

# LIFE Music, March 2018: The upper register—and lower case—of k.d. lang

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By Peter Jones

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Her name is k.d. lang. There—I have stylized it in violation of Associated Press, my natural inclination and every tendency to capitalize a proper name.

“I never got too bent out of shape if people didn’t do it,” the Canadian singer-songwriter says of a favored stylization she has used since the release of her first album in 1984.



Not every journalist has been as stubborn as me in adapting to Lang’s—err lang’s—penchant. But after more than three decades of insisting that what’s good for album covers is not necessarily the obligation of writers and critics, I have not so much given in—as given out—to a musician I respect.

I always used to think it was pretentious for an artist to use all caps or all lower case in their names, but after interviewing lang recently, I have come to realize it was instead, perhaps, me who was being pretentious. Lang is, in fact, among the least-pretentious musicians I have interviewed.

But as you may have just noticed, I still refuse to begin a sentence—any sentence—with a lower-case letter. So, there. We all have our limits.

“That’s your job, though,” lang says, as we continued this odd line of questioning. “That’s the job of the press to keep us on the straight and narrow with capitalization and such.”

For lang, it just came down to a matter of preference.

“I just loved the way lower-case printing looks aesthetically,” she says. “I remember being in school and looking at an ee cummings poster. I just started doing it and then it became sort of a marketing tool, I guess.”

Whatever cobwebs grow on her shift key, let it be known—in all caps—that lang performs Sunday, March 11, at the Paramount Theatre as part of a tour in which the Grammy winner will sing *Ingénue* in its entirety.

Suffice it to say that capitalization has been the least of lang’s controversies over the years. Her proud lesbianism and outspoken veganism—even while playing amid country’s Nashville establishment in the mid-1980s—attracted almost as much attention as her crystalline vocals.

Born Kathryn Dawn Lang in Alberta, Canada in 1961, lang was quite literally a country girl—at least by Canadian standards—having grown up in Consort, a town of about 650 people in prairie country.

“Although I never liked country music as a kid, country has been this dance partner that once in a while we’ll have a go at it, but it’s just part of me,” she says.

Amazingly enough, when this short-haired androgynous Canadian first emerged on the international scene, American country music was exactly where she landed.

Although generally too country for rock stations and too weird for country, lang’s soprano channeled something close enough to Patsy Cline that even some in conservative Nashville took notice. Loretta Lynn and Kitty Wells were among the guests on lang’s 1988 release *Shadowland*.

“I knew I was challenging the norms, and if I wanted to be a country star, I probably would have toned it down and curled my hair or something,” she says.

“Fortunately, I was thinking longevity when I was a youngster. I’ve never done more than three shows in a row. I don’t smoke. I don’t drink when I’m touring and I don’t talk very much. I keep a very monastic approach to touring.”

A career highlight of the period was her 1989 Grammy-winning duet with Roy Orbison on a remake of the latter’s classic hit “Crying.”

“Sharing a mic and hearing that voice of this gentle introverted man, it was incredible,” lang says.

Before long, lang was dabbling in pop, folk and jazz. 1992’s Grammy-winning *Ingénue* was void of any country influence and produced “Constant Craving,” the artist’s most durable hit.

A complete performance—track by track— of the release is the centerpiece of her current tour.

“It’s a totally different ball game to sequence a record than a show,” she says. “But I think when the audience has a relationship to it, it’s up to the performer to sell the sequence. It’s like being a good actor.”

At 56, lang's angelic voice has shown little wear, largely because she was smart from the beginning.

"Fortunately, I was thinking longevity when I was a youngster," she says. "I've never done more than three shows in a row. I don't smoke. I don't drink when I'm touring and I don't talk very much. I keep a very monastic approach to touring."

Although lang concedes her voice has gotten a tad deeper over the years, it is still a thrill to behold as she walks the stage, often barefoot, sharing a voice that could sing the phonebook and still make it sound interesting.

"As long as it's not the Ukrainian, Jewish and Eastern European names, I might be able to do it," she says with a laugh.

For more information, visit [paramountdenver.com](http://paramountdenver.com) and [kdlang.com](http://kdlang.com). Contact Peter Jones at [pjoneslifemusic@aol.com](mailto:pjoneslifemusic@aol.com).