



kim petras

Words by NICOLE MOOREFIELD Photos by CATHERINE POWELL

FOR AS LONG AS SHE CAN remember, Kim Petras has dreamed of becoming a popstar. This fantasy is not uncommon in young girls, who idolize Britney and Christina before they can spell diva, but Kim has put in the work to make pop-stardom her reality and has been reaching goals nonstop, a veritable powerhouse of success.

Kim grew up obsessed with music in Cologne, Germany. She wrote her first song at 12 after discovering songwriting documentaries and becoming instantly fascinated with pop. “It was just a sad song about having a crush on a boy in my school,” Kim remembers, but it was an important step in launching her songwriting career.

As a kid, she could invariably be found writing and producing out of her bedroom. Her first big break was a German laundry detergent commercial at 16, which landed Kim her first record deal. “Ever since I was young, I was trying to become a good songwriter,” Kim explains. “I don’t think anybody thought I would really go and do it.” Though her family and small circle of friends enjoyed her music and supported her creative endeavors, “I never really found people who liked pop music as much as I did in Germany,” Kim reflects. So at 19, she made the life-changing decision to move to Los Angeles with no money or connections.

Her bed was a studio couch, her writing partner anyone willing.

To many, Kim’s dream seemed impossible, but she had a plan: write one big hit for someone else, then use that success to launch her own artistic career. Kim’s goal was achieved when Fergie recorded one of her songs. Although the track was never released, the publicity she garnered led to an American publishing deal.

Now 25, Kim is working on her first record. Her debut single, *I Don’t Want It At All*, went straight to number 1 on the Spotify Viral Charts in 2017. Since then, Kim has released five more songs and was featured on Charli XCX’s song “Unlock It”.

Kim’s sound is unlike anything else on the radio today. “I like to think I have a unique perspective,” she remarks. “It’s definitely all-out, unapologetic pop.” Her songs are fast-paced, glamorous, and energetic. “No song is ever inspired by the same thing,” she adds, from emotions and conversations to colors or movie quotes.

From the start, Kim has written in English, as German artists tended to wax poetic and acoustic. At first, Kim wrote alone and prioritized quantity over quality, but now she is focused on collaboration and creating one great song. “It’s such an important thing and such a beautiful thing to find

[co-writers] you really connect with,” she says, as the intimacy of songwriting creates strong bonds and better songs.

“I love when you’re in the studio with another artist and you can pick their brain about what they’re going through and you can write about it together and bring something out of them,” Kim explains. When writing with artists in the studio, the songs are created with them in mind, but of the songs she writes alone, Kim only gives away wrong fits. “Whenever I write a song that I know is totally me and has me in it too much, I would never give it away,” she says.

“I definitely see visuals while writing,” Kim notes. She has a color, outfit, hairstyle, or scene in mind for every song. As she writes, Kim hopes to create vivid images, which she reinforces with ambitious music videos. Fashion shines in her visuals — inspired by her stylists, 2000s Dior, and Karl Lagerfeld.

The biggest influences on Kim’s music are her friends. Her most frequent collaborators are lil aaron and Baby E, as well as songwriting partner Aaron Joseph. When they met four years ago, Aaron was the first to appreciate Kim as her own artist, and they have been best friends ever since. “[If you’re] not having fun writing songs in the studio, then you’re doing some-

thing wrong,” she adds.

Other inspirations include Freddie Mercury, Billy Idol, Cyndi Lauper, SZA, Kendrick Lamar, and Rae Sremmurd — the only commonality being writing prowess. Her dream collaboration would be with Kendrick, Drake, or Rihanna.

Out of all the songs she has written, the ones closest to Kim’s heart are her latest single, “Heart to Break” — which took months to write and perfect and “really sums up my whole love life” — and the song coming out next, an “anthemic-sounding, crazy girlfriend song.”

Now Kim has secured a place in the world she once dreamed about. “I’ve researched the shit out of [what] it takes to becoming a popstar,” Kim reveals, so the journey has come with few surprises, “but it’s definitely not glamorous once you’re doing it.” Being a pop sensation is a full-time job and Kim rarely gets to see her friends, but she “wouldn’t want it any other way.”

Kim has spent the past few months on the road for a radio tour. It’s a wild lifestyle, living out of a suitcase and waking up early in a new city every day, but Kim loves it. Her favorite city so far is New Orleans: the jazz bars, food, and culture hold a place in her heart, and “you can drink out in the street, which you can’t in L.A.,” she mentions.

One of the most rewarding aspects of celebrity is fandom. Kim tells about a trip to Disneyland where she rode Space Mountain with her fans and chatted to them about *Kingdom Hearts*. “I don’t remember how it was before them. I really love them and I feel super

loved,” she enthuses. “My fans just understand me completely.”

Another thing making Kim unique is her historic status as the youngest German to undergo gender confirmation surgery (at age 16). Kim began hormone therapy at 12, becoming the subject of documentaries and talk show discussions. Kim’s parents guided her through all the attention, teaching her “that not everybody’s as lucky to have supportive parents as me, and that there’s a huge suicide rate with transgender people,” she recalls. The documentaries were meant to help other young transgender people, which she is immensely proud of. “People still write me to this day that I inspired them to live their lives as they want to,” she says.

“I used to not tell people I worked with that I was transgender,” Kim shares. “I just really worked hard to get where I am. I think it’s amazing that I get to help other people that are transgender and fight for that openly, but at the same time, it is who I am.” While being transgender has impacted her experiences in the studio both positively and negatively, “I don’t know how it is any other way,” she admits.

For every goal Kim meets, five more spring up. She dreams of a No. 1 single and hopes to keep creating “sick” albums, songs, and videos. “I only want to keep getting better at doing what I do,” she adds. Kim is ambitious and driven, qualities that made her dream a reality. She hopes to one day headline an arena tour and to “always keep evolving and never repeat myself. Artistically, I want to be great.” NKO



