

Kimberly Townsend has become a new star on the Serbian internet since she covered songs by EKV and Bajaga. She spoke with our outlet about why an American woman is covering Serbian songs, and also talked about her Serbian husband, travels, and what surprised her in our country.

How old are you, and where are you from?

I'm 34 years old. I was born and raised in Collingswood, New Jersey, a vibrant town with a warm, welcoming energy. I moved to NYC for college, lived for half a year in London, lived for half a year on Martha's Vineyard (where my husband Ogi and I met!), which is a small island off the coast of Massachusetts, before moving back to NYC, where we've lived now for almost 10 years.

Is music your hobby or your main occupation? What's your favorite music genre?

Singing and songwriting is my greatest passion and I work on it full-time, but it's not my only source of income. The music industry offers no guaranteed financial security until you are very famous. Until then, I'll always have a part time job so I can continue to save for our future. I am a nanny twice a week for two little girls who I love like family.

My favorite music genre is singer/songwriter. Some of my favorites artists are Dodie Clark, Tracy Chapman, and Regina Spektor. My favorite songs are lyric driven, emotive songs that explore how it feels to live this life. It's what I most love to write about, and my favorite to listen to.

What made you do the 52 week cover challenge?

From spring through fall of 2019, I went on tour. Traveling every week and getting to share my music was a thrilling experience, but by the end I was craving quiet time at home after traveling for so long. Separately, though I've played covers in concerts, I'd never posted them publicly to YouTube, so I liked the idea of getting to challenge myself in that new way creatively, not just musically but as a producer as well. Not only did I learn the chords and memorize the lyrics for a new song every week, which was a challenge all in itself, but I dove into the production side as well. I learned about lighting, microphones and cameras, and all the audio work that happens in post production, all the mixing and mastering. I've learned a ton but in many ways I still have a long way to go.

Lastly, creating a campaign like this with regular uploads can sometimes be a great way for a YouTube channel to grow. The YouTube algorithms are really powerful - the more a creator uploads videos, the more often the algorithms will recommend them to strangers. I am proud of my original songs, they are like pieces of my heart, and I would love for them to reach as many ears as possible. Posting covers is a way to bring in new fans who might check out your original music after listening to a cover of a song they already know and love.

Why did you choose to cover Serbian songs? Is there any special connection between you and Serbia? Do you know anything more about our culture?

My husband Ogi is Serbian, so the Serbian culture is a big part of our life; the music, traditions, and delicious food. Ogi's entire family lives in Serbia, so half of our hearts are there - we can't wait till the pandemic ends and we can visit and hug our family we love and miss so much. Your culture is very warm and welcoming. For example, the first time I traveled to Serbia, I was surprised and touched that any home you enter, whether it's family or a total stranger, you are offered slippers as soon as you walk in the door! I had never experienced anything like that before in all my travels around the world. Such warm, open hospitality. And in every home I've ever gone to, coffee and amazing food is offered as soon as you sit down.

Do you plan to cover more Serbian songs? Is there any musician you're really fond of?

Yes! I'd like to continue to share Serbian covers - I have my next few already planned out. My next cover is the second Serbian song I ever heard! I'm keeping it a surprise for now, but I'll be sharing more about it soon via my Instagram - @kimblyy. We listen to lots of different Serbian artists so it's hard to choose just one, but lately we've been listening to a lot of Đorđe Balašević.

Your accent is impressive. Did you have any trouble concerning the Serbian language?

Thank you so much! That's generous of you to say. I've been hearing this from so many new fans, but I have to tell you it surprises me because I feel like I make mistakes all the time. Some of the Serbian letters are tricky for me - lj and nj specifically. But over the years I've gotten better at the pronunciation. Padeži are super challenging for me! I try my best but I definitely make many mistakes whenever I speak in Serbian. My goal is to be fluent one day, but I have a long way to go.

How's your career going so far, and what are your plans for the future?

My career is going well, but in many ways I'm just at the beginning. And if it's helpful to know for any other artists out there, the success I'm experiencing now is only because I got out of my own way. I stopped waiting for my songs and videos to be perfect. I stopped sitting in my insecurities and avoiding what scared me.

I spent a long time in my twenties kind of hibernating creatively. I had big dreams but I was afraid to fully pursue them. I grew up performing in Musical Theatre. It was my greatest passion and the main focus of my life growing up. I was fortunate to play so many amazing roles over the years. I went to college for a degree in theatre, and graduated with plans to pursue a Broadway career, but kind of accidentally fell into songwriting, so my focus shifted a bit. But during college and for a period of time after, the self doubt crept in and took over. I played concerts every once in awhile and performed in theatre shows, but it became more and more rare. I believed I had something unique to share creatively, but I got lost in self doubt and insecurities, so I avoided consistently and seriously pursuing my dreams.

It wasn't until a few years ago, when a few famous yoga instructors on Instagram heard my original music and started posting yoga videos set to my songs, that I fully woke up creatively. Literally overnight I had thousands of new people hearing my music, and sharing with me how it was helping them to heal and grow and connect with themselves. I was in shock and so grateful to hear that these songs I had written as my own cathartic, therapeutic way to process my feelings, were also resonating with and helping others. That led me to going into the studio and recording my very first single, Wild, which charted in Europe and trended on Spotify and got my name out there in a whole new way. From there I went back into the studio and recorded my debut EP, The History and the Heart of It, then went on tour.

Now that I've wrapped up my 52 WEEKS || 52 COVERS campaign, my focus will be on sharing more original music. Over the next few months, I'll be creating the fuller instrumentation around these songs that are already fully written, and will then head into the studio to record. And I'm going to continue creating Serbian covers. It's a real honor to hear how much the Serbian community has enjoyed these first two, and I can't wait to share more.