

KELSEA

BALLERINI

PHOTOS BY ADDIE WHELAN | WORDS BY ABBY FOX



In this modern age of constantly turning out new and unique artists, it can be hard for young musicians to find their footing, but 23-year-old Kelsea Ballerini seems to be doing everything right. This singer-songwriter established quite a following in the country music scene with her number one breakout hit, "Love Me Like You Mean It." She went on to release two more number one singles, becoming the first ever female country artist to go number one with her first three consecutive singles from her debut album.



Following her hit album, *The First Time*, Kelsea started to gain exposure beyond the country music world with her immediate radio success, as well as receiving CMT's second-annual Breakout Artist of the Year award in 2016, and being nominated for a Best New Artist Grammy award in 2017. She also hit the road and toured with country greats, including Lady Antebellum, Tim McGraw and Keith Urban, to just name a few.

Throughout this whirlwind of the past few years, Kelsea has remained true to herself and her songwriting. She has spent most of the last decade creating music based on her own life, to inspire and motivate others to live freely and fearlessly. In her debut album *The First Time*, the Tennessee native sings about the pressures placed on women and beauty in "Stilettos," describes the feeling of getting stood up in "XO," and even reflects back on her parents' divorce in "Secondhand Smoke."

After the heartbreak from her parents' divorce at a young age, Kelsea truly discovered her love of songwriting,

and her songs continue to tell honest stories about the struggles and successes in her life. "Growing up and being around the world and meeting more people, and even now falling in love...so many different things and different perspectives feed into your writing style," the artist explains. "I think when you first start writing you're kind of discovering what your writing style is and what your lyrical voice is, and I think that mine's changed even from the first record."

Following her first album release, Kelsea hit the road on her own sold out headline tour, aptly called *The First Time Tour*. Now, she's currently on tour with Thomas Rhett as a special guest on his 2017 *Home Team Tour*. "Three years ago I started on a radio tour and I went to pretty much every city in the United States, and it's been really cool to go back to those places and start playing different sized venues and hearing people singing along to songs, and even come back and sell out my first venue," says Kelsea. "It's been really cool to watch it grow."



No matter where she is, Kelsea's favorite song to perform live is her hit "Peter Pan." She says, "It really changed my life...and everyone really seems to sing that one the loudest, so it's a really special moment." With lyrics about personal growth and never growing up, it's easy for fans to relate to her timeless message, "Always going to fly away; Just because you know you can; Never going to learn there's no such place as Neverland; You don't understand; You'll never grow up..."

Kelsea has a strong connection with her fans, and social media allows her to interact with them daily. "I walk off stage every night and I look at my phone and I get on Twitter. I love seeing someone in the lawn that was in the very back of the amphitheater post a video of them dancing along to an unreleased song... because then I'm able to message them and get them backstage and take a picture. It's a really amazing way to connect with people instantly."

While Kelsea uses social media to connect with fans, she is also aware of the dangers of this internet-driven age. "People feel super confident behind their phones and behind their computers...I put myself

out there so I'm very aware that people are going to say whatever they want and that's totally fine." She also explains that she tries not to take all the comments personally. "I feel like art is very subjective and I know that the music that I make isn't for everyone, so people are allowed to have opinions about that." In a time when it is so simple to become obsessed with everything circulating online, Kelsea's humility and authenticity are completely refreshing.

Recently, Kelsea shared the music video for her heartbreaking new song, "Legends," and the video already has over two million views. Directed by Jeff Venable, the music video follows a couple's relationship from its romantic beginning to its tragic end. Throughout the video, shots of Kelsea wandering around an ocean-side cliff are interspersed. The singer gave us some insight into being on set while making the video. "It was in July and you would think that California in July would be beautiful, and that was so not the case. It was freezing cold but we tried to make it look like it was warm and cozy in the video, but it was not, it was freezing the whole time."

"Legends" is just the first single from Kelsea's upcoming sophomore album, which features 11 other tracks, including the title track, "Unapologetically." The singer-songwriter cannot be more excited for fans to hear this album. "I wrote over 200 songs for this record and I feel like I really made the biggest effort I could to make

sure that the whole record was thought-through and intentional and important." She hopes that when people listen to her new songs, they really feel and embrace their emotions. The album title could not be a more perfect description of how Kelsea Ballerini lives her life: unapologetically. *Unapologetically* is out November 3rd.



