as an intoxicating high.

"It was a pretty exciting time," she says of that period. "It was pretty tumultuous, there was a lot to process, but I'm alive and I'm still making records, so something went right."

Lang processed much of that time on 1995's album *All You Can Eat*.

How has she changed?

"I think I've refined a little bit, I think I've settled down a little bit, but I think my essence is the same."

Soon she will be moving on to the next phase of being a recording artist – touring.

In her suitcase she packs her essentials – her iPhone, her Buddhist prayer beads, her workout gear and her rosewater face spray.

She is looking forward to taking her girlfriend to Australia, which she describes as "her favourite market in the world".

"I love Australia. I love the weather and the people and the food."

A mention of Melbourne crops up in her single *I Dream of Spring*. It seems Australia loves her, too, with *Watershed* reaching No.3 on the ARIA charts. Lang is excited to be playing live again.

"It feels really good," she says of her current musical phase.

"I have a new band that's just really enthusing a lot of new life and energy into things, so everything's feeling really good right now."

kd lang plays QPAC on April 28; bookings 136 246. Album Watershed is out now.

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