

KIM LENZ

and the Jaguars

Long Bio

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By Chris Morris

Yes, *It's All True*: KIM LENZ is back.

The titian-haired, vivacious Los Angeles-based singer-songwriter-guitarist established herself as the top modern rockabilly songstress with a pair of widely praised albums for Hightone Records and rapturously received performances across the States and in Europe; *Rolling Stone* raved, "If Elvis had been a woman, he probably would have sounded just like Kim Lenz."

Kim has reconvened her rough 'n' tumble band the Jaguars and returned with her best recorded work yet, the album *It's All True*, which she produced herself and is releasing on her own Riley Records imprint. The new collection is 12 tracks of fuel-injected contemporary rockabilly that handsomely shows off Kim's sass, energy, and romp-stomping vocal chops. It secures her position in the small pantheon of great female rockabilly singers that includes Wanda Jackson and the late Janis Martin - singers with whom Lenz has shared many a stage. And it displays the genre's diversity and impact.

Kim says of the music, "There's so much room in rockabilly. I don't think people realize how big the umbrella is. Thematically, some people like to keep it in a box. But I don't think you have to keep it in the box. I think of it as writing haiku. There are limitations, but there are worlds and worlds and worlds you can do inside it. People see it in this limited way - they see poodle skirts and flames and Elvis impersonators, all these things that have gotten so kitschy. What I love about rockabilly is that it really is very emotional and very simple and direct."

After she took a breather from recording and performing to start a family, Kim's return to recording came as an unexpected development.

"I really didn't think I was going to make another record, to tell you the truth," she says. "I was really burned out after spending four years on the road, doing 200 shows a year. I pretty much played all the big festivals and all the big cities in the United States and Europe. I always said, 'I want to do this, I want to do that.' Well, I'd done it all! And I loved it, but it was the time to take a break and have a child."

However, a couple of developments coaxed her back towards the studio. When her son turned a year and a half, she was flown to Barcelona to make a previously booked appearance at a rockabilly festival.

She says, "That was my first inkling that maybe I could do it. After that, I played Spain every other year, and I did just a couple of shows in L.A., and I had giant crowds every time. It was really cool to go back into that again. But, still, my son was so young. When he was in first grade and in school seven hours a day, I started getting a little itch - 'Well, maybe I should do something.' I've had my music used in film and TV a few times, and that's kind of a fun place to be. So I started a studio in my house called Ocean Ranch Studios with the intention of making music for film and TV,



and I got started on a couple of projects. As soon as I got started, I realized I wanted to make a record."

The tipping point came when Kim attempted to set up a MySpace page for herself - and discovered that one already existed! A fan in Hamburg, Germany, had surreptitiously created the page, which already boasted 1,500 fans. She took it over, and was astonished by the response: "I've got 5,000 people signed up there now. I don't fish for people, I let people find me, and these were all people who found me. The MySpace support made me think, 'Man, maybe there are people out there that would actually like to have another record.'"

She decided her new project would be self-produced and self-released. She explains, "I had opportunities to sign with established labels, but I wanted to keep control of everything. I said, 'You know what, even if I don't sell one record, I just want to listen to the record and say, 'I like this record.'"

Kim cut the instrumental tracks for *It's All True* live at musician Joey Altruda's L.A. studio; she recorded her vocals at Ocean Ranch.

The album brings together the last touring incarnation of the Jaguars. The versatile Maine-born guitarist Nick Curran has played with honky-tonker Wayne Hancock, rockabilly giant Ronnie Dawson, and blues-rockers the Fabulous Thunderbirds; after the Jaguars went on hiatus, he led his own R&B-based unit, Nick Curran & the Nitelives, which recorded two smokin' albums for Blind Pig Records. Kim says of Curran, "He can play rhythm and blues, rockabilly, rock 'n' roll - pretty much any kind of roots guitar at least as well as anybody in the world. He's amazing. He was the only person I wanted to play on the record."

Doghouse bassist Jake Erwin returns to the Jaguars fold after a stint with the Texas swing unit the Hot Club of Cowtown. Drummer Scotty Tecce has also kept busy in the interim: He co-founded the Dallas doo-wop group the Fabulous Harmonaires (who back Kim on the new album's ballad "I Break a Heart Every Night") and also worked on his own psychobilly and country side projects.

Working with these top pros as a first-time producer was eye-opening, Kim says: "It was fun. It was a learning experience, and I was true to myself and did what I wanted. It's daunting, though, when you're dealing with people of that level of musicianship, saying, 'No, I don't like that, do this.' But I took music theory. I write a lot of songs. I understand how songs are put together. I play guitar, I play piano, and I play some drums. In the end I got just what I wanted, and I couldn't be happier."

Kim wrote seven of the 12 tracks on *It's All True*, and co-authored "That's the Breaks" with the top SoCal rockabilly/R&B/doo-wop/do-anything vocalist Big Sandy, who produced her second Hightone album. Sandy also authored the spunky "He's All Mine," on which he duets with Kim; the equally attitude-filled "I'll Tell You When" was penned for her by Sage Guyton of the Lucky Stars. Two covers culled from Kim's extensive rockabilly collection round out the album: "Burning Rubber" (recorded by Carol Cummings for Checker in 1961) and "Speed Limit" (released by Tommy Lam on Silverball Records in 1958).

"While I was writing this record," Kim says, "for a year I didn't listen to any rockabilly music, because I'm always worried I'm going to be writing what I'm listening to. I'm an American - I like to make new stuff. As much as I try to make it stay in that rockabilly haiku form, I have to make the music that's coming from inside of me, too."

It's All True is the culmination, to date, of a life in which rockabilly music has been a constant thread.

Born in San Diego, Kim was raised by a father who dug Roy Orbison and Carl Perkins and listened to Wolfman



Jack's border radio shows as a teen in the '50s, and a mother who loved Patsy Cline and classic country. She got a chance to check out roots music first-hand after she moved to Los Angeles in the late '80s.

"I used to hang out at the Blue Saloon and the Palomino and the King King," she recalls. "That's when Big Sandy was first playing around, Dave & Deke, Jump With Joey. The Reverend Horton Heat was just coming through then. They were so wild! The scene was so small. I had one vintage dress. I would go to the shows and just watch people. There were these girls on the scene, and they all had vintage clothes and the Bakelite jewelry and they knew how to dance. Nobody knew how to dance back then - the girls would dance with each other!"

She got more deeply involved in music after moving to Dallas with her husband to attend the University of North Texas. "We bought a huge house, and I met a lot of neat people who said, 'Let's jam at your house!' My first band wasn't even a band - it was people who came over and jammed who liked '50s and some '60s music. It was a bunch of people just goofing off."

Kim finally made her vocal debut with a 10-piece band at a Dallas coffeehouse. She only sang two numbers, but the bug bit her hard: "I can't really explain it. I couldn't sleep for a couple of days after that. It was this amazing feeling I had never felt before. I said, 'I have to do this some more!' From the beginning I knew I had to have my own band."

She began working with an existing group of Dallas musicians, who rechristened themselves the Jaguars in honor of the Fender Jaguar she played onstage. An opportunity to record a 45 led to sessions in Los Angeles with guitarist-producer Deke Dickerson of the Dave & Deke Combo; the resultant single was issued on tiny Wormtone Records. Things happened quickly for Kim after that.

"I decided to go on the road behind the 45," she says with a laugh. "Everyone said, 'You can't go on the road with a 45!' I said, 'Why not? I want to go on the road!' So I bought a van and brought the guys on the road and played San Francisco and L.A. Then Larry Sloven of Hightone caught wind of us and called: 'This is Larry Sloven from Hightone Records, and I want to talk to you about signing with us.' And I hung up on him! I thought for sure it was one of my friends playing a joke on me. He eventually called me back and convinced me."

Her association with Hightone produced the albums *Kim Lenz and Her Jaguars* (1998) and *The One and Only* (1999); the compilation *Up to My Old Tricks Again* was released in 2005. By the time she took her break from performing at the turn of the millennium, her albums and dynamic live shows had established her as *the* contemporary female rockabilly performer.

Back in the game and ready to rock, Kim Lenz and the Jaguars will support *It's All True* with live appearances around the country in the spring and summer of 2009. She's looking forward to reconnecting with the fans who have clamored for her return to the stage.

