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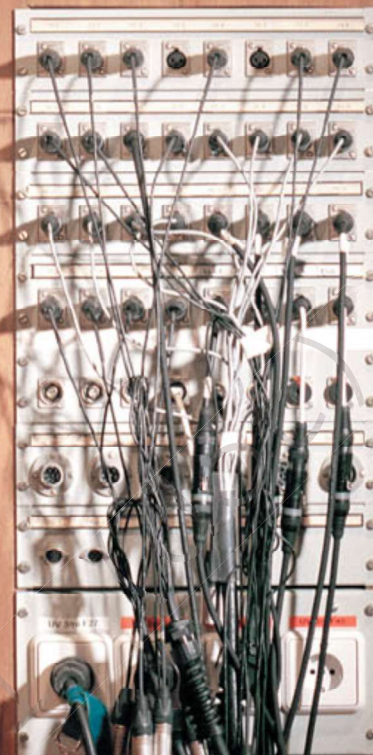
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GEAR REVIEWS

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So Much Possibility

Neko Case on Songwriting, Production, and Being Real

by Bren Davies

photography by Brian T. Silak

We got to sit down with Neko Case at Brooklyn, NY's The Honey Jar recording studio to discuss her career so far, as well as her production experiences while tracking and mixing her most recent release, *Hell-On*. Neko was gracious with her time, and we covered a lot of what she's learned about tracking her own voice and staying creative in the studio.

In one of your bios, you speak about "inventing a new language through [your] music and lyrics in order to express [your] creative vision." How did this evolve over the years, writing-wise and recording-wise, from your earlier projects to *Hell-On*?

Well, I think there were a lot of years where I didn't realize that that's what I was doing, even though I went to art school. When you go to art school, you have to ask yourself all the time, "What is art? What am I doing?" The really important question I got from art school was, "Does my project say what I'm trying to say to the viewer?" You think about that all the time. It's a really deep question. From that question, you take away a billion answers; but, basically, you're trying to express something inexpressible. You have to invent a new language made of a collage of other languages that will hopefully reach people in a way that they don't expect. You can't reach everyone. You can hit, like, 60 percent of the mark... probably. There are a few people who will get more out of it. It's not because your audience doesn't get it. It's because maybe you haven't pushed the idea far enough. I don't know how it's evolved. [But] I've never stopped thinking about that particular question. I'm a little too close to things to see how it's evolved, per se. I tend to think of songs very cinematically. I think of songs as trailers for movies, in a way. You know how sometimes the [trailer] can be really great, but then the movie isn't so great? I'm always obsessed with getting to the movies before the trailers. There's something about the trailers that I really love, because there's so much *possibility*. You don't know [what's going to happen]. It generates a feeling of excitement. [With] songs, I always want to have plenty of *space*. I want the transitions to be interesting. I want every strange part that happens during the recording to be audible later. It doesn't so much affect what mics I use, or specific gear, so much as it makes me spend a shit ton more time editing and making sure that things poke out or get compressed a lot more so that they really are audible.

You mean individual performance parts?

Yeah. If somebody's fingers slipped off a string at some point and it sounds really interesting – a lot of those moments are really valuable. I don't want them to be lost. I love using [the] stereo image to create space, as well as allowing things to move – or placing things in a space where you don't expect them to be. Whether people know it or not, they understand stereo image.

I like to make people excited in that way. Even though I'm not a fan of low-quality MP3s, at least there's still something that somebody can hear that's interesting on headphones. I think a lot about that. It's part of the job, but you've got to make sure that it sounds decent in a crappy pair of headphones, or on a computer. I can't get really excited about a cell phone speaker, though.

But I have to say, your albums sound phenomenal on that cell phone speaker.

Thank you. I have to give a lot of credit for that to Peter J. Moore, who masters my records. He started in the world of vinyl. He's one of those people who can tell what kind of tape he's using by smelling it, but he's also worked in the digital world for just as long. He's really good at finding the middle ground to satisfy both things. He deserves all the credit for that.

Have you always been aware of the stereo spectrum, or has that developed over the years?

I've always known about it. My dad was a stoner with a nice pair of headphones, so I listened to a lot of music that way as a kid. It was an exciting journey – going into another world. I [was always aware of] those things, [but] I made a lot of records before I really started thinking about the way things are placed [in the stereo spectrum]. There were a lot of things that k.d. lang did in the studio that were interesting [on the *case/lang/veirs* album]. We'd have a problem with something rubbing, and she'd say, "Just flip the positions of me and you in the stereo image." That would fix it. It was crazy! Just these strange little nudges can really make something exciting. Recently, I heard Beach House's "Black Car." They used a keyboard sound like [the beep that] a car door makes when it's opened. They [positioned it in the mix] where a lead vocal would normally be, and then put the vocal way off as a kind of ambient sound. It was really interesting. I didn't expect it at all. I was excited to hear somebody getting playful and experimenting with the stereo image.

There was a fire at your Vermont farm while you were tracking vocals for the new album in Sweden. How have changes in your personal life affected the recording and mixing processes of your albums over the years?

Well, the fire didn't affect it very much, except that things took a little longer. We were about two weeks away from finishing, at that point. I actually ended up staying in Sweden a bit longer. Over the years, I think

I've had a lot of problems with confidence. I am a person who's very *immediate*. There are a lot of people who are very methodical, who learn every single aspect and every single fact about something they're working with. Let's say we're talking about Pro Tools, for example. I don't have time to wait for the result. I've been that way all my life. Like in art school, I never made drawings. I never made notes of things. I never made sketches or plans. I had to work on the final version right away. It's taken me a lot longer to learn things than some people, but I have a valuable perspective from outside of the more academic way of looking at it. I have enough lingo, as well as enough skills and engineering [knowledge] to be able to communicate well with an engineer. [I can] trust them to take the reins so that I can experiment with things. I think that's my favorite way to work. There's a desperation to get to the music, the musicality, and the feeling that you're *in that moment*.

It sounds like you feel most creative, and most in the flow, when the engineering process is transparent – when you're able to express yourself, and not worry about what's going on in Pro Tools or "in the control room?"

Exactly. If it's something as simple as using an ADAT machine and tracks are armed, that's fine for me. I can do that. But with really deep, multi-screen displays and super tiny buttons you can flip on that you don't remember you have on, my brain doesn't work that way. I enjoy coming from outside of a really technical place, from more of a *musical* and *instinctual* place, and applying that in the studio. It's very rewarding. I love working with people who aren't used to it, like Lasse Mårtén [who mixed *Hell-On* with Neko]. He's a great mixing engineer, maybe one of the best in the world. I remember going in there, and we had such a great time. We get along and communicate really well. He told me, "This is the first time in about seven years that I've worked on a record that doesn't have a click track!"

As I listen to your recordings in chronological order, from the earliest Cub to Maow recordings you drummed on, up to the present album, the evolution of your sound seems very natural and organic to me.

That's because I was learning in front of people. I didn't have any idea what was happening. It's just the desire to do it that you don't even understand.

Did you have any idea at the very beginning when you were playing drums that you would end up making a name for yourself as a songwriter?

It's not really different. The desire and the ambition to do things – the *need* to do things – isn't different. It's still very DIY, because I'm a control freak who's in charge of what I do. I'm not really good at relaxing – which is kind of good, and not good at the same time. It's good if you have a business, but it's not good if you don't want your adrenal glands to dry out like little raisins or something.

It seems to have been productive for your musical output.



It's productive, for the most part, although it's really weird. When I get interviewed, people say, "You haven't put out a record in five years!" Like I've been off growing a beard or something. No, I've been in three other bands. People make records really fast, and I don't know if that's the way to do things, necessarily. I don't enjoy making a record really fast, with time limits. In fact, it makes me kind of unhappy.

So when people have been asking that question during interviews, it's as if they're only seeing Neko Case the solo artist, and not looking at The New Pornographers and other projects you've done in between as an expression of your creativity.

I think bands are pretty much expected to put out a record every two years. I don't know who made that up – probably record companies. I can see why. Financially it makes sense, but I would be dead from some sort of stress-related hemorrhaging. Some things take time. I like to take time to do it; it's important. Maybe I'll never get to make [another] record again. I don't know. I hope that's not the case, but it's entirely possible. I do take a while to make records, and there's no such thing as advances anymore because of streaming. Who knows what'll happen. I might have to open a restaurant or something...

Lyrics take time. Making good music takes time. Life takes time.

It does. And I don't Auto-Tune anything. I actually make sure I sing it right the first time – *or the fiftieth time* – depending on how long it takes to get it right. Sometimes you change things... Ear fatigue is real. There's a certain point in the day where every frequency in my voice has a witness protection program box over it, and I can't hear that frequency any more. It's time to go. It's like when you look at a certain color too long and all you see is the opposite color on the spectrum because the cones in your eyes have become fatigued; they cannot maintain that level of intensity anymore.

Let's talk about the wonderful crossroads where songwriting and production meet. Were you more focused perhaps on songwriting earlier in your career, and more aware of song production later on?

I think it just took some time to figure out that I'm a collage person. I had to look backwards to figure it out. I'd often come to the studio with three or four songs fleshed out – maybe some that the band and I had toured and we'd had a good feeling of, as well as some that we had practiced. There would be lyrics and moments that would just happen in the studio. I started to trust that and be okay with not knowing [in advance] where everything was going to go, and knowing that it would be formed in the studio. Studio and live are so completely different. Taking that time to get inside, and play with the machines and the technology, and see where that might push something is always really exciting. Indulging myself in serious rabbit holes. Ideas make other ideas. I'm a

completist. I don't like to leave any stone unturned. That makes people nervous sometimes. Time limits are time limits. People don't want to go in without knowing what they're going to do. I really enjoy going in and *not* knowing exactly what I'm going to do. But that doesn't invalidate the other way of working, because that's an incredible discipline and I envy people who can do it. I also learned to stop beating myself up because I couldn't do that.

You co-wrote most of the songs on *Hell-On* with your longtime writing partner, guitarist Paul Rigby. What is your demo process like? Do you record the first version of a song as you write it?

Often the [initial recordings] happen at my house. I just sing things into a recorder, which is now my phone, so I have snippets of things. I used to have an Aiwa portable cassette recorder that was my favorite, but it eventually ended up dying.

These snippets are a cappella?

Yeah. Probably about 65 percent of the time it's just a cappella. Sometimes I play guitar, or make a melody on piano. I can't play piano for shit. Paul is a trained jazz musician, and I am an untrained intuitive musician. I'll generally have pieces; some aren't really related, if you listen to them as pieces. But I will think that they relate thematically, or would pair with something. So I'll say, "Paul, this part and this part here; will you play me every single note that could go between to put them together?" He'll be like, "Yeah!" He totally gets off on playing every possible note. Sometimes I'll find a note, but he'll go, "You gotta hear the rest of the notes!" We do a lot of that. We like to find the chord less used, or things that aren't *usual* but [which] also aren't necessarily going to punch you in the face like we're trying too hard. I sometimes have different time signatures that need to be wedded together, so we'll figure out how to do that. Then there's the process of what chord would work under [a certain word or phrase]. How can we make that sound sadder? I don't want that chord to resolve – I want it to be more of a question. There's also a lot of belly laughing. Paul and I have known each other for years and years – we're close friends. The thing that I love about Paul is that he's still fucking amazed by music. There's no jadedness. We're huge fans of music. We'll listen to other music and be like, "Can you fucking believe that they fucking did that?" Or we'll watch The Staple Singers in *The Last Waltz*. How the fuck does Pops Staples make the guitar sound so huge when he only plays three notes at a time? Things like that. We're both very amazed. We really love it, and we think that music is the greatest thing to ever happen to humanity. And harmony singing, the feeling of making an actual, physical force with your human body and another person's human body... It's one of the most amazing feelings in the world – that vibration, that resonance. It really is the greatest feeling I can think of. Sadly, I'm not a great harmony singer because I'm so nasal and I don't blend well.

But the *case/lang/veirs* album has some wonderful, tight harmonies.

We worked hard on that. k.d. and Laura [Veirs] are master harmony singers. They're both incredible musicians, and they know what they're doing. They make me look good.

In addition to your various studio and live recordings, you released *Canadian Amp* in 2001, which was comprised of home recordings that you did in your kitchen at the time.

I did that on an 8-track ADAT machine.

How did your experience of recording an EP in your kitchen differ from the larger studio productions of the more recent albums that you've released as a solo artist?

I thought I was going to be doing that so much more, and I didn't have that much time. When I finally got an ADAT machine, it was too late and it shit the bed on day two. I tried to deal with it and get it fixed, but I didn't have enough time to commit to it – even though I love recording that way.

It seems like home recording would be really up your alley. You might want to consider trying one of the more basic USB interfaces out there that record pretty good song quality and fidelity.

I would love that. Maybe it's the answer to my question of not knowing if I'll be able to make a record again, because I don't know if I'll have money to do it.

You've recorded quite a few albums with Craig Schumacher [*Tape Op* #10] in Tucson, Arizona, as well as with other producers and engineers over the years. What did you learn from those previous recordings, production-wise?

Well, I would have to take it back a little further to recording with Darryl Neudorf, who is basically my mentor. He had a studio in Vancouver called the Miller Block, and I recorded my first few records with him. I think I was like, "What's a producer?" He looked at me and said, "Well, you're producing right now." He was always teaching me, answering questions, and encouraging me to ask questions. Frankly, he's one of the greatest feminists I've ever known in my life. I got so much confidence from him. Much like Paul Rigby, he was always excited to get into new sounds. He was interested in every technology, and he'd always know about the new things coming out every time we'd get together to record something. He was excited to work with new people, and to meet people. He was just excited to learn. I realize I'm saying "was" like he's dead. He *IS* a rabid teacher and learner at the same time. The man loves what he does.

Do you still keep in touch with him?

Oh, yeah; absolutely. I have every intention of working with him again. When we were recording, we were still using really big mixing desks. We used an SSL, which is my favorite console. We had to do manual fades. We had to ride the faders and do things in real time.

It's a choreographed dance.

It really is. He's a great musician, and an incredible drummer. He has really great pitch. It's always a fun

experience. I got the same experience recording with him as I got with my bandmates being in a band – that immediate need to learn something and to satisfy curiosity. Rabbit holes were not looked down upon. They weren't treated as frivolous. We would bring music in and try to dissect what was happening. He had so much knowledge about keyboards and synthesizers. He could always get in there. I learned so much from him, and I still learn things from him. Then going to Wavelab – Craig [Schumacher] is just such a musical person, and he's also really excited about technology; especially analog technology. We had a really good thing going, because I could trust Craig to tell me if something wasn't right. People can be really polite, and people can also want you to finish doing things and hurry up with it. Craig was very patient. I'd be like, "All right, tell me when it's not sharp." He'd be like, "Sharp, sharp!" He knew I wanted it to be good, and he wanted it to be good. Then Chris Schultz started working there, and I've been working with Chris Schultz through the years. Between the two of them and their enthusiasm for everything – and just straight-up *nerd-dom* – there was never any sort of seriousness going on in there. It was always a total mixed bag of men and women. Craig also teaches a lot. I've been very fortunate to work with engineers and producers who never once mansplained something to me. They appreciated my curiosity – and, again, I was coming from outside and had ideas they might not always think of. They understood the *fresh ears* concept. I'm not saying that I've done anything fucking revolutionary; but it really helps with storytelling, and it really helps with creating a cinematic space. The sound of your voice can only go so many ways. There are really great singers out there, and I'm not comparing myself to these women – or just comparing myself to women, because that drives me crazy. Björk and PJ Harvey are great at doing this thing where they have these huge ranges – but they're also not afraid of making their voices sound ugly, or being more of a character than something that's expected of a woman's voice. I like seeing women's voices used in different ways, and I love a low range. Women who can sing in a low range are rare. I guess different peoples' voices do different things, over time. But when you're the one using it all the time, you get fucking sick of it, frankly. That's one of the reasons I wanted to go to Sweden and work with Björn Yttling [*Tape Op* #65]. After working with case/lang/veirs, we were three control freaks getting together to cede control. That was our goal. We wanted to make it hard. We wanted to write songs from the ground up, and all have a say in each song. We were three control freaks who went to "Give Up Control Island." It was hard! It was scary. We had to serve the song by democracy, in a way. Also, Tucker Martine [*Tape Op* #29] was our honorary lady. He's part of case/lang/veirs too. He did most of the production. He was our great fourth member, but not attached to anything, because he didn't write the parts. He's also great to work with. He's such a fluid, hilarious person who really wants to be there. And that's the key: people who *really* want to be there. Anyway, after that experience, I was like, "Okay, that's what ceding control

really feels like. It feels really good! It's another option; an *Oblique Strategy*. Give up control!" I came out of that and I thought, "I'm so sick of my voice. What can I do [with *Hell-On*]?" I loved what Björn Yttling does with choruses. I thought, "Wow, that could be a really good place to go." I do big choruses with the New Pornographers all the time, as well as with my band; but it'd be cool to get a new take that on in a different place. We met and got along. He said something really great. I was talking about transitions in songs, like going from a bridge to [another section], and he said, "Why do people always have to have transitions? How come sometimes the hook can't be the whole song? I just want the hook!" That's so fucking obviously genius. Being introduced to Lasse Mårtén as well. He's one of the greatest mixing engineers out there. It was such a joy to work with someone who'd done things that were super Top 40 – and then not do them Top 40.

There's a versatility there.

It's like having a Formula One racecar, and you're like, "I just want to drive around Lake Michigan in it." It was so much fun. I think it was fun for him too. I've kept all of our emails. A lot of the mixing I had to do was via email. We had to go out on these crazy limbs to describe certain things, which was really fun.

I understand that your personal mic of choice, on at least four of your solo albums, has been the Audio-Technica AT4050 in omnidirectional mode.

Maybe all my records. I go between omni and cardioid. I've been doing cardioid a lot more lately. My voice is not gentle on ribbon mics or plate reverbs. I just think that the Audio-Technica 4050 is invisible. It can handle a lot of power, and a lot of nasal frequency.

This goes back to our discussion earlier about a transparent recording process, during which you can do what you do and not be concerned with gear or equipment settings.

Exactly. The omni setting on the 4050 is almost like an HD nature show. You suddenly have the hearing of a fucking bat.

I was going to ask you how involved you get with decisions about microphone choice or reverb choice. It's become obvious from this interview that you have very strong opinions and interactions with both concerns during tracking and mixing.

Well, the 4050 is my friend and ally. Live, I like to use a [Shure SM]58. I've also used a 58 a few times on this recording. I love the straight-up 58 – the Betas drive me fucking crazy; I can't use those. If you're a person who moves off the mic, [the Beta 58] is no good. That's another thing the 4050 is great for: if you want to move off [axis] and come back to it. I like to hear the sound of my feet on the ground. That's when I know there's enough presence. It's got to be pretty hot. There's just no way to recreate what your voice sounds like to yourself without your headphones on. You damp all of these places in your skull that vibrate when you sing, so you have to make this weird, artificial world to get your tuning and what have you – so that you have

confidence when you're pushing into the microphone. Most reverbs are okay for monitoring in the headphone mix, as long as they're long enough and there's no pre-delay. I like a small room; a small hall kind of sound. I can't ever use plate reverbs, because I'm too nasal. It sounds metallic, like there's a distortion. I try to tell engineers when I go to a studio, "Please don't bother with the plate!"

So many people have the EMT 140 and they want to use it on everything because it's super cool for their studio.

Exactly. But use it for something else. I've used a lot of digital reverbs. I love the Wendy Carlos Altiverb [plate convolution reverbs]. I just do – I love it. I never liked the Lexicon. People love the Lexicon, but I can't get into it for some reason. It has a saccharine, diet soda aftertaste to me. I see why people like it, and I think it has a place – but for vocals, I can't do it. I love the [1970s EMT 240] Gold Foil [plate] reverb, but you can never find one. I had the opportunity to buy one when I was in Toronto years ago, but I didn't do it. I still kick myself, because they're really expensive now. I don't need a Gold Foil reverb at my house anyway.

How many takes do you tend to do for a lead vocal before you feel like you've got enough to comp? What is your workflow and process like?

For the sake of air and breathing, I generally go verse by verse. I'll sing a verse five times, maybe six times. Then I'll move on to the next verse.

So not the whole song, but the verses one at a time, in order?

Not the whole song. I want to have something left. It's so physical. I always write songs that are too hard for me to sing at the time.

Which is probably why they sound so genuine and emotional.

You learn to hit the notes as you're doing it. It's such a physically demanding process. I'll generally [record a pass] and then be like, "Chris, let me hear that back." He'll often say, "Just nuke it and do it again." Both Chris and Craig have fantastic intonation. They save me a lot of fucking time.

When you're tracking and you are going to comp a final vocal from five or six passes, do you notice that there's any kind of pattern of success to your vocal takes, where it tends to be an earlier one out of the five, or the last one out of the five?

Things that are really emotional tend to come earlier, and things that require more physicality tend to be the later takes. Things that require power or stamina are generally not the last ones, but maybe around take four or five. It all makes sense at the end of the day. Things that require a bit of breath or tenderness are generally the earlier ones. Or the things where you've never sung something before – that can be really interesting. We keep all of that stuff. Then we'll comp a vocal. If there's a word or two that doesn't seem right, I'll do five more passes of that section. I also change the words a lot, so that factors in. It happens now and again where I don't

know why [something] doesn't make sense to me. Then I'll do it without the bass once and it's like, "Okay, the tuning of the bass is what was throwing me off." Or, "When I get to that spot, take everything out. I'm going to record it a cappella." It's weird stuff like that. It takes me a while to get there. I used to feel really gross [about it]. In Motown, they'd just do it in one take.

When you're tracking the "bigger" vocals that you have become known for – the more powerful ones, as opposed to the whispery ones – how far are you standing from the mic?

I'm not good at feet, but if the mic's here, I'd be standing over here [she stands up and demonstrates].

So you're four feet away, sometimes?

Sometimes. I'll be here [she stands about 4 feet from the mic], and then just move back. There's a lot of [playing with the axis of the mic when it is set to cardioid. Or moving further away and turning her head or body to the side to capture distance dynamics in the recorded vocal, when the mic is set to omni, per Neko's demonstration].

And you can do that from four feet away because you have the preamp gain set high enough so you can hear the sound of your toes in your shoes.

Yeah. It's crispy. I'm like, "Okay, don't move your feet!" If you want to make a trail on that word in falsetto, you've got to turn your head in a doppler effect kind of way to make a trail with your voice. I never use the 4050 for a whole record, because I like there to be some variety. I also like to work with engineers to find out what they like. Unfortunately, I'm not good with the Neumanns, which makes me so sad. Everybody has a beautiful Neumann that they want to bring out. I'm like, "Don't set up the Neumann." I'll try it, but I'm too nasal so it doesn't really work for me. The 4050 is a workhorse. It takes a lot of abuse.

Since you're singing so far back from the AT4050, the sound of whatever room you are recording in certainly comes into play. What are some of your favorite spaces where you've recorded vocals?

WaveLab is a big one, because the control room is not separated from the live room. It's one large room. My own studio, which is in an old movie theater – a small one, like 87 seats or something – sounds so fucking good. The sound of a human voice moving something is the most beautiful thing. I remember seeing this old TV footage of Tina Turner singing "River Deep, Mountain High." When her volume comes up, you can hear the wood in the room. I'm sure that has to do with TV camera compression or something. But it brought me to tears. The power of this woman moving something was so beautiful. Obviously it's Tina Turner; she's fucking amazing. But I just remember thinking that the sound of a human voice moving a space created by human beings – making this thing that is breathing, as well as moving the ribs of a larger creature that you're creating with all of these other people – it was such a profound thing. I'm sure that I've been trying to achieve *that sound* forever. Maybe that's when my journey into being a producer really started.

Your awareness of this is probably what has contributed in recent years to the power of your recorded vocals. A lot of singers might not have as deep an appreciation for the physical experience of moving the air in a room.

Everybody sings for different reasons. People use the term "vocal gymnastics" a lot. It's usually used as a semi-negative term, but it's a superpower. It's not a superpower because you're good at it, or as Björn Yttling would say, "It does not mean that you are 'The Queen of Singing!'" It's because you can do something physical with your body, like how I was talking about making a harmony with another person. It's the same natural phenomenon that tore apart the Tacoma Narrows Bridge when it vibrated at a certain frequency. Feeling that vibration and resonance is heavy. It's why a lot of times, a large group of people singing, even if they can't sing, will make you start crying. It's such a massive, unique way to communicate. It's really heavy. It's something that people used to understand a long time ago that we don't really understand anymore. On a scientific level, sure; but I don't think we *understand* it as a species anymore.

You have referred to k.d. lang's production approach on 2016's case/lang/veirs as one of the most natural you've ever worked with. How did her production knowledge and style influence your own on Hell-On?

The way that she would describe what she needed spoke to the people who didn't understand music as a written language. Untrained ears and trained ears alike got it and could fall in line. We all got it from one thing that she would explain. She knew what she wanted. She's such a natural. I asked her if she produced things for other people. She said, "No." I asked, "Why?" She's like, "I don't want to. I don't have time." Fair. Knowing what you want is fair, but the world of production is missing a fucking superstar. I've heard some very large, powerful voices in my life. I've stood next to Elton John and John Fogerty making these sounds come out of themselves. It's like, "Holy fuck! You are a crazy – *I don't know what!*" But pitch, strength, projection, *everything* – [k.d. lang] buried them. Without any amplification in a room, with a concrete floor where nothing moves naturally, she could move it! It was like a geyser in a National Park. So, she doesn't have to produce projects. She's walking around with this in her, all the time. It makes sense. Plus, she should get to do what she wants to do.

That's true. Everybody should get to do what they want to do.

But just knowing it's possible – not in a jealous way, but in a "holy shit, human beings are fucking miracles" kind of way. Human beings are really majestic animals.

We can produce some amazing forms of expression.

If people are allowed to have confidence, and have love and support, they can indulge these things in themselves that they can find so much joy in. They can magnify it. It can become like a Tesla coil of something completely different. Wow, my metaphors are terrible.

They're good. Talking about your collaboration in the studio with Björn Yttling on Hell-On, there's a split on the album with you having produced some of the songs yourself.

I co-produced six with him.

How did you decide which songs the two of you would co-produce?

I gave him the option. I said, "Which ones speak to you?"

I was going into a completely unknown situation where I was about to cede control on a lot of levels. I did that specifically because of what I got from the case/lang/veirs collaboration – and then I went to speak at the WOMANPRODUCER conference in Brooklyn, NY, which was the first of its kind in the world, which is fucking ridiculous. We say representation matters, and it's absolutely true. I went there and met all these women. I'm a really shy person when I first meet people. Khaela Maricich and Melissa Dyne [of The Blow] put it together on a tiny budget. It was incredible. I'm so beyond proud of those two. We all shared one dressing room. It was, like, six of us. You know how you're polite with people you've never met? We got in there and every woman in the room – all of whom were pretty shy – we exploded into conversation. We didn't realize how starved we were to have dialogues about technology, recording, and science. We didn't know how starved we were to have that. There we all were *representing* and simultaneously *seeing the representation*. It was too much. I've never felt that way before. I don't know if I'll ever feel that way again. I can only imagine it's akin to what somebody feels like when they win an Oscar for a movie they wrote or something. Melissa and Khaela did an incredible job of getting women from all over the world, from all different backgrounds, and most importantly, from all different age groups. It was the last time Pauline Oliveros [Tape Op #41] performed, for example. I'm so glad she got to go to the first WOMANPRODUCER conference before she passed. Between case/lang/veirs and "Okay, ceding control works," to the WOMANPRODUCER conference, it's like, "You know what? *I don't have anything to prove.*" Serving the song and ceding control, I think that's a great way to go. Doing it with confidence made it so that I showed up to that situation completely present. More so than I'd ever been, I think. It was such a strange and validating experience. I really hope they get a shit ton of grants and can reproduce the WOMANPRODUCER conference all over the world. It was one of the greatest nights of my life! And it wasn't because I was talking and having a moment. It was because, holy shit, this is *real*. ☺

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