



Butch Worrell, photographer

Pam Rosenblatt
Country music singer-songwriter Kasey Lansdale: Upbeat about *Restless*

*On a cold Monday, February 24, 2014 evening at 7 p.m., country music singer-songwriter Kasey Lansdale entertained a group of about fifteen people with her strong, clear singing voice with songs from her **Restless** (2013) album and with her reading of "Blind Love", the horror short story that she co-wrote with her father, well-known author*

*Joe Lansdale, out of **Dark Duets**, edited by Christopher Golden and published by Harper Collins in January 2014, on the main floor of Pandemonium Books in Central Square, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Christopher Golden also read from his new horror novel **Snowblind**, published by St. Martin's Press in January 2014. Both Lansdale and Golden gave the audience what they wanted to hear!*

*Approximately two hours beforehand, Lansdale sat down at a table in the basement of Pandemonium Books with **Wilderness House Literary Review's** arts editor, Pam Rosenblatt, where the two women discussed Lansdale's music and writing careers. The article that follows is what developed from that interview.*

FOR THE PAST EIGHT YEARS, Kasey Lansdale has been a professional country music singer-songwriter. She wanted to be a singer since she was eight years old, so it's no surprise and very much a thrill that, on August 20, 2013, she began distributing her first full album called *Restless* with Blue Siren Records, to the acclaim of *The Boston Globe* and *Music News Nashville*.

From Nacogdoches, Texas, Lansdale has been traveling across the country to promote four avenues of her creativity: *Restless*; *Dark Duets*; *Impossible Monsters*, a book filled with horror short stories that she edited; and the movie *Christmas with the Dead*, in which she plays the actress "Ella" who is the wife of the movie's main protagonist "Calvin" and she sings two songs that she wrote for the movie. She is touring with guitarist John Cleveland, whom she began working with in August 2013. And this duo is a great combination!

Lansdale doesn't really consider herself to be a just troubadour on tour. She simply goes to the different venues to promote her four endeavors. She said, "To be honest, I didn't really think about it in those terms. You have an album, you want to get the word out, you go on the road, it's just what you do. I think the thing that makes it more special is I get to see friends from across the nation while doing some work. And the work is

Wilderness House Literary Review 9/1

diverse enough that the events aren't all the same. Having those different outlets sort of breaks up what I think a normal tour would be like. One night might be a concert, another a book signing, and that helps to keep things fresh and fun."

Her tour has covered such places as her hometown Nacogdoches, Texas; Crockett, Texas; Nashville, Tennessee; Ben Wheeler and Plano, Texas; Tarkio, Montana; St. Joseph and Cloud, Michigan; Paxton, Illinois; Cambridge, Massachusetts; Portsmouth, New Hampshire; Long Island, New York; and Landing, New Jersey. It started in January 2014 and concluded in March 2014.

And all of Lansdale's hard work is paying off. Thousands of copies of each item have sold, "Which is super exciting," she said. "The Limited *Impossible Monsters* for example sold out in three days, and the first run of *Restless* sold out very quickly as well!"

Lansdale's careers include country music singing and songwriting, writing horror fiction as well as writing flash fiction, editing, and acting. She also runs the East Texas Songwriter's Workshop.

"The reason why I'm involved in so many different types of careers is because I believe all the arts trickle out and some days you may want to simply express yourself as an artist. I think it's important to let those things come out how they do because that's its truest form of art rather than trying to box it up and saying, 'Well, I'm only a singer so I only do this' or 'I'm only a writer so I can only do this' because it's not black and white," she said.

While singing-songwriting is her full-time work, she always finds time for her writing. "Music is definitely always been something that has been something that I wanted to do with my life. I always say, 'I was born to be a singer' and 'I was born into the world of writing.' My father is a full-time author, so he definitely was a big influence on me – as well as my mother. They were both very much into letting me follow my creative pass wherever that may lead," she said.

Lansdale's father, Joe Lansdale, has been a very strong influence on her careers in "so many different facets." He is probably why Kasey enjoys writing. "I definitely look at his work because we have a similar voice, a similar cadence to our speech because as I grew up and absorbed all those things as a child... There's a book [by my father] called *Edge of Dark Water* (2012). I wrote a song called 'Edge of Dark Water'. Publisher Little Brown Mulholland offered it as a free download when you purchase the novel. So we use the song to cross promote," Lansdale said.

Lansdale and her father often work at events together. "It started when we went to Italy and they put us in a festival with literary events and music events. We went as a team. And people started doing that in the United States. I would go and I would sing songs. He would read something that he had written. And then we would talk about the writing process and how songwriting is also a writing process. So it all tied together," she said.

Lansdale's music talent was discovered when she was in the third grade, and was singing the Reba McEntire song "Why Haven't I Heard from You?" Her teachers heard her and took her out of class to sing the

Wilderness House Literary Review 9/1

song to all of the teachers in the school instead of her doing her studies! That experience had a great impact upon Lansdale. "It was something that the teachers saw something in me and they let me grow on that. They let me build on that. That experience was a very pivotal moment for me. I still actually do that song in my set list today as a nod to that," she said.

Lansdale is very upbeat about her new album *Restless*. "Most of the songs on the *Restless* album are about being a strong woman, about taking power and not letting yourself be down, and about being brave and letting those feelings emerge. Sometimes women are thought to have to act a certain way or look a certain way. That all has its place in whatever society has. But, I think, it's important to show that you can break free of that. Women can be whatever they want to be," Lansdale said.

Included in the album are such songs as "Sorry Ain't Enough", "Foolin' Around", "Hard to be a Lady", and "Half as Much". Lansdale wrote seven out of the eleven songs on the tracks. John Carter Cash is the executive producer of the album, and the songs were recorded at Cash Cabin.

Lansdale is very keen on *Restless* after working on the project for four years. The album is in line, fits the vision and has a theme. She has another album out titled *No More Rain* (2008), which was her first album. It was recorded at a local studio.

"I will always love [*No More Rain*] and it will always be important to me because it was my first album. But I definitely think *Restless* is on a different level and it speaks of me right now as an artist," she said.

"Country music is always what spoke to me the most. I'm very much into the '60s soul Motown sound. I think country music is not only what captured my heart but it's where I grew up in East Texas, where I'm surrounded by the accent, the tone, the mentality. All these things spoke to me. And when I heard people like Reba, I heard her do these notes, and I heard her do these songs – as did it when I heard Sam Cook or Otis Redding – I felt she was doing the things that they were doing but she was doing them more in a way that was more relatable to me and to my environment," Lansdale said.

Country music was simply a natural for Kasey and her solid, warm, inviting personality. For her, the decision wasn't conscious. "It just happened," she said. "I grew up listening to all sort of music so I sound like a mixture of all that. I identify myself as country blue."

Reba McEntire, Loretta Lynn, Patsy Cline, Aretha Franklin, and Shania Twain are among the many country music women singers that have impacted Kasey's singing-songwriting.

One of the things Kasey likes about country music is that it involves storytelling, as does the horror stories that she writes. "[Storytelling] has to do with genres. It's less horror and country and more to do with storytelling," she said.

Lansdale finds it difficult to determine where country music is headed. "It's hard because country music is very cyclic. So many things have cross genres. Things that were country are now pop. And things that were pop are now rock. I think it's less important to focus on where it's all going to.... But I think what is more important is just creating what comes out

Wilderness House Literary Review 9/1

and letting the other people put the name on it," she said.

Lansdale thinks the country music sound will revert from the current mix to a more pure sound. "I grew up listening to the country music that my parents listened to. It's gone. Even the chord progressions of the country music of the '50s were all about a basic, simplistic sound," she said. "That's not what it is anymore.... But I believe those elements and those ideals will always be the backbone of country music.

For people just starting out as singer-songwriters, Kasey has words of advice: "I've been at [singing-songwriting] full-time for eight years. And my honest advice is that if there is anything you like equal or more, do that instead because it's a very complex business. It's a very difficult business and it's one that I'm navigating and learning every day. My father also has an independent business as an author. And as a full-time author for 40 years, I think, he still navigates as it changes.

My second piece of advice would be if there is nothing you love equal or more, then you are absolutely making the right choice. Perseverance. Keep going. You're going to get told 'No.' a lot more that you're going to get told 'Yes.' And if it doesn't take it you down, then you're in the right business. You're making the right choice!"