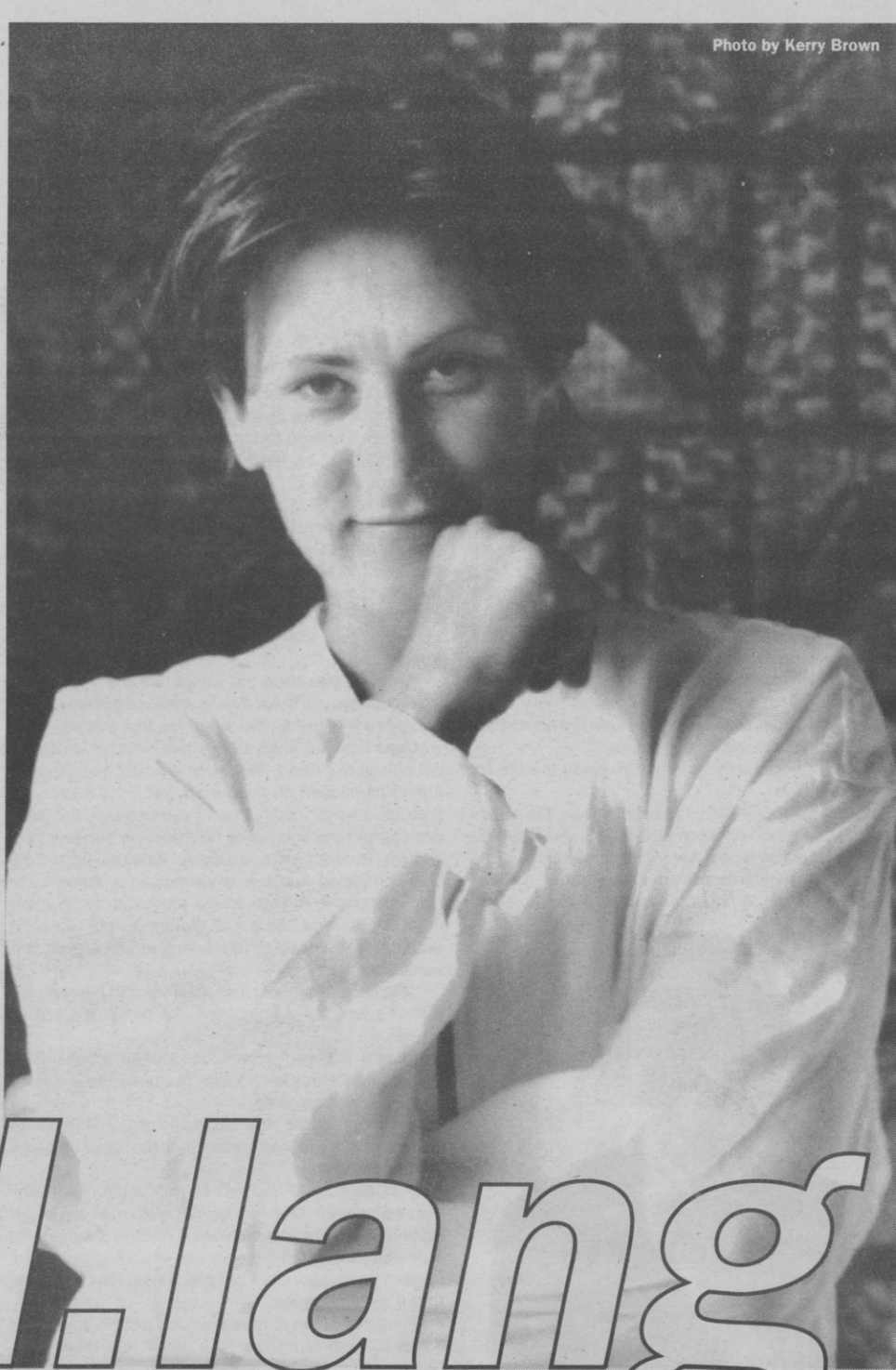


Flying in for some press, Pam Corkery, Paul Holmes and pressing the flesh at a Queen Street record store and then out and on to Australia a few days later was American cowgirl-come-chanteuse k.d. lang, leaving herself little time for real NZ sightseeing.



k.d. lang

“That point in my life was a big discovery that you’re *not* in control”

“I don’t think I’m gonna have time to get out of Auckland — Orkland . . . however you say it . . .”

Auckland . . .
“Orkland . . .”

With homosexual, heterosexual and non-sexual-orientation-specific media jostling vigorously for a few words with the singer, she did manage thirty brief minutes with a *RipItUp* writer and photographer. In a tastefully bland suite at the Regent we meet a k.d. lang who is, at first, hard to reconcile with the flamboyant, charismatic and colourful character in music videos and on stage — this one is smaller and quieter, wearing neither the outrageous cowboy-camp nor gender-neutral suits she is famous for, but plain and baggy white shirt and black pants.

K.d. is in town to promote *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues*, the soundtrack to the Gus Van Sant movie of the cult book of the 70s and her follow up to the hugely successful *Ingenue*, on which she re-shaped her sound to wide commercial and critical acclaim. “But *Cowgirls* is more than just a soundtrack,” the critics exclaim, “it’s virtually a new k.d. lang album.” Does k.d. see it that way?

“I do in the amount of work and effort that we put into it. But in terms of direction . . . Yeah, I guess that it is, but it’s also a soundtrack because we had to work under the guidelines of the movie and what Gus saw as the film . . . So I guess both answers are true.”

Did it give you a chance to do things that you couldn’t do on a k.d. lang album proper?

“Yeah definitely . . . a little more freedom, a little more liberation. I don’t think I would put a polka record with a funk tune, because I think the critics would come down on that . . .”

A lot of the instrumentals have a good fun sound to them . . .

“Yeah it was really fun. It was good for Ben my partner, the instrumental stuff . . . he really stretched himself on it. It was nice to see him do that, and he did really well on

it. It was a big challenge because we only had three months to write and record everything. The film at that time was coming out last March — a year ago — so we were up against this deadline — and then we had another year to complete it! But that maybe worked out for the best . . .”

They re-cut the film didn’t they?

“Yeah, pulled it and re-edited it, it’s supposed to be coming out next month.”

Do you think it’s going to be a good film?

“It’s a Gus film! It’s a little out there . . . but Uma Thurman’s sexy and great in it.”

In the video to ‘Just Keep Me Moving’ from the *Cowgirls* soundtrack k.d. rides down a country road on a motorbike and picks up the sexy Uma Thurman who is hitch-hiking (which, of course, is what *Cowgirls* is all about). You’re a motorbike buff?

“Yeah, I’ve been riding for about 22 years. That one was a particularly difficult — but fun — bike.”

Was that one of yours?

“No that wasn’t my bike. I’ve just got one now — I’ve got my very first motorcycle which is a Yamaha 60, which I got in 71 — but I’ve got a Springer right now, a Harley . . .”

Do you like making music videos or do you see them as a necessary evil?

“I don’t really feel one way or the other about them. They can be fun, and the final product’s nice to have . . . generally what happens in my experience is that you don’t have enough money or enough time to do something that’s real artistic. You spend a year, eight months — however long it takes you to do a record — and you’re in total control, but a video you have \$150,000 in a day or two days, and you have a director and all these other people and certain recommendations of what a video should be and why it’s a certain way . . . Videos are a part of the music industry — that’s the way it is.”

Are you a person who likes to travel?

“Definitely. Travel is my drug of choice.” And music’s a good way to see the world? “Yeah it is . . . In some ways it’s great —

but for the same reasons it’s great it’s awful, because you don’t have a type of anonymity . . . when you walk into a culture and you’re working in it, you’re a part of that culture so you’re not completely objective and removed like when you’re a tourist or a bohemian traveller. So it’s good because I get to see the world, but it’s also negative ‘cos I’m always working.”

After *Absolute Torch & Twang* you were on the road for a long time . . .

“The *Torch & Twang* tour was about 14 months straight — which was the end of the road for me, I couldn’t handle any more. At that time I’d been touring and recording non-stop for about ten years, and I’d just had it.”

Would you ever do that kind of touring again?

“Um . . . no I don’t think I would. I think that’s a little obsessive, it’s too long, it drains you too much.”

Will you ever be back down here to play?

“Oh yeah, definitely. I’ve been scheduled to come three times, or something, and every time we run out of money . . . usually that’s what it is. Last time we were touring with 10 band members, so it’s really expensive to get everyone down here. Now *Ingenue* has managed to sell enough that we could support ourselves, but at the time I was doing *Torch & Twang* there really wasn’t enough momentum.”

When you went in to record *Ingenue* did you say ‘OK, now we’re going to do something pretty different to what we’ve done before’?

“Yeah, I think we knew we were on a different track — I wanted to stay away from country, I wanted to make a break. It’s like a lover that’s over: you look at them and go ‘I have to say goodbye.’ It wasn’t there for me passionately . . . so when we went in to write *Ingenue* I really had no idea where I was going and we just started writing . . . and that’s what came out.”

Were you worried that people who had bought your records before were going to reject it?

“Well . . . it crossed my mind, but at the same time I think that people that were buying my records were not necessarily country listeners but *music* listeners . . . so I was hoping that they were interested in me as a vocalist — which I guess ended up being the case.”

Did you resent that you had been shunned by the country establishment?

“I think emotionally I was resentful, because any sort of rejection is hard to take, but to be quite honest I knew that I was alternative in country music, so I wasn’t expecting, or *wanting*, to be accepted. So in retrospect I couldn’t have asked for anything different, or wanted anything different.”

So do you know where you’re going with your next album?

“No I really have no idea — and it’s coming pretty soon! I think I’m going to start writing in May, and I really have no idea. Music is so diverse now and — not that I’ve ever really been following trends — but you’re always aware of what kind of path it’s winding . . . it’s very very broad right now.”

Do you feel pressure to top the success of *Ingenue*?

“If not from the outside, there certainly is from within. *Ingenue* was kind of an honestly channelled record, where it just came out, and wasn’t too contrived or analytical . . . and that’s one of the biggest challenges about going in and writing after a successful record is that you’re going ‘OK, what was the point, *why* did it work?’ Really you have to abandon all those tendencies that go with success and start with a real *primitive* place again . . .”

A lot of the songs on *Ingenue* seem to be about someone who isn’t in control of things, their life . . .

“Yeah definitely. That point in my life was a big discovery that you’re *not* in control — especially when it comes to other people. Love is a complete universe of its own. I think it’s hard, but it’s beautiful at the same time — to realise that the responsibility’s not always on your shoulders. As frustrating as that is, it relieves a lot of the pressure as well.”

You share your writing with Ben Mink — how did you start working with him?

“Originally we met at Sakuva at the

World’s Fair in Japan in 1985. He was playing with a band from Canada and I was playing, and we met backstage and we were talking and there was some sort of instant rapport, and we just started writing together when we got back to Canada and we’ve been together ever since.”

How do you get new things going . . . do you jam?

“No . . . basically we don’t talk to each other! We just live completely separate lives and when it comes time to writing we get together and we go ‘what have you been listening to, what’s turning you on?’ Somehow we’re completely parallel in our thinking and our taste still. He managed to turn whatever corner it was I went from *Torch & Twang* to *Ingenue*, and we were right in sync. It’s just great, it’s my longest relationship! I love Ben, and he manages to keep a really loose hold on my imagination, which is exactly what I need, and it’s just great.”

Do you ever have times when one person says ‘I love this bit’ and the other says ‘No I hate it’?

“Oh definitely, but we’ve gotten to a point where we realise we both have as much emotion and life invested in our music that it’s not an ego thing anymore. So we’re able to edit each other without hurting each other’s feelings.”

Do have any idea where you’d be if you hadn’t hooked up with him?

“I have no idea . . . I shudder at the thought of not having him . . . I don’t know — I wouldn’t be as happy . . . in a creative sense.”

Happily for us my questions run out before our half hour does, and photographer Kerry Brown has time to shoot some photos in a makeshift environment a little more photogenic than a tastefully bland suite at the Regent. Kerry discreetly pitches k.d. for some music video business as he snaps, and then we’re out, leaving her to the next of her allocated guests.

JONATHAN KING