

# The Heart

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## ADAM LAMBERT: DON'T LOOK BACK

From *Idol* to Queen to label-less free agent to EDM, the pop star is still searching for his sweet spot: "It's hard for me to be happy"

BY SHIRLEY HALPERIN  
PHOTOGRAPHED BY ZOY GROSSMAN

**A**DAM LAMBERT LOOKS LIKE he's ready to kick some ass. Sauntering through a penthouse at the Hollywood landmark Chateau Marmont, the 6-foot-1 singer towers over a cadre of assistants in a pair of throwback club-kid platform boots that lift him a good half-foot off the ground. To complete the look, Lambert is donning drop-crotch pants and a tight black tank, showing off his arms, which are newly muscled and heavily tattooed, with much of the ink acquired during the last two years. It's a gloomier, rawer look for the former glam-rock revivalist, one better-suited for a guy who calls his inability to be content his "dark side."

Lambert photographed  
May 8 at Chateau  
Marmont in Los  
Angeles. To see video of  
him discussing his  
new sound, go to  
[Billboard.com](http://Billboard.com) or  
[Billboard.com/ipad](http://Billboard.com/ipad).

"It's hard for me to be happy with things," he says. "Even if things are going well, I tend to look at the negatives and be really critical of myself. I think I'm searching for some sort of answer."

After six years in the spotlight, Lambert, 33, is still trying to find himself and his comfort zone in the music industry. His third studio album, *The Original High* (due June 16), features a new Euro-dance-inspired sound via pop maestros **Max Martin** and **Shellback (Taylor Swift, Maroon 5)**, darker lyrics — loneliness is a recurring theme — and a new label home, Warner Bros., after a split with RCA due to creative differences in 2013.

"A lot of us go through life trying to re-create something that has already happened, and that causes us to run around in circles chasing our tail," Lambert says softly. "That's not what life is about."

Raised in San Diego, where his mother worked as an interior designer and his father as a software professional, Lambert started out as an *American Idol* anomaly, a sexually ambiguous rocker with a flair for operatic shrieks and studded leather outfits among earnest pop singers. He came in second place, and revealed himself as gay in a *Rolling Stone* cover story shortly after. Neither hurt his career: His 2010 major-label debut, *For Your Entertainment*, landed two top 10 hits, "If I Had You" and "Whataya Want From Me." His edgier, glammier follow-up, 2012's *Trespassing*, made him the first openly gay male artist to top the Billboard 200. That same year, he entered a new phase in his career, as touring frontman for **Queen**. A strange gig for a young pop star, sure, but one that felt "fated," says Lambert — he auditioned for *Idol* with "Bohemian Rhapsody."

Those were the good times. But then, says Lambert, he faced a growing disconnect with RCA, which, after releasing two albums by the singer, saw only one way to a third: an '80s covers record.

There was just one problem: "I'm not an '80s guy," he says. "I don't know '80s music. I have a lot of respect for the label's opinions, so I sat with the idea and started researching the time period, but it just wasn't resonating with me. It felt forced."

Announcing his split from the label in July 2013 — just three months after he broke up with his

boyfriend of three years, Finnish reality star **Sauli Koskinen** — was "scary," recalls Lambert. "Like, what's going to happen? What's the expression — in a boat without a paddle?" Just as frightening were visions of being another forgotten *Idol* grad. "I thought about that too," he confesses. "I felt unsettled, disenchanted."

He didn't have to feel that way for long. Warner



Lambert (left) onstage with Queen's Brian May in Amsterdam on Jan. 30.

Bros. contacted him the next day, and he eventually signed with the label. "His path has had its bumps and ups and downs," admits Warner CEO **Cameron Strang**. "But he's poised to have a great career. He's more comfortable with himself and his vision."

Last year, Lambert reunited with Martin, the Swedish Grammy winner behind the hits from his first album, who agreed to produce his new project with frequent partner Shellback. "Adam came to us with a new direction that inspired us to get involved in a big way," says Martin. "I'm very excited."

The result often sounds more like EDM than pop or rock. It's not a "dance record" per se, Lambert is careful to note, but it is inspired by the clubs, both in his adopted hometown of Los Angeles and in

Stockholm, where much of *High* was recorded with Martin. "I wanted something more internal and grounded — a little bit less with the theatrical, the camp, the presentation," says Lambert. First single "Ghost Town" sounds like a '90s house banger, but its chorus ("My heart is a ghost town") is anything but chipper. "The album is really honest," he says. "It's about where I'm at in my life right now."

Where's that exactly? Lambert is open about being "boy crazy" but ultimately feeling lonely. "I don't know what I want in relationships, which is probably the reason I'm pouring my energy into my work. I'm dating my album right now," he cracks. "It's going well. We have an open relationship."

Music and fame sometimes fill the void, temporarily. "I'll do a TV show or a photo shoot, and there's so much happening that's really fun, then I get home and I'm like, 'Oh, I'm by myself.' Part of me is independent and another is needy. I have both extremes, and they wrestle all the time."

Ever the "open book" (his words), Lambert takes great pride in being the first out gay male to top the Billboard 200. It's a subject that has come up lately with another openly gay vocal sensation who followed in his footsteps: **Sam Smith**.

"We've commiserated on how it is to be gay in the media," says Lambert. "But a lot has changed. People are not as hung up on it. I'd like to think that the media doesn't sensationalize it as much, but sometimes I'm proven wrong."

One media spectacle he has had his eye on, like the rest of the world, is **Caitlyn Jenner**. "The power Caitlyn has is that she can show and teach everybody what transitioning is from start to finish, and challenge people's perceptions," says Lambert. "It's important to have that ripple effect into the mainstream so people can begin wrapping their heads around it and become more comfortable. Any movement in that direction is positive."

Lambert has always been about forward movement, after all. He may never find his place — but he's not sure if he wants to. "Life's about exploring new things," he says. "It's about getting into new relationships and adventures and traveling. That's what gives me the motive to keep pushing on. Like, what's next?"

## OVERHEARD BY THE BILLBOARD STAFF

### Marc Anthony's Cuban Groove

Cuban duo **Gente de Zona** is the first act to sign to **Marc Anthony's** new entertainment company, Magnus Media. The deal came about after Anthony agreed to be featured on GDZ's new single, "La Gozadera." The Puerto Rican salsa star first heard the song when mutual pal **Pitbull** invited the pair — **Randy Malcolm** and **Alexander Delgado** — to Anthony's house in Miami several months ago. When



Anthony

Malcolm played the track on his phone, Anthony was hooked. "I heard the future of music," he told *Billboard* at the *La Voz Kids* finale in Orlando on June 7. "The song is a smash."

### Kiesza And Kelsey

The Tony Awards brought together two strange bedfellows at New York's Radio City Music Hall on June 7. Actor **Kelsey Grammer** was spotted in the aisles introducing "Hideaway" singer **Kiesza** to his wife, **Kayte Walsh**.



Kiesza

### Empire's First Lady Loves Cool James

*Empire* diva **Taraji P. Henson** expressed appreciation for more than **LL Cool J's** talent at the taping of Spike TV's *Guys' Choice Awards* in Los Angeles on June 6. When Henson presented the rap pioneer with an accolade honoring his 30-year career, she said: "Let me tell you what he does for women and hip-hop — LL, the way you lick your lips... I had to say it!" she exclaimed. Despite looking flustered, LL elicited squeals from the crowd when he licked his lips as he accepted his award. The show, which also featured **Chris Pratt** and **The Rock**, debuts June 18.

Got gossip? Send to tips@billboard.com.