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## After leaving Hopkins County for Nashville four years ago, Kaci Brown has become a rising star

**Patti Sells** | *News-Telegram Feature Editor*

June 26, 2005 - It's a long way from the Coca-Cola Soundstage in Sulphur Springs to touring with the Backstreet Boys and releasing an album on a major record label.



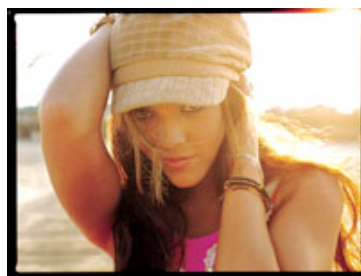
But Kaci Brown is about to reach the end of that journey, and looks to be headed for much bigger things.

"Everything's just crazy, but I love it," said Brown, who left Sulphur Springs with her family four years ago to chase her dream in Nashville. "All those days of sitting home bored -- I guess they're over."

"Unbelievable," the first single off Kaci Brown's upcoming album, 'NSTIG8R,' is scheduled to start hitting the airwaves on July 18, just a few days before she starts taking the stage as an opening act for the Backstreet Boys.

Photos Courtesy of Interscope Records

Watch out world, here she comes.



Kaci Brown will hit the road this summer with the Backstreet Boys as they make their way across the U.S. on tour July 22-Sept. 2. The tour starts four days after her first single, "Unbelievable," is scheduled to begin airing on radio.

"This is a dream come true for me," said Kaci Brown, who left Sulphur Springs for

Nashville in 2001 to pursue a career in country music. "I've waited my entire life for this."

Which hasn't been all that long, considering the fact that she is just 16 years old (although she turns 17 next month).

Kaci, the daughter of Annette and Frank Francis of Tennessee and Kirk and Shelly Brown of Mount Pleasant, and granddaughter of Bill and Gloria Thomas and Betty Hicks, started singing when she was "still in diapers, using a wooden spoon" as a microphone. By the time she was 6, she knew she wanted to be a star, and took advantage of every opportunity possible, singing in churches, school talent competitions, pageants and variety shows.

Before long, the little girl with the big voice was making a name for herself across the state, earning titles such as Little Miss Texas Overall Grand Talent winner, and by performing regularly in various oprys and other venues. That includes several appearances on the Johnnie High Show at Arlington Music Hall, which has included such names as Leann Rimes, John Anderson, Gary Morris, Box Car Willie and many others at one time or another.

It was after one of her performances on High's Music Country Revue that Kaci met singer/songwriter Thom Sheppard from Nashville, who invited her to sit in with him and his band, which play regularly at the world famous Legend's Corner on Nashville's Music Row. Kaci and her mother, Annette, who was her manager at the time, took him up on his offer and made several trips to Tennessee to sit in with the group. Sheppard later provided Kaci with several songs for her first demo, and even put her in contact with his own publisher, Charlie Monk, who has played a major role in the success of stars such as Randy Travis.

In June of 2001, the family took a leap of faith when they moved to Nashville in order for Kaci to pursue a career in country music.

It wasn't long until Kaci was performing for some of country music's greatest legends and then signing her first publishing contract with Barbara Orbison of Still Working Music, which made her one of the youngest staff writers in Nashville, and the history of country music. Kaci found herself co-writing songs with the likes of Tommy Lee James, who has written songs for Reba McEntire, Martina McBride, Brooks & Dunn, and Tim McGraw.

The next step for Kaci would be to secure her own record deal.

According to Annette, Kaci soon began recording, cut her first CD, and then proceeded to pitch her music to some of country music's biggest labels.

"They loved her, and she was really impressing a lot of people, but they felt she was just too progressive," said Francis, recalling the disappointment. "They told her, 'You're going to be a star, but you're not going to be a country star. "

The movers and shakers in the country music industry encouraged Kaci to instead shift her focus and her talent to pop music.

"When they told me I wasn't country enough, I was like, 'What are you talking about! I'm from Texas!'" laughed Kaci.

"I was really disappointed. It felt like my life was coming to a halt. I just remember Mom said, 'You know, God works in mysterious ways. Maybe you should consider this.'"

For a solid year, Kaci sat back contemplating life, all the while journaling and writing songs on her own, according to her mother, who said Kaci seemed to "really start finding herself."

Kaci said during that time she did a lot of soul searching and was simply trying to find her place in music when fate intervened in the form of Toby Gad, a German born pop producer/ writer from New York, who has contributed to around 50 record releases in Europe with many European stars such as Milli Vanilli and Enrique Iglesias, and who is now on a roll in the U.S.A. with 10 billboard hit records, eight hit albums, four of them No. 1 and two No. 1 singles. In 2004 and 2005 Gad has co-wrote and produced three entire albums with major U.S. labels.

"It was just by coincidence that a pop writer (Gad) from New York came to our publisher in Nashville, Clay Myers, who played him some of her music,

and he wanted to meet Kaci,” Francis recalled.

The two spent a couple of days together playing music and writing, according to Francis, and came up with a song that Gad recorded the next day. Gad went back to his home in New York, but within a week’s time called Francis, saying “I want to produce her.”

What followed was a 10-day writing session with 14-hour long days. And over the course of the following year, there would be two more writing sessions in Nashville, one in New York, and one in Los Angeles, all of which resulted in more than 30 songs, and a debut album entitled, “NSTIG8R,” which will be released Aug. 9.

According to Kaci, Gad unlike anyone she had ever worked with.

“No structure whatsoever. He’d say, ‘Lets write the second line of the third verse,’” she recalled with a laugh. “He’s an absolute genius. He played every instrument on my album. He really challenged me.

“My range has grown tremendously,” she added. “I did all my own backup vocals for the album, which was really weird because I’ve never had to harmonize with myself.”

After six months, the pair presented an “almost finished” album to Gad’s manager, David Sonnenberg, president of DAS Communications, who for more than 20 years has guided and promoted the careers of Meat Loaf, Fugees, and more recently, the Black Eyed Peas.

Kaci Brown was added to Sonnenberg’s list, and may be well on her way to super stardom.

In October of last year, Gad’s young protegee, who is fast becoming known as the “multi-talented 16-year-old from Texas,” signed her first record deal with Jimmy Iovine of Interscope Records for her single entitled “Unbelievable,” which is scheduled to hit radio by July 18. (Interscope handles a few other artists who have done well -- like Eminem, 50 Cent, U2, Sheryl Crow, Lorretta Lynn, Weezer, and many more.)

The next thing Kaci knew, she was booked as opening entertainment for the Backstreet Boys, who are promoting their first album in more than four years, “Never Gone,” which opens in West Palm Beach, Fla.

“I just can’t believe it,” Kaci said. “I can remember having sleepovers with my friends in Sulphur Springs, and we would listen to their music. It’s just my little girl dream come true. I don’t really think it’s hit me yet.”

Kaci has yet to meet the all grown-up boy band, and anticipates the moment, praying “she doesn’t have sweaty palms” when she shakes their hands.

“It’s been a process -- a journey,” said Francis. “Nashville was a good move, and country was what Kaci knew. It wasn’t so far out of our comfort zone. She has always loved all genres of music, but we would have never gone to L.A. or New York to look for a pop deal. Nashville was a real growing experience. It gave Kaci a chance to grow musically, vocally, and to just naturally evolve.”

Unbelievable.

Kaci Brown Official Website: [www.kacibrown.com](http://www.kacibrown.com)

## TOUR DATES

- July 22, West Palm Beach, FL -- Sound Advice Amphitheatre
- July 23, Tampa, FL -- Ford Amphitheatre
- July 24, Atlanta, GA -- Gwinnett Arena
- July 26, Cleveland, OH -- Tower City Theater
- July 27, New York, NY -- Radio City Music Hall
- July 29, Atlantic City, NJ -- Borgata Hotel Spa & Casino
- July 30, Wantagh, NY -- Tommy Hilfiger Jones Beach Theater
- July 31, Holmdel, NJ -- PNC Bank Arts Center
- August 3, Detroit, MI -- DTE Energy Music Theatre
- August 4, Buffalo, NY -- Darien Lakes Amphitheatre
- August 6, Washington, DC -- Nissan Pavilion
- August 7, Saratoga Springs, NY -- SPAC
- August 9, Wallingford, CT -- Oakdale Theater
- August 10, Portland, ME -- Cumberland County Civic Center
- August 12, Hershey, PA -- Star Pavilion at Hersheypark Stadium
- August 13, Camden, NJ -- Tweeter Center at the Waterfront
- August 14, Boston, MA -- Tweeter Center
- August 16, Cincinnati, OH -- Riverbend Music Center
- August 17, Pittsburgh, PA -- Post Gazette Pavilion
- August 19, Chicago, IL -- Lakeside Pavilion at Northerly Island
- August 20, Minneapolis, MN -- US Bank Theater at Target Center
- August 21, Kansas City, MO -- Verizon Wireless Amphitheater
- August 25, Los Angeles, CA -- Verizon Wireless Amphitheater
- August 26, Phoenix, AZ -- Dodge Theatre
- August 27, Las Vegas -- Mandalay Bay
- August 30, Concord, CA -- Chronicle Pavilion
- August 31, Sacramento, CA -- Sleep Train Amphitheatre
- September 2, Portland, OR -- Clark County Amphitheater



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