



Shot on location at Lucien in Toronto

## SECOND WIND

Jazz singer Alex Pangman is back in the swing of life after a double lung transplant. TEXT: NOREEN FLANAGAN

**A**fter eight hours of surgery, Alex Pangman slowly came out of her foggy, anaesthetized state with one song on her mind: “What a Difference a Day Makes.” What a difference indeed. The 33-year-old jazz singer had just undergone a life-saving double lung transplant at the Toronto General Hospital. Earlier that day, she had received the phone call she and her husband, “Col.” Tom Parker, had been waiting for since she was placed on the transplant list in June 2008. Pangman says that as she raced to the hospital in a cab, her heart was pounding. “The doctor came in to check me out. Once I got the green light for surgery, he took a

Sharpie and signed his initials on my chest. By 1 p.m., I was being wheeled into the operating room. It was surreal. I was looking at my dad, my mom and my husband for maybe the last time. I was filled with fear but also hope. In the room, I said something stupid like ‘Hi, folks! I’m a singer, so please be careful when you’re passing tubes down my throat!’”

Pangman, who has been nicknamed “Canada’s sweetheart of swing,” has been singing since her early teens, when she discovered the music of ‘20s and ‘30s jazz legends like Mildred Bailey and Louis Armstrong. The self-taught musician went on to release four CDs ▷

VINCENT LIONS/VINCENT LIONS.COM; HAIR & MAKEUP: GIANLUCA ORIENTI/PULITINO GROUP; STYLIST: JULIANA SCHIAVATTI/PULITINO GROUP; ASSISTANT: MARIKO LAUREN; DRESS: GADABOUT VINTAGE; NECKLACE: FABRICE AT HAZELTON LAINES; RING: CAROLE TARENBAUM VINTAGE COLLECTION; SHOES: VALENTINO AT DAVIDS SHOES

with her band, The Alleycats. Throughout this time, she kept her battle with cystic fibrosis a secret. “The blind blues musician is sort of romantic,” she explains. “I didn’t feel that the image of a jazz singer coughing up blood between songs was that poetic. But I always felt that if some miracle happened and I got new lungs, it would be my responsibility to spread the word about organ donation and how it can change lives.”

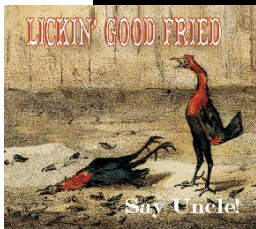
This past November, Pangman and Parker marked the one-year anniversary of her operation by releasing a country CD, *Say Uncle!*, which was recorded with their band, Lickin’ Good

## REVIEW

Alex Pangman’s roots might lie in traditional jazz, but she swings a different way in *Lickin’ Good Fried*, the rollicking old-time country band she co-fronts with her husband, “Col.” Tom Parker. On their album, *Say Uncle!* (Rooster Sandwich Records), Pangman and Parker roll their way through a dozen originals and a

couple of covers—including Roger Miller’s wacky “My Uncle Used to Love Me (But She Died),” whose lyrics provided the band’s name—accompanied by guitar, mandolin,

fiddle and bass. The album was released on the anniversary of Pangman’s lung surgery, and it sounds like the couple is enjoying every sweet minute of their music-making. **MARY DICKIE**



Fried, and produced in the couple’s home a few months before Pangman’s operation. At that time, her lung capacity had fallen to 27 percent and it was becoming increasingly difficult for her to sing. “My world had gotten very small,” she recalls. “Getting out of bed was a struggle. As soon as I sat up, I would cough for half an hour, and getting showered and dressed left me winded.”

Today, her lung capacity averages about 80 percent and her voice has returned stronger than ever. She’s had some setbacks—pneumonia

and a viral infection—but remains optimistic about her future. “These kinds of wrinkles are to be expected in the first year,” she says simply. “The good news is that I can sing again. It’s not like being a singer is just a job for me—it’s who I am. To have my craft slowly taken from me was hard; to have it back is pure joy!” Pangman still fondly recalls the day she returned home from the hospital and told her husband to grab his guitar. “We sang a song by Connie Smith called ‘Darling Are You Ever Coming Home.’ Before the operation it was like I was singing through a straw, and now I had a megaphone. For me, November 4 will always be a joyous anniversary, but for some family out there it’s a sad one. I won’t ever know who my donor was, but I intend to honour the gift I’ve been given. I want the donor family to know the joy their generosity has brought back into my life.” □

On January 28, Pangman will perform a fundraising concert for the Ontario Lung Association ([on.lung.ca](http://on.lung.ca)). For more information on becoming a donor, go to [organdonations.ca](http://organdonations.ca).



● The glorious guitar sounds, Beatle-esque harmonies and pure pop songs on **By Divine Right’s** instantly addictive *Mutant Message* (Hand Drawn Dracula/Outside Music) belie the fact that it was largely created by leader Jose Contreras in his home, a barn and even the forest. Although he has been recording with other musicians, including his wife, Lily Frost, and the Meligrove Band, it’s the first new album in five years from this relatively unsung anchor of Canadian indie rock. It’s also ample proof of Contreras’ songwriting skills and impeccable ear for melody.

● **Woodpigeon’s** *Die Stadt Muzikanten* (Boomba/Outside Music), by contrast, features a choir and an orchestra and yet still has an intimate, small-scale feel. Songwriter Mark Hamilton was inspired by the lives and music of his German and Austrian immigrant grandparents and used their experiences as a jumping-off point to explore the meaning of his own travels and tribulations in 15 beautifully crafted songs. ● **SOULmate** (Sony Music/Sony Music Entertainment Canada) was supposed to be **Jacksoul’s** comeback album, celebrating front-man Haydain Neale’s recovery from a serious traffic accident. Instead, sadly, it must serve as an epitaph after his death from lung cancer in November. Every song is a poignant reminder of what we’ve lost: a marvellous honey-voiced singer and creator of beautiful songs that recall the golden era of classic ’60s/’70s soul. Proceeds from the album’s sale go to the Haydain Neale Family Trust. **M.D.**