

# Trio offers healing to lovers and misfits



Laura Veirs, k.d. lang and Neko Case delight a full house July 7 at Robert Z. Hawkins Amphitheater in Reno. Photo/LTN

**By Kim Wyatt**

RENO – That voice.

Legendary vocalist k.d. lang stole the show at a revelatory concert under the stars Thursday night in Reno. Lang, touring with Neko Case and Laura Veirs, blew away a sold-out crowd with an intimate, powerful performance at the Robert Z. Hawkins Amphitheater at Bartley Ranch Regional Park.

The concert on July 7 was part of the Artown citywide arts festival that lasts through the month of July.

The 16-song set, followed by two encores, featured songs from the newly formed supergroup's June 17 release,

“case/lang/veirs.” A playful lang led veteran musicians Case and Veirs through love lost and found, howling dervishes and do-wop with swagger, all while barefoot in what looked like very comfortable dark pajamas. Although the stage, a simple backdrop of the album cover artwork by Elliott Green, was designed to be egalitarian, highlighting the collaboration as well as each of the musician’s oeuvres, a charismatic lang easily commanded the crowd.

“We’re going to lay a little healing on you, ’cause we all need it right now,” lang said, kicking off the concert. Song after song showcased the strengths of each performer: lang crushed it on a cover of Neil Young’s “Helpless,” casting a spell as the moon rose and bats flitted in and out of trees. The alchemic Case brought the crowd to its feet with the hit “Man” from her latest album. Folk artist Veirs was the workhorse of the group, a guitar in hand for each number. New to me, Veirs’-led songs, like “Best-Kept Secret,” are deceptively simple toe-tappers, yet complete stories. Although the women co-wrote all 14 songs and share lead vocals on their excellent debut album, Veirs received co-songwriting credit on every song. So while lang’s vocals and Case’s metaphors captivate, perhaps Veirs keeps the wheels on the bus.

One song I won’t soon forget is “Blue Fire,” named after the hottest part of a flame. No one does unrequited love like lang. In full crooner mode, she lets loose a honeyed voice that penetrates your chest and makes you want to break your own heart so you can feel that deeply again.

The intimate setting at the amphitheater complemented the show, with mountains and big sky the backdrop. So many of the songs had celestial themes, with stars, sky and constellations anchoring heartbreaking lyrics. If you’re going to have big emotions in public, this is a good place to do it.

Their trio’s top-notch band—Johnny Sangster on guitar, Lex Price on bass, Barbara Gruska on drummers and keyboardist

Steve Moore—provided a formidable and rich counterpart; at times I looked for instrument that weren't there. The band elevated the trio's vocals, and when their harmonies worked, they really worked. One could see why Lang invited Case and Veirs to make an album and take their show on the road.

The earnest opening act, Loch Lomond, hit the jackpot when invited to open for the super group. The vibe at the amphitheater was pleasant, and the food great, especially a vegetarian taco platter and cheese plate that I would order at a restaurant. Let's hope the Collaboration Catering works out the bugs and returns.

The concert ended with the controlled chaos and wild vocals of "Georgia Stars." Two encores later, the concert ended in exactly the right place, with "I Want to Be Here," paean to the world's artists and misfits: lovely, hopeful and musically interesting. Lang introduced the song by acknowledging the shooting of Philando Castile. The world is a terrible place today, she said, and then offered this tender number as atonement.

We're a long way from healing. But musicians like Lang, Case and Veirs are doing something about it, bringing us together to share what's broken inside and out. And they're doing it beautifully under the stars.

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