LINDSEY STIRLING: SONG BY SONG

CRYSTALIZE

There’s no precedent for Lindsey Stirling’s success. She plays the violin. Her songs have no lyrics. A manager didn’t develop her image and a producer never nurtured her sound. Despite her grassroots entry into stardom, Lindsey can claim an international following and a powerful online presence that is the envy of other artists.

In some ways, the music industry has both anticipated and dreaded the rise of an artist like Lindsey Stirling. And her success flies in the face of a business that all but ignored her attempts to break in.

Lindsey’s story begins simply enough. She was born September 21st, 1986 in Santa Ana, California and spent her childhood in Gilbert, Arizona. Lindsey’s parents were avid fans of the arts and their children soon began to take on artistic interests of their own. But with a tight family budget, a five-year-old Lindsey had to choose between two budding passions: dance and violin.

Lindsey choose the violin, but did not let go of her dream to dance and decided to combine her two passions on own. It wasn’t easy. Yet even without formal training, the observant Stirling worked hard to become an accomplished dancer.

In High School, Lindsey joined a rock band and wrote her first violin rock song. And an early performance of the song helped her win the title of Miss Arizona Junior title and earned her the Spirit Award at the national competition.

After graduating high school, she moved to Provo, Utah to attend Brigham Young University to pursue a degree in recreational therapy. Yet Lindsey couldn’t put aside her passion for music and in 2010 she put her education on hold to sign up for the hit NBC show America’s Got Talent.

Her first performances thrilled the judges and in early August, Lindsey excitedly performed in the show’s quarterfinal. But dreams of finally making it big came to a grinding halt when judge Piers Morgan buzzed her out. Morgan offered harsh criticism of her performance and Sharon Osborne also argued that a violinist couldn’t make it out a group.

Stirling was devastated by the decision, but decided not to give up on her unique style of performance. She took advantage of every opportunity to perform, paying at open mic nights and parties. Lindsey also renewed focus on her Internet presence, uploading videos to her YouTube Channel: Lindseystomp.

Not long after her final performance on America’s Got Talent, cinematographer and fellow Brigham Young student, Devin Graham contacted her in hopes of putting a YouTube video together. They agreed to tackle her song “Spontaneous Me.” Filmed on May 9, 2011, the video was a breakout hit.

Over the next 10 months Devin and Stirling teamed up for more videos – always aiming for an avant guard experience. One of the most unique would be “Crystallize.”

Inspired by the science behind the crystallization of water, Lindsey struggled for several months to capture the song’s melody – and worked hard to blend the contrasting elements of violin and dub step. When the song was finished, Devin and Lindsey traveled to the Ice Castles attraction in Silverthorne, Colorado to shoot the video. After the video was uploaded, the pair realized it wasn’t going to be just another video.
By the end of 2012, “Crystalize” would become the 8th most watched YouTube video of the year. The song and video struck an instant connection with fans and helped prove Lindsey’s grassroots platform could work in an industry dominated by suits. Within two years, “Crystalize” would garner nearly 100 million views.

In the fall of 2012, Lindsey decided to create her first album – without the help of a record label. The lack of a label allowed her to create her own sound and brand.

Lindsey’s example proved that an Internet model for marketing an artist could succeed. Her ability to triumph after being shut out by labels is also a shining example for other hopeful musicians. With “Crystalize,” Lindsey may have just changed the music industry game forever.

**ELEMENTS**

Lindsey Stirling, the self-made dub step violinist with killer dance moves, had been knocked down on America’s Got Talent… but she defied her critics and created her own big break when she uploaded her mega-hit video, Crystallize.

Now, with a legion of fans wanting more and eager to continue her with momentum, Lindsey searched for inspiration. She returned the studio with an open mind and spent time improvising and coming up with diverse melodies. Her unique mix of dubstep and violin would have made record labels nervous – but creating her brand alone gave Lindsey the freedom to explore. And when it came to “Elements,” Lindsey’s music was first inspired by visuals.

Moved by imagery of slow motion water, fire and other elements, Lindsey worked diligently to create music to match. Once the song was written, she pushed forward on making the video – producing, costuming and creating the sets herself. “Elements” was filmed in a whirlwind of creativity, taking only five days to be completed.

Hoping lightning would strike twice - Lindsey’s uploaded the video on September 18, 2012. Within its first month - the instrumental song racked up over 400,000 views and would eventually garner roughly forty million.

Lindsey’s videos have also become an integral part of her live performances and help the fringe genre of dubstep enter the mainstream.

While the success of “Elements” fortified her reputation as a musician, it also drew attention to her dancing. Passionate about dance since childhood, Lindsey put down her violin to take part in YouTube channel dance competition, Dance Show Down.

Her work ethic and energy gained the respect of other dancers and helped prove her abilities to the world. Lindsey was now armed to take control of every aspect of her career.

Following the success of Elements – and without the restrictions of a major label – Lindsey was free to explore new territory and decided to team up with NBC “Sing Off” winners Pentatonix. Their collaboration would earn them the first ever YouTube award for “Response of the Year.”

Lindsey also demonstrated her ability to hold her own with other stars. In 2014, SoundExchange honoured Lindsey, alongside Grammy-Award winner Lorde, and chart topping duo Macklemore & Ryan Lewis, as recipients of with their first-ever PULSE Award – spotlighting artists who have broken through in the digital streaming world.
After “Elements” proved she was a digital star with staying power, Lindsey was willing to take her talents to new territory. And in her new album, she was ready to share a deep, personal struggle.

Lindsey’s faith would play an important role in her recovery and shape a new attitude towards her career.

For the album’s title track, “Shatter Me,” Stirling would seek out a collaborator who could match the emotions she was exploring. Lzzy Hale’s hard-hitting voice proved to be the perfect companion to Lindsey’s melody.

“Shatter Me” was released in April of 2014. It reached #1 on three different US charts and iTunes and #2 on the Billboard 200 behind the multiplatinum soundtrack for Disney’s Frozen.

With the song’s success Lindsey was also able get closure from her humiliating experience on America’s Got Talent. As she set out on a world tour, her most vocal critic Piers Moran tweeted: “Congratulations Lindsey Stirling. You did indeed prove me wrong.”

As Lindsey manoeuvres into more mainstream music, she still carries the YouTube, do-it-yourself on approach she had when creating “Elements” – including with a recent collaboration with nine-time Grammy winner, John Legend.

As Lindsey’s career climbs to new heights, she remains grounded by her humble beginnings. Never forgetting the crucial element to her success is an unshakable belief in her own abilities.

The tables are turning in the music industry. Traditionally, struggling artists needed connections and logistical support to “make it.” Now, Stirling is proving there are other ways to break into the business. And it’s not hard to imagine a future where artists don’t need managers, agents or labels.

Songs like “Elements” blatantly show Stirling’s biggest secret to success – she plays music that’s true to her heart.