

Rock star KT Tunstall has achieved the rare feat of getting the message on kicking the carbon habit into lurid tabloid newspapers. She told a reporter how she avoided using air conditioning in the summer by “walking around my house naked.” And she added: “I also highly recommend sharing a bath, hitting yourself on the head with a ladle if you need to boil the kettle twice, and turning your heating down by two degrees.”

The 32 year old singer — who has sold five million records, won three BRIT awards, and received a Grammy nomination — has taken steps to reduce her own carbon footprint, and is reaching a wide audience with her forthright, if quirky, advice.

Born to Chinese and Irish parents, she was adopted at two weeks by a physicist and a schoolteacher in the Scottish university town of St. Andrews. “I grew up on a craggy coastline that is crumbling into the wild North Sea,” she says. “To me, nature is an obviously omnipotent force, and we are guests. As long as we are graceful, appreciative lodgers, the earth remains healthy and wondrous. But we are trashing the guest house, and it feels wrong.”

Tunstall did not even start listening to pop music until she was 17. Her home had no television or stereo because her younger brother is profoundly deaf, and the noise interfered with his hearing aid. But she taught herself the guitar from a busker’s booklet, and formed her first band while on a scholarship in Connecticut, USA. She returned to Britain, took the name KT (“I needed to do something with my name to stick out of the crowd”) and performed frequently. But success was a long time coming; she finally broke through as a last minute stand-in on a television show, giving a barnstorming rendition of her single ‘Black Horse and the Cherry Tree’, which then shot to the top of the charts.

She is now intent on using her fame to tackle climate change. “I’m not out to preach”, she says “but global warming is the most important issue in our lives. Even small changes can make a difference. But if we don’t all change our attitudes — and make wider choices — we’ll be living in a very different reality in ten year’s time. It won’t be nice.”

She has set about making such choices in what she admits is “the pretty environmentally unfriendly job” of a rock star. She does not own a car, insists that her tour buses run on biodiesel, adds a small charge to each ticket so that she can offset fans’ trips to see her, and has planted a wood of 5,000 trees.

She has greened her London flat — insulating it with 95 per cent recycled board and sheep’s wool; adding eleven solar panels; fitting water saving devices and using solvent-free paint; and sticking to wood that has either been reclaimed or certified by the Forest Stewardship Council.

And she continues to urge practical measures, in her own style. “Go topical not tropical: these days everyone’s turning their thermostat down a degree or two.” “Tell everyone in the family to have a shower, not a bath: that will stop them singing.” And: “Forgotten what those funny things on the end of your legs are for? Find out. Walk.” GL

KT Tunstall