



SONY MUSIC

Kellie Pickler - Biography

Kellie Pickler is everything that's right about that uniquely modern place where reality and celebrity come together. She is first and foremost a force of nature, a young woman who followed a restless small-town dream to the upper reaches of the music world. She came armed with real talent, for she is a singer who has learned well from idols like Tammy, Patsy, Loretta and Dolly. Still, it takes much more to enter the cultural consciousness as firmly and unmistakably as she has, and Kellie brings more in spades.

It starts with star quality, that undefinable but clearly identifiable trait she possesses in abundance. She combines beauty, wit, humor and guilelessness in a way that has attracted fans from her first days in the national spotlight, and she has proven over and over that there is a great deal of substance under the blond-haired, light-hearted exterior.

Kellie established herself quickly as both a singer and a songwriter to be reckoned with, co-writing her first hit, "Red High Heels," her first gold single. Her debut album, *Small Town Girl*, produced two follow-up hits--the poignant "I Wonder," which she also co-wrote, and the light-hearted "Things That Never Cross A Man's Mind." Together, they propelled the release to near-platinum status.

Her second album, *Kellie Pickler*, for which she co-wrote half the songs, spawned the uplifting "Don't You Know You're Beautiful" and "Best Days of Your Life." The latter, co-written by Kellie with Taylor Swift, quickly became the biggest hit of her career, rising to the Top Ten and earning gold in digital sales. In fact, the song speaks volumes about Kellie's life in that her close friendship with Swift, like her friendship with another co-writer, Aimee Mayo, has helped her with the process of seamlessly turning the ups and downs of her life into compelling art.

Just how far those hits and that 24-carat personality have carried her can be seen in even a short list of her achievements. She won three 2008 CMT Music Awards--Breakthrough Video, Tearjerker Video and Performance of the Year--all for "I Wonder," and has earned many other award nominations. She has received two ASCAP awards citing "Red High Heels" and "I Wonder" as among the most performed country songs of the year. Both her albums debuted #1 country and Top Ten overall in *Billboard*, a feat equaled by only six other females in country music. She has hosted *The View*, graced the cover of *USA Weekend*, and served as correspondent in Times Square for "Dick Clark's Rockin' Eve" with Ryan Seacrest to usher in 2009.

A straight shooter with an infectious zest for life, Kellie has learned to balance her "leap now, look later" disposition and her need to oversee her life and career as she lives out her lifelong desire to control her own destiny. In fact, lest anyone be tempted to underestimate her, it's worth remembering that in a brief time, Kellie went from a 19-year-old with a troubled home life to a young woman running a multi-million-dollar business--"the Kellie Pickler Company," as she calls it--handling all the challenges and responsibilities of fame in a fast-paced world.

Kellie's dream took root in Albemarle, North Carolina, where determination and optimism were her answers to an often tough and uncertain childhood. Raised by her grandparents, she developed the spirit of an inveterate dreamer. With her uncanny ability to temper tough realities with humor, she says, referring to her tour bus, "As a child I thought, 'I'm going to be a big country star and get out of this damn trailer.' Then I go and get one. I mean, it's a million-dollar trailer, but it's still a trailer!"

The first song she learned to sing was Hank Sr.'s "My Bucket's Got a Hole In It," and the first music she owned was a George Strait tape. A telling moment came when, just before her eighth birthday, she went with her grandparents to visit her father.

"He was incarcerated," she says, "but he had been talking to my grandparents about helping get me a birthday

present. He asked whether I wanted a little TV for my bedroom or a little stereo. I said I wanted a radio so I could listen to the country radio station. I always wanted to be part of country music. I used to think the coolest thing in the world would be to turn on the radio and hear, "Coming up, the new record from Kellie Pickler."

She took part in a handful of talent contests, worked as a Sonic waitress and studied to become a paralegal. Then, in the fall of 2005, she auditioned in Greensboro, North Carolina, for American Idol. Her raw talent and her attractive and unfiltered personality won her a legion of fans, among them the sometimes jaundiced Simon Cowell.

She reached the show's Final 6, signed with BNA Records and recorded her first album in whirlwind sessions sandwiched between dates on the Idol tour. Its release established her firmly in the country marketplace, and her breath-of-fresh-air personality did the rest.

A lifelong student of country music, she is a fan of legends including Willie Nelson and Merle Haggard as well as modern-day talents like Jamey Johnson and Lee Ann Womack. The lessons she draws from them have become part of her artistic make-up.

"I write what my soul tells me to write," she says. "I realized the key to writing is just being true and writing what is real. It's why country music has such an impact. It's music people relate to because it's about telling true stories." She treats her singing the same way.

"I can't remember a time in my life when I didn't like to sing. It's a way of expressing who I am, and it's therapeutic for me. It's how I express what I'm going through. People release their emotions, their happiness or sadness, in different ways—dancing, painting, running. Mine is singing. That and writing are healing for me."

Kellie's insulated upbringing left her with a thirst for travel, adventure and self-development. An avid reader--she can often be found in her state room on her bus, curled up with a book or her Kindle II--she is a walking advertisement for personal fulfillment. That has led her to explore the world both out of curiosity and out of a desire to take her talents where they can be of use to others.

"The USO tours I've been part of have definitely been the highlight of my career and my life," she says. "It has been the most impactful, life-changing thing I've been able to do."

Her first tour, to Iraq, became a moving GAC special, "My USO Diary," and she followed that with a trip to Germany, Afghanistan, Iraq, Kosovo and England. "The greatest way to learn is to travel," she says. "There are so many amazing people I've met that have changed my life for the better. It's something that can help us not be so judgmental and close-minded." She is above all a woman whose music, like her life, is a gift to those around her.

"If I've learned anything," she says, "it's that we take so many things for granted. I love it when something I read or someone I meet makes me think, 'You've got it made, girl.' I don't want to dwell on what I don't have. I want to appreciate life and the good things and people I'm surrounded by. I know that's good for the soul."