

Concert Review

Dwight Yoakam; Buck Owens; K.D. Lang (Universal Amphitheater; 6251 capacity; \$18.50 top)

Stunning talents of country newcomer K.D. Lang are a hard act to follow, and woe be unto the honkytonk hotshot who tries it. Proud and pretty Dwight Yoakam did his best at the Universal Amphitheater Saturday, working up a rousing distraction with the help of inspiration and mentor Buck Owens. But if Lang's daring and starpower outshone Yoakam's more conservative tactics, near sellout crowd was the clear winner by the time the last guitar string had twanged close to midnight.

Yoakam is an excellent craftsman within a fine tradition, delivering his well-honed new honkytonk songs in a Hank Williams whine and then nailing them to the wall with hot, rock-inspired guitar. Three days before release of his third LP, "Buenas Noches From A Lonely Room," he unveiled its arresting title tune, a resonant, dark, deep-hurtin' song with a Spanish rhythm guitar, twanging Western lead and strong hook that make it a ready-made jukebox mainstay.

But for the most part, new material was disappointingly rare, as

Yoakam described the new LP as "dark" — perhaps deemed too brooding for concert play — and seemed intent on fitting almost everything from his strong-selling first LPs into his lengthy set.

Fiddle player Brantley Kearns, whose high-spirited sawing put the indelible kick in Yoakam's previous records, was missing from the band, sadly, but ably replaced by Scott Jones, who injected some distinctive percussive bowing. Producer-guitarist Pete Anderson added impeccable lead guitar lines.

Owens, '60s country star whose Bakersfield sound has been Yoakam's major influence, joined him for a duet of their feisty, Tex-Mex flavored new single, "Streets Of Bakersfield," then soloed in a five-song mini-set of mostly upbeat faves like "Love's Gonna Live Here Again" and "Tiger By The Tail." Appearance was a rare treat for hardcore fans — Owens came out of retirement to blend talents with Yoakam on the nine-week tour.

But the headliners couldn't
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eclipse the glow from Lang's set. The androgynous Canadian chanteuse with the bristly haircut is country's most unlikely star — her previous L.A. appearance was at the rock-oriented Roxy — but when she opens her mouth to sing, she's undeniable and there's nothing Nashville can do about it.

Radiating confidence and showbiz electricity, Lang blended the torchy, archival delights of her recent "Shadowland" LP with the wild-eyed hoedown originals of her debut album.

Four songs into her set she drew a standing ovation for Patsy Cline's "Three Cigarettes In An Ashtray," which she performed in a cartoonish cowgirl dress and campy, stagey style that suggest one foot in the avant-garde and one foot in the past.

Crowd was on its feet again to applaud her cover of Roy Orbison's "Crying." It's hard not to be wowed, as Lang unleashes a voice that swoops and glides like a trick airplane, frolicking in its abundant virtuosity.

A bluesy, suggestive "Walkin' After Midnight" was another highlight. Five-man backup, the Reclines, served singer well with choreographed but unslick hijinks and looney-tunes stylings that fit her whimsical approach. *Daws.*