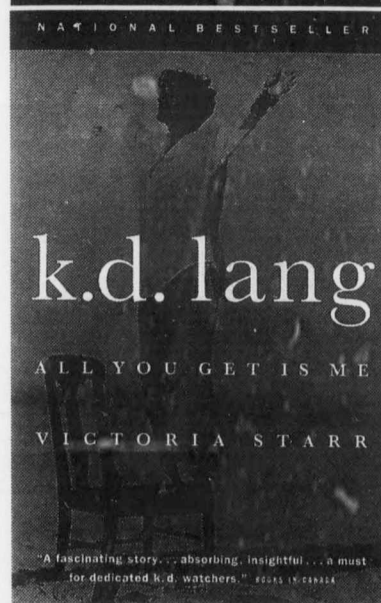


...book reviews...book reviews...book reviews...book reviews...book reviews...



k.d. lang: All You Get Is Me
by Victoria Starr

I've never had more than a passing interest in k.d. lang's music, so it was with mild curiosity about a successful Canadian 'personality' that I picked up this biography. I finished it with much more interest and respect for the biography genre, as well as this particular subject.

If fame is your measure, k.d. lang has achieved success. Proof of this, aside from her Grammy award, her newsmaking conflict with the cattle ranchers of Alberta, and gold albums, is the *Vanity Fair* cover where she posed wearing a mannish suit, getting cosy with Cindy Crawford. The issue outsold the one featuring a naked, pregnant Demi Moore — and who thought they could ever top that?

However, the real appeal of this book is not the opportunity it provides for star-gazing. Two other themes make it the real page-turner it is. The first is the study of the music industry: recording companies, radio stations, artists and journalists, who together make up a seething entity that is better than a soap opera any day.

lang's tumultuous relationship with Nashville, culminating in her decision to move away from country music, is marked by ups — such as the song she recorded with Loretta Lynn, Kitty Wells, and Brenda Lee for the *Shadowland* album. lang's acceptance in Nashville was hard-earned, and this collaboration with established country artists marked a high in her relationship with the country music community.

And then there were downs. When lang won her Grammy for Best Female Country Vocalist in

1990, Starr writes, "the gatekeepers of country radio quickly closed ranks." A Nashville radio spokesperson told *Billboard*: "Here in Music City we have three awards shows of our own every year. As far as our listeners are concerned, those are the real awards for country artists."

This kind of dismissal of lang as a true country artist reflects the difficulty she had simply fitting in. Instead of following that Nashville "the higher the hair, the closer to God" dictum, lang maintained her own often outlandish style, and it is this sense of determination and self-assurance that represents the book's second major strength.

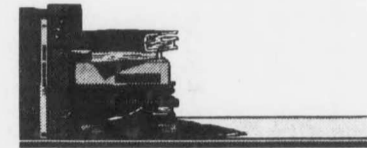
A talented singer from early on, lang decided she was going to be a star in junior high, and made no secret of the fact. But anyone tempted to underestimate the determination and strength it took to achieve her goal will think again after reading this book.

The insight Starr provides into that side of lang's personality makes this a worthwhile read regardless of your taste in music. Fundamentally, this is a story about courage and spirit.

It is all too easy to judge stars by those surface indicators filtered down to us by the media. Among other things, *All You Get is Me* reminds us that there is much more going on beneath that surface. k.d. lang is not simply a Canadian who made it big in the States, or a

successful lesbian recording artist; her life so far (she's thirty-four years old) has been complicated and interesting, a fact that may be lost when you get caught up in the fascination of that *Vanity Fair* cover.

- Mary Rogal Black



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