

# KIMBRA'S

AFTER A HEADY BEGINNING, THE THIRD ALBUM FROM **KIMBRA** SHOWS HOW THE MUSICIAN HAS GROWN.

BEFORE 'SOMEBODY THAT I USED TO KNOW', before she won a Grammy, before career moves to Melbourne and then New York, a local New Zealand television station captured Kimbra on the record, divulging her biggest hopes and dreams in a three-minute segment about how music is made.

"Hi, I'm Kimbra," the precocious then-11-year-old said, waving at the camera. "And one day, I'd love to be a pop star."

Just shy of 10 years later, Kimbra Lee Johnson would get exactly what she'd asked for: she'd land the cameo of a lifetime with Gotye, use its success to propel her debut album to the top of the charts and return three years later with *The Golden Echo*, an album that made her uncompromising vision and dedication to authentic artistry plainly clear. It's the sort of rise most artists only dream of, a one-in-a-million success story. And it's not over yet.

This month Kimbra is back with *Primal Heart*, the album she describes as her "best yet", the product of four years of growing, experimenting and absorbing new ideas. If first impressions are anything to go by, the New Zealand export might have had a change in outlook since we last heard from her. Her two lead singles ('Everybody Knows' and the brilliant 'Top of the World') focus on themes of disillusionment and power rather than punch-drunk love and 90s music. The stripped-back videos feature Kimbra stony-faced and strong, rather than grinning and surrounded by a frame full of confetti, primary colours and synchronised back-up dancers. Does that mean Kimbra has ditched the unapologetic positivity of her previous two albums?

"I don't think as a whole the record feels dark, but it feels tougher and

perhaps more realised," she tells me down the phone from New York, which she now calls home. "I keep coming back to the words 'courage' and 'boldness' on this record. This record feels like it's quite confrontational, in terms of confronting things within myself, within relationships in my life. And being a New Zealander in America and all the things that evokes, which is a lot." She pauses. "Maybe it's something about living in America at a time when Donald Trump is president, but it's also to do with having more courage to have an opinion on things and use my platform as an artist to speak."

And speak she does. In the wake of the Harvey Weinstein reckoning, Kimbra used a post on her blog to call out the music industry sexism

woman is expressive it must mean she's interested."

But Kimbra is keen to point out that *Primal Heart* isn't a pessimistic affair. "The whole thing is about exploring duality. A lot of the darker songs find a home among the more triumphant ones and touch on themes of idealism and transcendence and I think that's always going to be part of what I do. I'll always be playful, but there's a strength that comes through." The songs draw on big themes – the "primordial and raw matter of what makes us up" and the way "humans need love in our lives to survive".

And as for her pop star aspirations? "I've made some pretty conscious choices to be more anonymous," she reveals. "After

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she has experienced over her career – unwanted advances from professionals she was working with, men in studios who assumed she didn't know how to produce (she does).

"I'm glad these things are being talked about because, of course, I've been in those situations as well – where you watch someone completely misinterpret who you are and start to blatantly disrespect your craft by suggesting that your greatest value is your body," she sighs.

"You go into the studio and bare your heart and soul while you're singing – for me, that's a big part of who I am. And [you're met with] the idea that this could be some kind of open invitation. It's something that seems to slip under the radar time and time again – the sense of entitlement in these industries. If a

the Grammys, I could've moved to Hollywood and done all the parties, but I just went to a farm outside of LA and hung out with a bunch of animals and made a record with Thundercat and a bunch of crazy musicians. And then I moved to New York, away from the industry. I feel like I'm making decisions that are more about protecting my sense of self and my search for grounding.

"Whenever things get high like that, I want to find ways of grounding myself back to being a nobody," she adds. "Because at the end of the day, I think I am a nobody."

It's not true, but it's nice of her to say.

by **Katie Cunningham**  
(@katiecunning)

» *Primal Heart is out now.*





TIMBRE