

KIMBRA

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may not know Kimbra Johnson by name yet, but you likely know her voice. She's the female counterpart on Gotye's global sensation/breakup anthem "Somebody That I Used to Know," which has clocked in 285 million YouTube views thus far. The 22-year-old rising star is a Kiwi who's already gone platinum in Australia, achieving Triple J's #1 spot in the Hottest 100 (a huge feat for any newcomer). Kimbra has also appeared on *JIMMY KIMMEL LIVE*, *SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE*, scored a sold-out tour with Foster the People, and she's even having a track "reimagined" on *GLEE*. But all this pales in comparison to what she's aiming to achieve as she steps into her own spotlight with the US debut of her album, *VOWS*. Kimbra tells us what standing in the doorway to superstardom feels like.

LADYGUNN: You've been writing new material since you were a teenager but you didn't release most of it until recently, though you could have released it and toured at a young age. Are you glad you waited until now?

KIMBRA: At the time I was a teenager, when I signed a record deal, I wanted to put it all out there, everything that represented what I wanted to say musically, but the producer on board at the time felt strongly that I needed to wait until I found my sound and took my time with it. It's been two and a half years since writing this record and I've had a lot of time on my hands so I wanted to finally get out there and get the ball moving now that I've found what I want to say. So yeah, I'm kind of glad I didn't rush out the door.

Since embarking on writing the material years ago, what are some of the biggest things you've learned along the way that have affected the way the album turned out now?

I feel like the record of the different emotions, self-exploration, and discovery I've experienced up to being 22 —finding out what I stand for. A lot of time has been spent figuring out what I'm going to stand for and what I believe, and also what I detach myself from. I worked out what I think a lot of the elements are going to be for the rest of my career as a musician. When I'm involved in it to such an extent, where I'm not just singing the songs and writing them but thinking about the production side of things, and all of the other kinds of technical aspects, it's a challenge for me. But you have to learn to stop tampering with the music and just let it speak for itself and not over-complicate things. It'll continue to be a struggle for me to find that balance—it's been a challenge for me to throw all of the colors at the canvas and see what works and discover what paths I'm going to explore next.

So as an artist, what did you figure out along the way and what do you stand for?

Well honestly, there are certain moments when I'd write a song that didn't feel like it was completely me. So I had to stop to think what songs really represent where I was coming from, what I believed in, how I wanted to sound. And that just came from being direct with myself and writing from the soul, and coming from a place of authenticity and honesty. A beautiful by-product of that is when you do start to tell the truth, to use your convictions, your

instincts, there's an organic symmetry in your music.

That authenticity in song-making isn't always the case in youth-targeted mainstream pop. The raw-boned, young audiences are so used to manufactured bubblegum pop that doesn't have much of that, so it's good that you set out to create something that can appeal to them but that has that authenticity as well.

Yeah, I wanted to try and not be completely safe with this record and get out of my comfort zone and that meant not being scared to sound ugly sometimes. I put in noises that sound a little perfunctory, because I think all of that stuff is real and shows the raw truth behind the emotions. If you try to cover that up by making it sound too perfect and radio-friendly, or like you said, too bubblegum, that doesn't stand the true test of time, and it's not getting out of any comfort zone.

Was it your intention to break out first by doing collaborations, like the duet with Gotye? You recorded your vocals for "Somebody That I Used to Know" in the casual parameters of your bedroom, so when the song massively exploded I can imagine you didn't expect that.

I really didn't. If anyone had told me it would be number one on the charts alongside Justin Bieber, I'd be shocked. Especially because Gotye is a kind of an eccentric, experimental artist and so it was baffling for us that it blew up to that degree. It was never in anyone's plan. I think that's beautiful and shows the power of the song and the Internet. It's those simple emotions that really connect with people.

Here in America you're just breaking out, but in Australia you've achieved pretty significant success, so is it a nice change for you to be in a place where you're not yet that well-known and aren't burdened by any expectations?

It's a more refreshed feeling for sure. It's fun to come here and play for new people. I like going back and forth and seeing the new audience versus the fans that have been there from the start. I'm happy not to be

knuckled down to one city or place. It's nice because in a way, I'm rediscovering my music as I perform it for the new fans who have just discovered it. I've been lucky to have escaped being pigeonholed or overexposed thus far because the album is pretty eclectic. I don't feel too burdened by any of that at this point because I feel the songs will speak for themselves.

Let's talk about your first American headlining tour. What a lot of the American audiences don't realize is that you've been performing in stadiums since a very young age - did that help you cultivate your stage presence as it is now?

Yeah, being in front of lot of people since I was young helped me conquer any fears and helped me become more comfortable. I learned how to hold myself in front of a crowd. Having a stage presence isn't something anyone can teach you, it's just something that develops as you become more sure of yourself.

What is one of your biggest and deepest fantasies?

I often daydream about a house next to a forest or by a lake with a vegetable garden. A place where I can be in nature and go on long walks. I think I often have fantasies about retreating, becoming a recluse or being kind of isolated. I guess I'll have to pursue that one day, certainly not anytime soon. *Laughs.* ■

