

The Tim Smal Show – 21 September 2020 transcript

Katie Lyon talks about her latest release 'Some Things Take Time', as well as her live performance at The House of Machines in Cape Town.

Tim Smal (host): Aloha and welcome to the show today. My name is Tim Smal, thanks for joining me. My guest today on the show is Katie Lyon. She is a singer-songwriter from Southwest Florida. Katie is influenced by the sounds of Brandi Carlile, Miranda Lambert, Kacey Musgraves, as well as George Strait, Chris Stapleton and Jason Isbell. Katie's music resembles the easy listening side of country, where you can kick back with a drink on your back porch and let your mind drift into a song. Katie, welcome to the show.

Katie Lyon (guest): Thanks so much for having me Tim.

Tim Smal: So Katie, we actually met in Cape Town a few years ago. You were traveling with your family and I happened to actually serve you guys on a wine farm while I was working there and that's how I met you.

Katie Lyon: That was an awesome day. I drank a lot of wine, thanks for that.

Tim Smal: You're welcome. And I thought to myself "Hey, I should hook you up with a gig in Cape Town while you're here", seen as you were just on holiday. And I spoke to one of my friends at the bar in town called House of Machines, and Andy let you borrow his guitar and you got to play an open mic.

Katie Lyon: Yes, that was an incredible night too. I mean, the whole day was amazing, but by that time it was just... I wasn't even... I think I was flying out the next morning too, so it was one of our last night's in Cape Town and everyone was super nice. I'm sure it was very weird to have an American at an open mic night like that.

Tim Smal: Well, I guess what happens a lot is that, musicians come to South Africa on holiday for a couple of days and they don't really intend to play shows. So often they'll come and go and then when you speak to them in the years ahead they kind of say "Oh yeah, you know, I was in Cape Town and I was just hanging out, but I didn't play a show" so I always think it's super cool if the musician can just at least say that they played one show in Cape Town. So now you can tell all your friends that you've played a gig in South Africa.

Katie Lyon: Yeah, honestly, when I tell people that, they're really amazed by it, so thank you for introducing me to your friend Andy and everyone I met there that night was, super nice and kind. So, you know, it kind of felt like home. Andy did say one really funny thing though, I think, when I got on stage, because he was... I think he was leading the open mic and he goes "Now this is Katie from America and don't judge her for that" or something to that extent – I thought that was pretty funny.

Tim Smal: Yeah, Andy's a real character. He's put out a couple of records himself (Andy Lund & The Mission Men) and he's also certainly toured in the states, so he's got a lot of live experience. But Katie, you have a new record out, it's called 'Some Things Take Time'. Can you tell us more about your latest record?

Katie Lyon: I'd love to. I'm really excited about it. I released it in the middle of last month and I'm seeing some pretty good results from it – it seems to resonate with people. I

typically record in Nashville, Tennessee, but I kinda took a step back on this one. I went back to my hometown and I recorded this in Cape Coral, Florida with a good friend of mine at his home studio Juniper Recordings. And honestly, it was such a fun experience because it was so relaxed. We got to really dive into each song in detail and we had a lot more time, mainly because, you know, I don't think he really billed me by the hour. So it was a really great creative experience.

Tim Smal: Yeah, I guess it makes a big difference if you feel that that pressure is off your shoulders when you're making a record. Of course, it's good to have deadlines and so forth, but if you feel like you have the creative space to just do the work that you need to do, it's certainly a really awesome environment to be in, right?

Katie Lyon: Yes, I was so thankful for that and honestly, I think we had... we did five songs and we gave ourselves three days – which isn't a lot, but they were really long three days. But all the musicians were just on it – they were on their game and we all got to collaborate a little bit. So the songs that I used to play out live by myself, kind of, started to turn into this collaborative thing with the other musicians in the room. Mainly, like, you know, we ended up coming up with some really cool guitar lines and bass lines and things like that. And really, it was them, not me. I was just like “Yeah, that sounds great, keep going.”

Tim Smal: Yeah, it's always great to work with other musicians in the studio and to experience the songs coming together and taking shape in the studio environment. But in terms of how you actually wrote the songs, did you compose them all yourself or did you collaborate with other songwriters?

Katie Lyon: So I'm on this, I guess, journey with collaborative songwriting, but I'm at the very beginning of it, so all of these songs are written by me and me only. Honestly, I take a lot of pride in that and I take a lot of pride in my songwriting abilities, I suppose. But I'm working on trying to get better at co-writing, because to be honest with you, I'm not very good at it.

Tim Smal: Yeah, I guess getting used to the idea of co-writing takes a bit of time, especially if you're used to writing on your own, it can feel a little bit unsettling to have to open up and I suppose, you know, share your vulnerabilities with another songwriter. But I guess over time, you get better at that right? It's a muscle you have to, kind of, work at. And I've heard a lot of stories of how songwriters have actually managed to develop that skill and to improve as songwriters, because ultimately when they collaborate with others, it's like iron sharpening iron, right?

Katie Lyon: Exactly. Yeah, I'm working on it. It's one of those things that I know I need to do. But to be honest with you, I have been traveling so much and haven't really stayed in one place for very long in the last few years. So in order to book those co-writes and things like that, it's been difficult and not something I've super prioritized, so moving into the next chapter of music for me, I think will involve me writing a lot of music with my friends, which I'm excited about.

Tim Smal: Well, being based in Tennessee, you certainly have access to a lot of really good songwriters and a great music culture. I'm sure you've spent a lot of time in Nashville and I understand that you've actually recently moved to an area called Chattanooga in Tennessee, which I'm not familiar with, but maybe you can tell me a little bit more about what it's like to be living there and what the music scene is like in Chattanooga?

Katie Lyon: I would love to. Nashville is growing... it's growing so fast, it's become this big beast of a city. And to be honest, I mean, I love Nashville and I loved my time there, but just about two hours east is Chattanooga. So there's... it's more mountainous, it's more based in nature and you can get outside and go explore nature's wonders a little bit easier than you can if you lived in the city of Nashville. But Chattanooga is smaller and the music scene there is something I'm still trying to tap into, but it... to me it seems like there's a ton of opportunities to play at small local businesses and things like that. And they take a lot of pride on the local music community and even, they have a lot of – maybe not a lot, but they have programs for people even to go out and busk on the street and make money doing it that way. That was of course before the COVID-19 pandemic but, still some pretty cool options.

Tim Smal: Cool. Yeah, I've certainly chatted to a couple of musicians who don't live in the center of Nashville itself, but who live an hour or two away from Nashville. So it's certainly a great thing to be based in Tennessee, and at least you can get to Nashville when you need to be there. And yeah, you know, a two hour drive in America – that's not too bad.

I remember once being in... let me see if I can remember this correctly – I think I was in the city of... oh my gosh, I think it was... Ohio... I think I was in the city of Columbus, Ohio and I needed to get to Nashville, Tennessee to watch a gig of a band on the same day and it was a 7-hour drive. But actually just because of, you know, how things are set up in the states, the roads are really good – the seven-hour drive didn't feel like a seven-hour drive, you know. We left Columbus and we got to Nashville and I was like “Hey, I'm ready to roll. It doesn't feel like I've even been on the road.” So I guess, it's something you get used to, right... being in America, just kind of being on the road and traveling... and even seven hours is not as bad as say, fourteen hours, right?

Katie Lyon: Oh, I love a good road trip. Actually just recently, I drove from Nashville, Tennessee up to Burlington, Vermont where I am right now. I'm just up here temporarily and I'm going back to Tennessee in a couple weeks. But that is a... I think it's a 20-hour trip and we took it – we just drove it straight through and, you know, I guess it isn't bad. It's so nice to see the country and see all sorts of different cities that you go through, you know. I had a really good time and I do a lot of driving actually.

Tim Smal: Yeah. And of course, the longer you drive in the states, the more plush dolls you collect from those crane machines at the trucker stops, right?

Katie Lyon: Actually, it's so funny you mention that. Last night I was in the middle of nowhere in Vermont, like in the... I don't think there was even any cell reception. And the car that I was driving started overheating, so I had to stop into a truck stop. And I was in there and I had to buy coolant and I put that in my vehicle. And then they had this really goofy looking trucker hat – I was like... “I need that.” So I just bought it, brought it home as my souvenir, so maybe I'll start collecting those instead.

Tim Smal: Awesome. Well, you came out with your first major release in 2017 called 'No Matter Where You Roam' and then in 2020 you released 'Some Things Take Time' which we spoke a little bit about. But I believe there's actually quite a special message regarding this album, or EP that you released, should I say. Would you like to tell us more about the special message behind this record?

Katie Lyon: Yeah. 2020 has been pretty unique for all of us, I think. But for me, specifically, I wasn't sure when I was going to release this album, because I've been going through some, I guess, I should say quite a lot of personal turmoil. But my mom actually was diagnosed with breast cancer just about the time that I started to think about recording this album. And it's pretty unfortunate situation where, you know, it was really aggressive, so I didn't get a whole lot of time with her between diagnosis and unfortunately she passed away this March.

But in the meantime, because I was in Florida – because that's where she lived – I was actually able to, kind of, include her in the process of recording these songs and get her perspective on what each recording day, you know, whether this little note was bad or this little, you know, groove if she liked it or not. So a lot of times when I listen to this album back, it reminds me of those really precious moments of her being like “Ah man, I love this part.” So I'm always going to think really fondly of this EP.

Tim Smal: I'm very sorry to hear about the passing of your mom, but I guess at the same time, as you mentioned, it's a really special experience to have worked with your mom on this record and it will always be very close to you in your discography moving forward. So I think it's also great that the listeners can have more of an idea of what was going on at the time and some of the hidden meanings with regard to the album. Because to be able to have your mom around and have her be a part of the, I suppose, the writing and the recording process, if you will... yeah, it's just a really special moment in time that you've been able to capture, so I'm really glad to hear that.

Do you think that moving forward from here, you're going to need some time just to, sort of, take a time out with that and the coronavirus complications and so forth, in terms of what's happening in the world? Or do you feel like you're actually ready to start writing or do another album – where are you at, in terms of your career, at this point in time?

Katie Lyon: Honestly, I've been writing more now than ever. You know, when my mom passed away, it was... it still is a really devastating, tough thing for me to be dealing with. But the only thing that keeps me going, is the fact that I know she would want me to keep writing. And everyday, you know, I'll pick up my guitar and I'm like “Man, sometimes I'm just not feeling it.” But the next day, it'll just spark a song and I'll have it written in like 30 minutes. And I really do think sometimes, I'm like “Well, someone's giving me a little creative tip from somewhere” and I credit that to my mom on most days.

But during the coronavirus, I was actually able to be a part of something called 'The Songwriter Quarantine'. And it was a songwriter collective actually out of Southwest Florida, where a bunch of musicians would get together and they would write a new song every week and there would be a deadline every Sunday night: you'd have to have the song written and uploaded to YouTube by 9 p.m. And it was all based off a different prompt every week. And that really actually helped me get my creative juices flowing again when I was like, you know, going through a lot of phases of depression and grief and anxiety, it really helped me get my basis and get back to stuff that I love to do, so I'm very thankful for that.

Tim Smal: Now I've been listening to 'Some Things Take Time' and I've really been enjoying it. So I just thought I would just choose one song that I really like and perhaps you can tell me just a little bit more about that. So I'm going to choose 'Suits You Just Right' – that's the track I'm going to choose today that I really like, and I thought maybe you could just tell the listeners a little bit more about that song specifically.

Katie Lyon: Oh man, I love that you picked that song. This is a special one, because it's one of the first songs that I wrote truly about my own life. Normally I just, you know, write on other people's experiences, because that tends to be the easier thing to do. But this one is about me and it gets right down to it. I mean, the first lyric of it is: "*I didn't grow up with no daddy, but that's not a tear I cry. He rode out in the middle of the night, at least he let me say goodbye.*" And that really happened. But to me, it's a way for me to turn what you would think might be a really terrible experience into something like, you know what, I'm good, I'm okay – like we're okay here. And I actually played this song that night in South Africa, so it's been in the works for quite some time and I just now put it out into the world, you know, on a record. But it's definitely important to me.

And I guess another very important lyric would be in the second verse – see this song is all about, you know, feeling comfortable with yourself and who you are and who the world basically perceives you to be. And the line in the second verse is: "*Closets don't tell secrets, but I would if I were you.*" And it's basically saying, you know, I'm a gay country singer, I'm married to a woman. And in that song, I'm just kind of owning that, because I think it's important to be part of the conversation and for people to know exactly who I am.

Tim Smal: Great. Well, thanks for sharing and I'm glad I chose a good song for you to talk about. I'm really interested just to ask you about the genre of country music. Of course, country music is really popular in the United States and its growing in popularity around the world. But one of the aspects of country music, is this idea that the songwriters have a great opportunity to tell stories – that's really an important fabric of country music. So I'm just really interested, in terms of how you gravitated towards country music – was it the stories that the songwriters were weaving that attracted you, was it perhaps the sound of the genre itself, or a combination of both? Can you tell me more just about your interest in country music and how you felt drawn to this genre.

Katie Lyon: Yes. So I started listening to country music, I mean, pretty much as soon as I could hear, because that's all my parents would play growing up. They didn't really know anything else – I mean, they grew up in the middle of Iowa, which is, you know, like the Midwest to its core. But I've just always listened to country, I only knew... I thought "Wow, this must be the only genre out there" until I, you know, probably transitioned into my teens and then I was like "Wow, there's pop music, rock music, all this other stuff that I started learning about." And I do listen to all genres now, but I always come back to country because of the stories. I love obviously... sound is important, you need to like the sound of the song... but I love getting lost in the story that someone's trying to tell me.

Tim Smal: And I did mention a couple of artists that you really like listening to, but if you had to tour with somebody or, you know, write with somebody, do you have any artists that you can think of that are really inspiring you right now, that you perhaps would like to go and watch or even work with or tour with one day?

Katie Lyon: Oh man, it's actually the first one you had on your list: Brandi Carlile. I actually didn't start listening to her music up until, maybe like, three or four years ago. But then I started, just really... her music really resonates with me. I think she's from Washington. But also, she does a lot of humanitarian work and uses her music for those purposes. So, I mean, I would just really love to follow in those footsteps and honestly, I think our music is in the same like country / folk / maybe Americana-ish vein.

Tim Smal: Yeah, I'm personally not all that familiar with Brandi Carlile's music, but I do

know that she's very popular and that she's been on the music scene for quite some time. And so, perhaps I should dig up some of her old records and just, you know, do a deep dive into her discography.

Katie Lyon: Oh man, yeah, you will love it – well, I think you'll love it. My favorite album of hers is probably one titled 'Bear Creek'. It's really beautiful, so if you want to start somewhere, that's my suggestion.

Tim Smal: Great. Yeah, I love getting suggestions from musicians. So do you have any other suggestions of artists that we can listen to, some records that you're spinning at the moment?

Katie Lyon: What am I listening to at the moment? I'm kind of all over the place, but my recent obsession is the new Katie Pruitt album. She's very good – I'm not exactly sure what genre I would consider that, but it's definitely in the 'singer-songwriter' genre, I think, would apply. And let's see... who else am I listening to a lot lately?

Oh, this is a great one: Larkin Poe. They're a rock band made up of two sisters – one rips on the guitar and the other riffs on slide guitar. And it's like blues / country / folk / rock – they got it all going on. That album's called 'Self-made Man'.

Tim Smal: Yeah, so I actually do know Larkin Poe quite well. A couple of years ago, they had a series of EPs that they put out – I can't remember what the name of the EPs were, but yeah, I know Larkin Poe and I really enjoy their music, so I'll definitely check out that recommendation.

Katie Lyon: The day before Jesse and I got married, there was like a concert right outside of our venue and Larkin Poe actually played there in Chattanooga, Tennessee and that's kind of how I started to listen to their music. And now it's just... it's a good memory.

Tim Smal: Awesome. Well, Katie it's been super cool having you on the show today. I've really enjoyed speaking with you and I know the listeners are going to enjoy listening to your latest release 'Some Things Take Time' which I'm sure they can find in a couple of different places. But would you like to just let the listeners know how they can get hold of you and where they can find you?

Katie Lyon: Absolutely. I'm pretty much on all streaming platforms – Spotify is probably the most popular one for this record. As well as my website, I've linked out pretty much everything. But if you'd like to purchase a CD or t-shirt of sorts, I definitely have merch on my website too, so that's katielyonmusic.com and then the album is 'Some Things Take Time' on Spotify.

Tim Smal: Awesome. Well thanks again for joining me on the show today Katie, it's been really, really cool. Enjoy the rest of your day there in Vermont and all the best with the year ahead. I wish you all the best with songwriting and recording and touring in the future, until we meet again.

Katie Lyon: Yeah, it was so good to catch up with you Tim and stay safe over there in Cape Town and I can't wait to chat again.