

PRESENTS



k.d. lang

Special Guest: The Wood Brothers

A Mondavi Center Special Event
Friday, March 27, 2009 • 8 pm
Jackson Hall, Mondavi Center, UC Davis

There will be one intermission.

Program Announced from the Stage.

The artists and your fellow audience members appreciate silence during the performance. Please be sure that you have switched off cellular phones, watch alarms, and pager signals. Videotaping, photographing, and audio recording are strictly forbidden. Violators are subject to removal.

k.d. lang *watershed*

As the title suggests, *Watershed* represents a milestone in k.d. lang's already extraordinary career. For the first time, she has assumed, on her own, the role of producer--as well as writer, singer, and multi-instrumentalist -- for this album of new original songs. The result is perhaps lang's most confident and revealing work, with gorgeous arrangements featuring strings and guitars; distilled lyrics that come across as intimate reveries; and warm, understated, and often very sexy vocal performances. *Watershed* serves as a highly personal companion to her 2004 Nonesuch debut, *Hymns of the 49th Parallel*, a collection of brilliantly realized interpretations of material from fellow Canadian songwriters like Leonard Cohen, Joni Mitchell, Neil Young, and Jane Siberry.

lang has often organized her albums around a particular sound (like the clear-eyed country of *Absolute Torch and Twang*) or concept (the elegant smoking songs of *Drag*). This time the theme, if one can be identified, would simply be k.d. lang as she is right now, with plenty of musical and lyrical intimations of how she got here. As lang explains, "*Watershed* is like a culmination of everything I've done--there's a little bit of jazz, a little country, a little of the *Ingénue* sound, a little Brazilian touch. It really feels like the way I hear music, this mash-up of genres, and I think it reflects all the styles that have preceded this in my catalogue. I didn't feel the need to be genre-specific because this experience felt so wide open. I didn't have a band in the studio where I had to come up with a feel for a song because the clock was ticking and dollars were flying out the window."

In content, says lang, the songs on *Watershed* "are similar because they all are a reassessment of my relationship to the world and to myself, and how my actions and thoughts and my offerings affect my life and the lives of others. That's where the idea of a watershed comes in, I guess, with a shift in perspective." And the way she performs her lyrics has evolved along with her words. The bravura moments here are often the quieter, more confessional ones. Cosseted by longtime band-mate Teddy Borowiecki's inspired string arrangements, lang found no need to belt. "I think that is age and wisdom," she decides. "It's like a painter discovering earth tones again in a whole new way or a chef coming back down to the Alice Waters level of cooking, where sea salt is the absolutely perfect spice. It's about communicating, and sometimes communicating is about whispering or about simply stating something in a gentle, quiet manner. I love that I've uncovered that part of me. I love to sing that way, it feels really good on the throat, it feels very natural." As for her legendary bringing-down-the-house vocal prowess, lang admits, laughing, "I was ready to conquer the world and my voice was just an extension of my exuberance."

In her 25 years of record-making, lang has worked with a wide range of producers--country (Owen Bradley), pop (David Kahne), even rockabilly (Dave Edmunds)--and she has co-produced such discs as the 1992 *Ingénue*, which included the Grammy Award-winning "Constant Craving." With *Watershed*, lang explains, "It started to unfold in a natural progression. I began to demo the songs in such a way that all the performances could be used on the record if I wanted them to. I would just step back from a song, revisit it later, and if I liked it, I would keep the track. It was a matter of chronicling, of documenting the songwriting process. A lot of what you hear on *Watershed* is first approaches, the creative moment of songwriting rather than just the performance of a song. For example, the vocal on the 'Shadow and the Frame,' that's the first time I sang it. I tried to capture the most real, the most honest performance to me. In a lot of cases, it was the very first one. I was always looking for a producer, but in the back of my mind I was thinking, *I can produce this*. I guess I kind of grew into the fact that I could do it, that I had the confidence to it. I kept working on the songs and then I brought in Lynne Earls, a friend who's an engineer and a programmer, and we started cleaning them up. As I kept doing that, I realized *I am producing this record--so just finish it*. I went into the process a little more intensely in the last year and a half, more intensely into editing and overdubbing, staying focused and diligent--and then I was done. And I had produced the record."

The anything's-possible approach lang took to making *Watershed* yielded its share of surprises. "Jealous Dog," for example, is entirely a first take. Says lang, "That's how I sing when I'm at home, that's my demo of that song. It was all done in a morning, just after bassist David Piltch and I had composed it. It was actually written as a bluegrass tune, more up-tempo. I deconstructed it to put it on tape and when it was done, I realized, that is exactly how I feel about this song. So I just left it, I never touched it again." Opening track "I Dream Of Spring," is a more lush affair, yet, lang says, it "sort of just happened. After it was finished, I started to sing it around the house and I thought, this is a gift. It came from examining the songs on *Hymns of the 49th Parallel* and studying those songwriters." "I Dream Of Spring" opens with flamenco-like guitar lines and a drum machine, before gliding into a harmony-layered chorus; in the second verse, Greg Leisz's pedal steel takes over the melody right before the strings swell. As for those strings, the arrangements were also, in a sense, a gift: "They are so crazy, phenomenal. I knew Teddy could do it and I knew that this was the time. When the string session came, we booked six hours, but we were done in three because the arrangements were so clean and so together. It just blew my mind. I started to cry because Teddy elevated the record to such a different level. I am so, so grateful to him."

"Upstream" revisits the bossa nova rhythms that floated through *Invincible Summer*. Says lang, "I'm a sucker for Brazilian music. It's fun to sing and it's fun to play, so when I'm making music, I always fall back on that." "Sunday," which evokes an even more languid mood, is a sensual spin on Bacharach/David pop-jazz: "I love Sundays, when you just find yourself on the bed, with the sun hitting it," lang admits, and on the track she contemplates all the possibilities of being in such a position.

Once again, lang collaborates with the musicians who have long accompanied her in the studio and on the road: pianist Borowiecki, bassist Piltch, steel player Leisz, guitarist Ben Mink. Jon Hassell makes a guest appearance on trumpet, as does new Nonesuch labelmate Noam Pikelnny, banjo player for the Punch Brothers. But, lang reveals, her veteran tour-mates won't be joining her when she takes her new songs on the road: "That's another reason for the album title. It marks a huge, huge change in my life. Teddy, David and Greg will not be with me. I'll have a brand new band. It's a natural turning point -they're older, and are really in demand in the studio for lots of other artists now. I'm going to be like Tony--I can't quit. It's really sad for me to see them go, but at the same time it is one of those changes, a watershed moment, when the direction shifts. I'm excited to work with some new guys and build new relationships. It's a big change for me, but I'm ready to embrace it."

Watershed marks a turning point for lang as a producer, band leader and self-assured songwriter. For all those who listen, it will simply be the fulfillment of a promise made long ago, at that unforgettable moment when we first heard her sing. —Michael Hill

THE WOOD BROTHERS

Oliver and Chris Wood grew up in Boulder, Colorado. Sons of a poet and a microbiologist, they both took up music. Oliver moved to Atlanta and became a southerner. Chris moved to New York City and became a Yankee. Now, after years of musical and geographical separation they have reunited.

While in Atlanta, Oliver soaked up the roots of blues, the soul of the south, and found he had a talent for writing and singing songs. His band, King Johnson (named after Freddy King and Robert Johnson) toured mostly in the southern states. Meanwhile, Chris was living in Manhattan playing everything from free jazz to rock and roll. This is where he met his band mates to form Medeski Martin & Wood.

Now the Wood Brothers have begun a collaboration that combines their shared childhood influences with everything they've learned since leaving home. Their music has a rootsy feel that blends blues, folk, and rock music in a guitar/bass duo. The brothers' album, *Loaded*, produced by John Medeski, was released on Blue Note Records in 2008.