

GENTRY

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

Interviews with extraordinary women, including singer-songwriter Kris Angelis.

+HOME



\$4.99US



EST 1993

JAN 2020

THE HEARTS & MINDS OF SILICON VALLEY





KRIS ANGELIS

On the eve of her new musical release, we hear about life in the Golden State and on tour.

WRITTEN BY FREDRIC HAMBER
PHOTOGRAPHED BY SHANE O'DONNELL

Singer-songwriter Kris Angelis doesn't just wear her heart on her sleeve; she brandishes it in the very titles of her folk/pop songs, like "Heartbreak Is Contagious" and "I Hope I Never Fall in Love Again," as well as her 2013 album *The Left Atrium*, which garnered an LA Music Critics Award for Best Female Album upon its release.

"I don't understand how people get through life who don't have some sort of artistic outlet," Angelis says. As a student, when she had a difficult assignment, she would relieve stress by writing songs. "Most of my songs are inspired by personal experiences. Usually when I go through some sort of heartbreak I do something really intense to distract myself," she says. Her lyrics are often in the second person, written to and about a "you" whom she disarms by being reflective rather than rancorous:

You would've been my first choice if only I was yours

But my dear I'm getting weary of knocking on closed doors

Born in Florida, Angelis spent the first 10 years of her life on a farm outside Gainesville before crossing the country to California with her parents, setting out for Monterey by car on her and her twin sister Alix's 11th birthday. Both parents were in the Air Force, her mother a lieutenant colonel and her father a hospice nurse who eventually retired with the rank of major. For a brief time the family lived on the campus of the Naval Postgraduate School, before moving first to Pebble Beach and then to Carmel Valley, where the girls attended Carmel High. "That was a really good place to grow up and become an artist in," Angelis says. "There's a good community there for the arts. It has so many theaters for being such a small town."

Angelis—pronounced like Los Angeles, her current hometown—has been singing all her life, since before she could talk, according to family lore. When the teen pop boy band Hanson had their Grammy-nominated hit, "MMMBop," it was a revelation for Angelis, who identified with the young singers and felt a world opening up. Before that, she shares, "I felt like musicians and singers were these otherworldly creatures." She and her sister learned to harmonize by listening to Hanson. "I was also very influenced by my parents' records, and my grandparents' music taste as well - lots of classical, Strauss

waltzes, and the Eagles and Beatles and the Archies. A lot of great harmonies and pop sensibilities had an influence on what I do now."

After graduation she enrolled at UC Santa Barbara. "One of the best—of many—things I remember about UCSB was the beach basically surrounding the campus," she recalls. "One night, some friends and I went for a dip right outside our dorm and got covered in bioluminescent algae and felt like mermaids!" When members of the Brandi Carlisle Band were visiting to play the Lobero (the oldest continuously operating theater in the Golden State), Angelis decided to show them the beach. They ended up frolicking with dolphins close to shore.

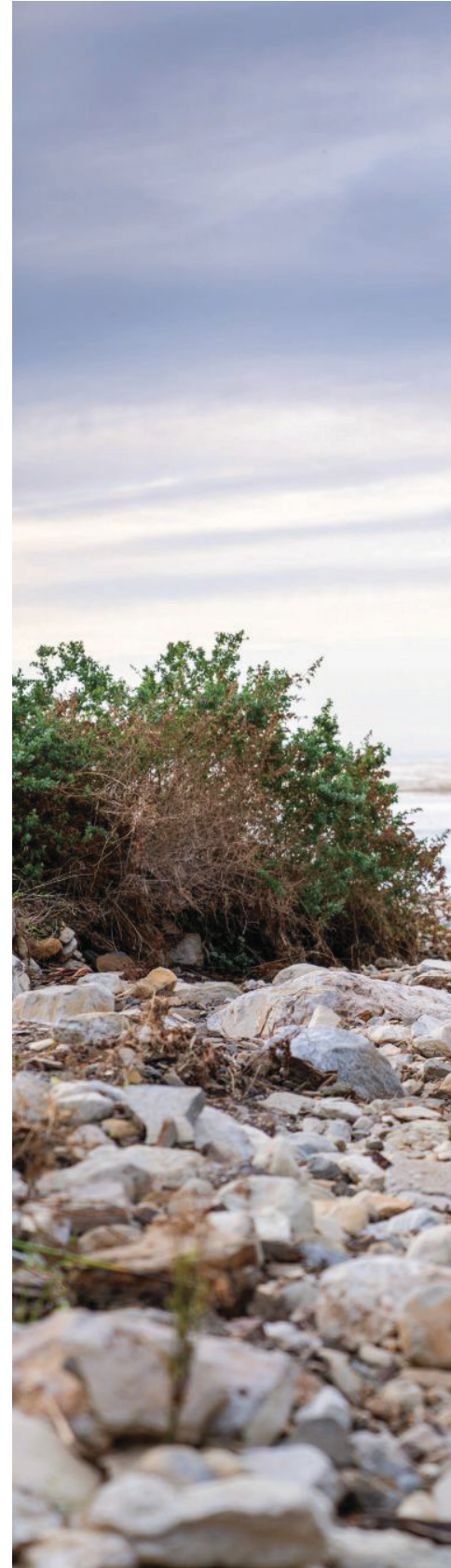
Her musical interests were always paired with a love of dance: ballet, jazz, modern lyrical dance. Her career goal upon entering college had been to become a physical therapist, a logical and practical adjunct, as she saw it, to her dance work. She earned a liberal arts degree with all the necessary premedical credits to be admitted to the PhD program at USC for physical therapy. "Then I was like, you know what? *I want to be a singer and an actress*," she says. So she moved to LA.

After spending time with her friends from the Brandi Carlisle Band, from whom she has learned about the business of music, she focused on her songwriting. "I let my sister be the actress," she chuckles, referring to her twin, an actress, writer, and filmmaker.

Brief Sounds was Kris' first CD, created in 2005 with an assist on chords and backup instrumentation from musician Tim Hanseroth, captured on a four-track analogue recorder in his Seattle apartment. "Most of my songs are about unrequited love or some sort of love turmoil," she explains. Her next EP, *Ghost in the Corner*, "was about me really delving and discovering myself as an artist and grappling with that. Not knowing where I'm going or which path I should be taking."

*I try to ignore that whispering voice
What if I opened the door
Only to find there was nothing behind
but what meets the eye?*

Angelis currently lives in Pasadena. "What I like about LA is almost everyone you meet is up to something," she says. "They came here because they have dreams and are passionate about something. For a long time I was living in the Valley - I just sort of kept moving east along Moorpark Avenue.





I like this area because it's not crazy parking like in Hollywood. One of my favorites is Sweetsalt; it's a great little place in Toluca Lake. And Tujunga Valley has Aroma café. They don't have Wi-Fi so everyone is just there to talk or write."

Her 2017 album *Heartbreak Is Contagious*, more pop than folk, was a collaboration with two songwriters and a producer, who encouraged her to record at least one unequivocally happy tune. The finger-snapping single "Kevin Bacon" was a result. "It's called 'Kevin Bacon' not because it's actually about him but because it references his moves, like *Footloose*, as part of the dancing and fun," she explains. A music video accompanying the release showed Angelis attempting to teach a handsome/slightly uncoordinated guy how to move to the beat, their flirty *pas de deux* moving from the 40-yard line of a football gridiron to a family living room and back out to a field of weeds.

*We're breaking all the rules,
I'm 'bout to cut footloose,
your Kevin Bacon moves...*

On a hot afternoon last summer at Campos Family Vineyards in Byron, California, Angelis sat on a stool in a sleeveless red dress serenading the tasting room visitors with her Guild OM 140-E guitar. Some songs hearken to a personal loss two years ago, when her car was broken into at the end of a tour, all her valuables, including computer and instruments, gone:

*Stained glass, stronger than we were before.
Stained glass, pieces that were stolen,
colored by the way we are.*

During a break she accepted a glass of Campos Big Red blend from a member of the winery staff, and took a few minutes to do a live selfie video for her fans on social media. A couple in the room enjoying a bottle of wine were happy to have the opportunity to experience her music in person. "We've heard you on Spotify," the man told her.

She ended not with one of her own compositions but with Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah." According to the poster advertisements, she was scheduled to perform until 4 PM. As she resolved the song on its final note, there was just a bit of lovely reverb at the end, and then silence. (I stole a glance at my phone: 4

PM exactly; the woman is a pro.) "I'm on tour," she told the room, with the pride of someone happy to have found her niche. "This is my full-time job. It's what I do now."

Within the hour she was en route to the airport to catch a flight to Alaska, to pitch a tent on the Portage Glacier for a couple of nights before performing at The Last Frontier Bar in Anchorage. Alaska would be state 30-something in her quest to perform in all 50 states. (As of press time she has accomplished her goal, celebrating after a performance in Hawaii.)

She generally gets from place to place not by plane, but in her Prius C, and likes seeing different parts of the country. "So much of it is gorgeous," she says, "even places that I didn't think... *Idaho!* Who knew?" As for the challenges of road life? "I have to do all the driving, no matter how tired I am. But the positive side is I can be alone and talk to myself and no one cares."

Along with places to go and songs to sing she also has people to meet. She stays with "friends of friends of friends," to whom she is introduced after putting out word of where she'll be next. "I've just been really touched by how generous and open people are to having a stranger stay with them. I've met a lot of cool people that have a different point of view."

Angelis' forthcoming album *That Siren*, *Hope* will debut January 16 at a launch party at Hotel Café in Los Angeles, and is available for preorder on iTunes. It explores various facets of hope, an emotion she sees "as a siren of the sea, luring you toward something only to have you crash into the rocks, which is what it can sometimes feel like when you place your hope in certain things." The album's genre reflects a return to the folk roots of her earlier work, a bit of a twang to her voice, but even more Americana in style. "It was important to me that everything be real: organic instruments and no Auto-Tune," she says. "Because people, feelings, and life aren't perfect and that's what gives them—and art—its soul." ●



“It was important to me that everything be real: organic instruments and no Auto-Tune. Because people, feelings, and life aren’t perfect and that’s what gives them—and art—its soul.”

