

JC ALVAREZ

KRISTINE W: STILL NO. 1

Nearly two decades after her debut album, our favorite dance diva continues her dominance with a new album, new tour and a whole new outlook.

It's winter in New York City, which means brutal cold and Arctic winds. Inside the historic Waldorf-Astoria Hotel on Park Avenue, the plush opulence offers an inviting respite from the fierce chill. The lobby reveals a cross-section of visitors, from black-clad Eurotrash with the X-ray trophy wife to the oil tycoon schmoozing with a corporate CEO. A Chanel-laden lady who lunches struts while a concierge struggles to keep up while balancing her shopping bags and neatly bundled boxes. It's like the well-choreographed opening scene of a classic MGM ensemble movie – an updated *Grand Hotel*.

Adding to the unfolding tableau, along strides a beautiful young woman, the former beauty-pageant-queen-turned-dance-diva comes Kristine W. Along with one of the biggest voices in popular music, she has one of the biggest smiles in the business. Kristine W can be easily counted on for one of the warmest receptions, even on a frosty day. It's a fitting juxtaposition to be meeting with one of the most daringly brazen personalities on the dance charts in the Art Deco elegance of this tony landmark.



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JAZZING FOR SOME REMAKES

Kristine W doesn't do anything subtly. The former Miss Washington State contestant for Miss America has always been a showgirl at heart. She's in New York to make the promotional rounds for her latest album, *New & Number Ones* – some brand new, others reinvented. We settle into a corner table behind the bar of the Peacock Alley Lounge. The piano in the far corner doesn't escape the pop star. The last time that Kristine W (born Kristine Weitz) toured, she performed her greatest hits as jazz standards, then recorded them for the double album *Straight Up With a Twist*.

KW as a jazz chanteuse is by no means a stretch. Jazz is in her bones. “I'm from a musical family,” she said. “My mother was a jazz singer. I used to peek out from behind the curtain and watch her from backstage.” Before she herself morphed into one of the '90s biggest dance artists (according to a recent Billboard ranking, third just behind Madonna and Beyoncé), KW polished her act in Las Vegas lounges. Eventually she signed with a major label, which would prove both good and bad.

The No. 1 single “One More Try” from the groundbreaking album *Land Of The Living* proved to be KW's crossover hit, a topper on both dance and pop radio charts. It would open the door to the string of dance anthems that followed and indelibly connected her to the gay Circuit. When dance music fell out of favor and was replaced by the twin offshoots of commercial bubble-gum pop that produced boy-bands and pop-princesses and DJ-dominated electronica that has overtaken big rooms, the labels lost interest in “genre specific” acts. Feeling unsupported within the system, KW was one of the first artists to self-produce, becoming the CEO of Fly Again Music.

Because of the politics and red tape surrounding music rights and regulations, she discovered that she didn't own most of her early catalog hits. But KW is the sole owner of the contemporary reimaginings (by some of the most sought-after remixers) on *New & Number Ones*. “New audiences are trained to listen to things that are sonically



much more thick and lush," she said. "I wanted to perform these new versions of those hits in a new way."

Fans will easily recognize many of the tracks on the album's set list and will revel in the spin given to classics like "Land of the Living," by the Netherland's Subgroover; and Soul Seekerz's version of "Lovin' You." She describes the album's concept as a "creative way to bring my music to a whole new audience." KW points out that "Feel What You Want," remixed U.K. duo Bimbo Jones, was "a really difficult song to take on. They turned it out."

The album is a return to the genre that made her a clubland favorite and sports some fresh and impressive collaborations tailored for the dance floor, including a new tune, "Everything

That I Got," once again with beatmaster duo Bimbo Jones (Lee Dagger and Marc Jacobs). With dance music coming once again to the foreground and enjoying a surge in popularity, after two decades in command of the genre, Kristine W is pleased with the positive turn dance music is enjoying.

HER LATEST NEW & NUMBER ONES

She is concerned that the dance genre has become oversaturated. "I don't want it to get so much like the pop charts, where you just see the same people [charting] again and again." While strategically assembling her production team on *New & Number Ones*, it was very important to KW that she forgo the group invading radio and marketing themselves on car ads.

"I want to have something that's *my sound*," she said. "It's easier to deal with producers that are more collaborative. You come up with something that is unique because you have these two energies coming together." KW has comfortably toed the line, teaming up with composers as she has with Rollo Armstrong and Rob D, while also serving as a remix producer's muse, as on recent projects with circuit DJ-remixer Tony Moran and the legendary Junior Vasquez. "It becomes harder to interject your own talent when

you're working with producers who are also concerned with being personalities themselves," she said.

Her personality is engineered into the *New* album tracks, taking their place next to the *Number Ones*. "So Close to Me" is one of the new singles that feel completely contemporary but still linked to her signature sound. KW has hinted that it may well be the next single to hit the clubs, remixes sure to follow. With 17 sounds so prominently showcased, *New & Number Ones* has something for every KW fan and those as-yet unfamiliar with her music. Productions by StoneBridge, Chus and Cebellos, Digital Dog, Twisted Dee and more, guarantee that you'll be hearing them on the floor.

WORKING FOR LGBT RIGHTS

The album wasn't the only reason for Kristine W's visit to the Big Apple last month. Lending her talents to a cause she is passionate about, she headlined the Human Rights Campaign Gala event at the Waldorf. In many ways, it provided the perfect note to kick off her promotional tour.

"I'm honored," she said. "Every time I participate in an HRC event, I'm reminded of how far we've come." Recently, Kristine W was

Looking for the Next Dance Diva





New & Number Ones is available now in a full-album 17-track package and an 11-track *Club Mixes* compilation. You can buy the packages and stay connected to KW's upcoming tour dates by visiting her official website at kristinew.com.

 **Tap here for more information**

in her home state of Washington performing at a fundraiser when voters there passed a referendum making marriage equality legal. She was ecstatic. It's a cause she believes in and works hard to help achieve everywhere.

"Everyone should be able to have the right to get married," KW said. "If we're going to talk about equality, you're going to have to let freedom ring." She's always believed that straight allies of the community should have as strong a voice as the gay community. "That's when you can see change happening," she said.

The HRC Gala stage was a hotbed of activity when two talented gay artists – Jason Walker and Ari Gold – joined KW. "I hired them!" she exclaimed. "I wanted to get the hottest backup

singers on the planet. I had to get those guys in the show with me." With this benefit being one of the first stops of her tour, she wanted to give the audience a taste of what they can expect.

"This is the *New & Number Ones Tour*," she said. "There'll be dancers and dancing, and I'll be performing songs from the new album." Already deep into rehearsals, KW promises that she'll be going all-out. Now that her complete oeuvre exists in a digital world, she insists on touring to promote her new material. "I miss record stores and album releases, but I like getting into the clubs and getting on stage. ... And with this album, with these guys that I've worked with – I got lucky – I feel it's been *perfectly* done." KW continues to give it everything she's got. 