

BESSIE TURNER

Her latest single may be making big waves, but it hasn't been an easy ride for this young singer-guitarist, as George Henry King found out

After a troubling few years, Suffolk-based soloist, Bessie Turner may have just had the best six months of her life. Her debut single, 'Big Sleep', sprinkled the Radio 1 airwaves with an alt-rock elegance almost immediately after its release in April, and following a series of well-attended local shows, she was invited to grace the BBC Introducing stage at this year's Latitude Festival; something she did with a crowd-winning concoction of delicate melodies and vulnerability.

When we meet in Manningtree, two days before her second single 'Words You Say' is aired without warning on Jo Wiley's Radio 2 show, I too, much like the festivalgoers that Turner has entertained all summer, am instantly won over. Despite having just sprinted from her day job in order to expertly dodge the rush-hour traffic, Turner emerges from her cream Mini Cooper looking as star-like as she does in her music videos. At first glance, Turner's glitzy qualities could be interpreted as

intimidating. But dig a little deeper and you'll find an artist as intriguing as she is apologetic for her 'post-work appearance', and above all else, as happy as she's ever been. However, her voyage into the oft-turbulent waters of the music industry hasn't always been plain sailing. "I got really sick. It's kind of dark, how sick I got," she openly admits. "I was super poorly and I was diagnosed with a functional neurological disorder – I was given an MS (multiple sclerosis) diagnosis. I never wanted to stop doing music, it just happened."

Prior to becoming unwell, Turner had been playing occasionally in local pubs and frequently attending jam-nights in search of inspiration and at times, friendship. Her lack of finances, however, mirrored her lack of confidence and so, despite being an in-demand live musician and a small, dedicated fanbase who clamour for studio recordings of her music, Turner opted against professionally laying down any of her songs. After falling ill and being in a "shit relationship with a boyfriend

who turned out to be a nasty guy", she eventually decided to embark on an indefinite hiatus – unwillingly turning her back on her love of music.

Three years on, however, and Turner's life couldn't be more different, living in a houseboat with her new boyfriend and drummer, Ben Ward. "I've always been very confident, but shy at the same time. And I've always been vulnerable and scared to say, 'I want to be a singer, that's all I want to do'. But Ben was like, 'Fuck, you're really, really good' and he battled with me for ages, trying to get me to record something, and I was like 'No, what's the point?'"

After a while, Ward's barrage of pestering and encouragement had a convincing effect. Accompanied with a batch of new songs – most of which took as long to write as they do to now play – Turner headed to The Crypt Studio in London to get to work with producer George Perks (The Darkness, Clean Bandit), while Ben carefully crafted her comeback behind the scenes. The sessions were a success and spawned the release of debut single 'Big Sleep' – a four-minute dose of melancholia, in which feelings of loneliness and exhaustion are explored.

The reaction that the track received undeniably catalysed Turner's return to music, and in hindsight, foreshadowed the unexpected opportunities bestowed upon her over the coming months – most notably her triumphant performance on the BBC Introducing stage at this year's Latitude Festival. "I joked last year when I went to Latitude that I was going to play this year," Turner recalls. "It was amazing and the biggest confidence boost in the world, but I get so unbelievably anxious, so I invited a couple of my friends who are like my sisters, I had a couple of beers and I got ready in really good time so I was relaxed. I just felt so overjoyed."





GEARBOX

"My Tanglewood guitar was the first guitar that I ever bought myself. I had some money saved - which I think was meant for a car - but I went into this nice little guitar shop called Rocket Music in Ipswich and I said that I wasn't really good at guitar and I needed one that would be easy to play. This elderly lady once owned my guitar, but she suffered from arthritis and so she gave it in and I bought it."

“After my MS diagnosis, I didn't want to stop doing music, it just happened”

Having been away from the Suffolk live circuit for the best part of three years, however, Turner's initial delight at the invite was quickly replaced by a feeling that she was not quite good enough to be there - which fans will almost certainly dispute. She was also ecstatic to learn she'd be performing in front of, acoustic singer-songwriter, Lucy Rose. "I loved her when I was a teenager. So, on the press day I was just shaking. I had woken up in a bit of a tizz, I'd had a bad night's sleep the night before and I hadn't put any make-up on.

"I was on my way to the press day and I was running late, so I stopped at Tesco and stole a concealer tester. Then all of a sudden, I'm surrounded by all these people: Ben Lovett from Mumford and Sons and Lucy Rose! After that, I knew the rest of Latitude would be easy, because they wouldn't be watching."

Despite her summer of success, relying solely on the minimal income that gigging and record sales occasionally gifts a musician, isn't always financially viable - even when they're performing at major

festivals and being played on the biggest radio station in the world. Turner currently still holds down a variety of jobs and she's quick to point out that she only got paid £12.50 for a show she played recently. But that's fine by Turner, because whether these past six months have been the best of her life or not, she remains sensible and level-headed enough to not take anything for granted.

"I think to say 'I want to sell millions of record' is such a brave thing to do. I've met loads of people who are like 'I'm going to be so successful' and I just hope they don't get hurt. I don't want to commit to the idea of having to be successful, but I don't want to fail either." ■

Bessie Turner's new single, 'Words You Say' is out now via Don't Try Records. Info: www.facebook.com/bessieturnermusic/