

WHO'S NEXT

KÊTA

HOMETOWN: Greenwood, Ind.
INFLUENCES: Elvis Presley, Imogen Heap, the Supremes
ALBUM: *Generation Call EP*, out now
WEBSITE: whoisketa.com

BORN INTO A MUSICAL HOME—HER MOTHER WAS A classically trained violinist and vocalist, and her father played guitar—Kêta grew up singing at church and county fairs. But at the age of 10, her budding career was halted after contracting Lyme disease. “My life was all doctor’s appointments, tests, needles and experiments with different medications,” she says. “I remember lying in bed thinking that I needed to rethink my entire life and who I was going to be.”

After she recovered, Kêta—born Keta Jo McCue—learned how to play guitar and ukulele and entered talent competitions. While attending a showcase in Orlando, Fla., she connected with producer-musicians Mike Mac and Jordan Baum, and they began collaborating via Skype. “We just had an instant chemistry,” she says. “You’d think those first sessions would’ve been awkward, but we finished a song the first time we talked.”

After visiting L.A. to complete a series of recording sessions, Kêta signed with Evolve/Capitol. While working on her debut EP, *Generation Call*, she had clear intentions about the conceptual structure. “I gave Mike and Jordan as much insight as I could in terms of the sound I wanted my music to have,” says Kêta, 16. “It was important for me to be really exact about the kind of art I wanted to make, and it ended up 100 percent spot-on and completely what I’d envisioned.”

In 2014, Kêta earned a plum assignment as opening act for Sam Smith on his West Coast tour. Onstage and in the recording studio, she often reflects upon the difficulties of her youth. “For me, to go from being in such a dark place, where the dream of making music seemed so out of reach, and now doing it on such a huge scale, it’s just so exciting and amazing.”