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k.d. lang: Anything but the expected

By Steve Freeman

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Think colliding worlds and you may come close to understanding k.d. lang, the critically acclaimed performer headed for Aurora's Paramount Arts Centre on Monday.

The nouveau country music singer and songwriter calls her brand of music "conpunk" — a little bit country, a little bit punk.

Evidence of that non-traditional label is an androgynous look, clothing ever bit rural and western in style, a collection of songs reminiscent of country music legend Patsy Cline, a stage presence once labeled "slam dance gone hoedown," and attention from nontraditional country music institutions like Rolling Stone magazine, "Saturday Night Live" and pop cable music television VH-1.

Those worlds thrive on heavy doses of rock music and acts on the trendy side of musical entertainment. It's questionable whether the inhabitants ever heard music by the late Cline or Willie Nelson, both country music standards receiving proverbial bows on the alto vocalist's latest recording, "Absolute Torch and Twang" (Warner Bros.)

No contradictions exist in Lang's self-evaluation, however.

"My music is a hybrid of a lot of things," said Lang in the January edition of Taxi magazine. "But it's really most influenced by jazz ballad singing — torch music — and hillbilly twang, with some sort of polite balance existing between them."

Raised in the town of Consort, Alberta, Kathy Dawn Lang was introduced to music by her parents and in early years listened to pop artists like

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k.d. lang will bring her show to the Paramount Arts Centre in Aurora on Monday.

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Joni Mitchell and The Carpenters. She landed a part in a play about the life of Cline, who became her idol, and found a music home.

To her credit are three critically acclaimed recordings on major labels, a tie with artist Tracy Chapman for Rolling Stone's Critics Pick for Best Female Singer award and three nominations for Grammy awards in 1988 and '89.

She will perform Monday at 8 p.m. with her band, the reclines, named in honor of Cline. Tickets are \$19.50 and \$17.50 and are available at Ticketron outlets or by calling 902-1919 or 896-6666.