

## Kelly Izzo Shapiro Extended Bio

Writing songs has become a part of my daily routine, like brushing my teeth or taking a shower. I just don't feel right if I don't take time to sit with an instrument, clear my head and write. It has become my way of energizing my day. Writing daily has allowed me to reflect on more than my own personal struggles and victories. If I wrote about myself everyday, I would quickly run out of things to say, so I write about the people and things I see around me and their delicate moments. By focusing on individuals, I can begin to understand the human experience more personally. I believe through these intimate looks larger truths are revealed.

I started writing when I was 12 years old. Throughout middle and high school, I performed in school talent shows, local coffee houses and festivals. I instantly fell in love with the ability to connect with an audience through song. Everyone interprets music in their own way and therefore a song will resonate differently with each person, but ironically, it is this unique perception that brings people together.

In 2008 I enrolled in the Music Conservatory at SUNY Purchase and spent the next four years learning as much as I could about the art of songwriting. It was at Purchase that I began writing at least one song every day. I find it beneficial to sit down and commit to a song until it is completed. I cannot leave a song in fragments like many other writers. If I let an idea sit for too long it can escape. Songs are like butterflies, if I don't catch them, they fly away.

During college I wrote almost 2,000 songs and I continue to write daily. At the end of my freshman year, I entered the Woody Guthrie Songwriting contest and won an opportunity to perform in Guthrie's hometown of Okemah, OK at the Woody Guthrie Festival. It was an amazing experience being able to sing in honor of one of my musical heroes, a man who dedicated his life to telling the story of the common man.

In 2009 I partnered with a drama group in Rochester, New York to work on an original musical, which became *Alice Unraveled*, a story of a young girl struggling with post-traumatic stress after a sexual assault. The concept was developed prior to production but I wrote the script and music one scene at a time and sent it to the director using online media. It was inspiring to work in collaboration, to get immediate feedback on the scenes and songs. The frequent critique kept the writing process fresh and alive and taught me to view my work from multiple perspectives. In May 2010, *Alice Unraveled* was performed for the first time. It was an incredible experience. I have never been more nervous and excited.

Writing musicals has since become a passion of mine. The next two years were dedicated to refining *Alice Unraveled*. In 2011, I teamed up with fellow Purchase Studio Composition student Michael Hart who added arrangements to the show. During our junior and senior years, Mike and I worked along with Professor Jim McElwaine in an independent study course that focused on writing for the stage. Jim McElwaine read the script, liked it and introduced me to TONY Nominated Barry Keating, the writer and composer for *Starmites*. I met with Barry multiple times to discuss the show and he encouraged me to produce it at SUNY Purchase. Following Keating's advice, throughout 2011 and 2012, I worked vigorously to assemble a talented production team. The show went up in March 2012, fully arranged.

After college I had the honor of participating in the CAP21 Writer's Residency program. My time there ultimately blossomed into the inspiration for a new musical. I wrote dozens of songs based on the artwork of Renee Magritte. I am currently working on weaving these pieces together to tell a story about how art can be a connective and healing force.

In 2013 *Alice Unraveled* was accepted as a developmental reading in the New York Musical Theater Festival. At NYMF I was able to work with an amazing cast and received valuable insight from skilled theater professionals. With every reiteration of the show I find new ideas, parts to tweak and places that need expansion. I continue to look at the script with a critical eye and plan on making improvements, but I am proud of how audiences have responded to it so far. Many people have told me that it has moved them, and I am most pleased that it has opened up conversations about the problems associated with teenage sexual assault.

Following my success at NYMF I spent the next few years in Manhattan working on my musicals and teaching music classes to children ages 6 months - 5 years. Teaching was the most rewarding experience of my life. I learned so much interacting with the creative, limitless energy that kid's possess. They forced me to consider problems from all angles and to really dig into the "why". Seeing the joy that music brought to young children inspired me to start creating my own children's songs and stories. In 2014 I developed *Bitty Bird*, a quirky but shy bird with a love of singing and a huge imagination. I am currently developing a TV show pilot and some musical theater pieces about Bitty and her woodland friends.

Manhattan proved too chaotic for me and though I had some amazing friends and memories there in 2015 I decided to move back home to Rochester. I missed my family, crisp upstate New York apples and the serene country side. I had been dealing with some mysterious health problems for years and I wanted to take some time to heal and focus on getting better. It was a difficult decision to make but ultimately it proved to be the right one.

Days after moving back home I met my husband Mike Shapiro at a local open mike night. I was blown away by his melodic, introspective guitar playing and his lyrical story telling. We hit it off and started playing music together shortly thereafter. A few years later and we are happily married and living in a house with more guitars than rooms to put them in. I could not have dreamed of a better partner.

In 2018 I had the joy of collaborating with my parents on a musical theater mash up of "Cinderella" and "The Emperor's New Clothes". *Silk & Cinders* premiered in April 2018 and was met with great success and love in our community. I am hoping to refine it and to work on another production of it in the future.

Currently, I am enjoying performing around Rochester with Mike. We are hoping to get a combo of musicians together to perform and record with. I am also keeping busy working on new musical theater projects, Bitty Bird and other children's music and promoting my second full length album entitled *Bad Shark*.