

RELISHING HER VICTORY
'CELEBRITY MASTERCHEF' WINNER
KIMBERLY WYATT
INVITES US INTO HER KITCHEN AND SHARES
HER RECIPE FOR A HAPPY FAMILY LIFE



'It's nice to be able to use my kitchen and not worry about a timer or have John and Gregg looming over me yelling, "Two minutes to go!"'

In the chic kitchen of her London home, dancer, DJ, former pop star, mum-of-one and newly crowned *Celebrity MasterChef* champion Kimberly Wyatt is giving us a lesson in the art of multitasking. Excitedly regaling us with tales of her run on the hit BBC1 cookery show – an experience she found exhilarating, exhausting and, giving birth to her daughter Willow aside, “probably my proudest achievement” – the one-time Pussycat Doll manages to remain picture “purrfect” while simultaneously rustling up an impromptu coconut sponge for the HELLO! team as our photographer snaps away.

“Usually I follow a recipe but I’m not prepared so I have no idea how this is going to turn out,” says Kimberly, 33, as she rummages around in the deep recesses of her well-stocked cupboards.

Stir in the additional challenge of a scrumptious seven-month-old baby girl who keeps making a play for Mummy’s hair and any kitchen utensil within grabbing distance and it’s a wonder the cake ever makes it into the oven.

However, such pressure is small fry compared to what was involved in reaching the end of a show in which she probably wouldn’t have had a pussycat in hell’s chance of reaching the final a few years ago.

“It feels totally surreal, to be honest,” says the US-born star.

Kimberly was named 2015’s champ last Friday, after impressing *MasterChef* hosts John Torode and Gregg Wallace with her winning meal of loin of lamb cooked in a salt crust, with celeriac purée, roasted shallots, Jerusalem artichokes and a cherry tomato, rosemary, garlic and balsamic olive-oil sauce.

COOKING UP A STORM

Is she still trying to digest her victory? “I am,” she says, which is no surprise since she was pretty clueless in the kitchen until four years ago, when she first met her husband of 17 months, international supermodel Max Rogers.

“When you’re on the road as much as I was with the Pussycat Dolls, food becomes fuel and it’s hard when you’re grabbing meals on the go to eat healthily and creatively,” she says. “But a man who can cook is a very sexy thing and Max is a great cook.”

“Over time, I found his passion for it inspiring and infectious. We became a team in the kitchen – I was his sous chef and I learned so much from him. With that, my confidence started to grow.”

“Then, when I fell pregnant, I became even more aware of being responsible for this little person growing inside me and the need to nourish her with good stuff so my initial plan, when I went into *MasterChef*, was to bring healthy ‘mummy’ food to the table by pairing unconventional, interesting flavours to create tasty dishes that are also really nutritious.”

Although great in theory, her dishes weren’t always as well received as she’d envisaged. A fish and fruit combo, for instance, appeared to make Gregg a bit green around the gills.

“I still stand by that one – it’s delicious,” says Kimberly, with a laugh. “But no, it didn’t go down so well. It was a case of, ‘This is just plain wacky – make us something we love.’”

“But that’s the thing about *MasterChef* – you’re only ever as good as your last offering and there’s this constant underlying pressure of having to up the ante every time. And the further

(LEFT) SHIRT: JOHN LEWIS. JEANS: TOPSHOP. (RIGHT) KIMBERLY'S TOP: KIN AT JOHN LEWIS

Kimberly is queen of the kitchen as she celebrates her *Celebrity MasterChef* triumph with husband Max Rogers and their seven-month-old daughter Willow. “It still feels surreal,” she says, adding: “Max was behind me 100 per cent. If I hadn’t had him, I would never have been able to do it”





Kimberly effortlessly whips up a coconut sponge during HELLO!'s photoshoot, one of the skills she learnt after meeting Max. "I was his sous chef," she says. In the *MasterChef* kitchen, however, she was the one in charge and was determined to win. "Once we were in there, it was heads down and the gloves were off"



'Willow is my priority now. Baking together is something I really can't wait for'

you get into the competition, the more you want it – and the more everyone else wants it, too. So while it was all very friendly outside of the kitchen and I did make some really great friends on the show, once we were in there, it was heads down and the gloves were off."

Kimberly's "ruthless competitive streak" was instilled in her as a child, when she first started entering dance competitions in and around her Midwest home town in Missouri.

"I was ten when I entered my first competition," she says. "I did it to gain experience and I remember standing up there as they called third runner-up, second runner-up, first runner-up and none of them were me. I thought, 'That's okay. At least I've done it.' Then they called the winner and it was my name. That moment inspired a whole new world for me and set into motion me knowing where my dreams lay."

RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

At 17, she loaded up her car and moved to Las Vegas for an audition, from where, via rehearsals in Miami, she landed a job as a dancer on a cruise ship sailing from Barcelona to Venice.

"Coming from a very small town in middle America, it was quite the departure," says Kimberly.

It wasn't all plain sailing, though, and in the early days she struggled with feelings of insecurity that manifested itself in her relationship with food.

"I gained quite a lot of weight in my first job and developed a really negative body image that I wasn't equipped to deal with," she says.

"I didn't know how to get the weight off but over time, I learned that stress and lack of sleep have a lot to do with it and it planted a seed of having to figure out not only how to have a good relationship with food, but also a good relationship with myself," she adds.

"Under the pressure of the entertainment business – especially in places like Los Angeles, where you're competing against hundreds of girls – you have to take it upon yourself to create that relationship.

"You're surrounded by girls who have very negative views of themselves and I think that my saving grace was that nothing I've ever achieved was based on my looks, but on my dancing and on my talent.

"I never felt that I had the most beautiful face or the most lustrous hair so I put in the crazy hours to prove what I could do and that was the healthiest thing that could have happened."

Has the birth of Willow crystallised her concerns about the



Baby Willow is treated to the cook's perk of licking the spoon (above). The little girl has a healthy appetite, says her doting mum. "She loves food. She seems to not be able to get enough. She tries to feed herself now, which is hilarious because it goes everywhere"

insecurities young girls face with body image?

"One hundred per cent it has – and that is why promoting healthy eating is a real goal of mine," she says. "In this selfie-obsessed generation, where people are so driven by fame and looks, with Photoshopped faces and bodies, we're all living in a false reality. What's important to me is to stay true to myself and to what I've learned along the way so that I can introduce Willow to that in the healthiest way I know."

"I have no control over the choices she makes in the future – my own experience taught me that – but I can be the best example to her that I can possibly be. Walking the walk means a

lot more than talking the talk and that's what I set out to do."

Embracing the changes that pregnancy has brought to her body, Kimberly says she's "fuller" but feels "more of a woman" since she had her daughter. "I've blossomed, I guess," she says. "But I'm still toned and I feel good about my body."

Exercise is a big part of her life but she's tailored it to include Willow so she's not parted from her daughter any longer than is necessary.

"Because Willow is my priority now, I find ways to do it with her," she tells us. "We do mummy and baby yoga and weight classes. I love having her in that fitness atmosphere. I do my squats while holding her hand and do

push-up kisses and she loves it. It feels like playtime for her."

"I also have my online fitness program called Mum On A Mission, which is just 24 minutes a day, seven days a week of dance-infused circuit/high-intensity training."

THE NEXT BATCH

Now Kimberly is looking forward to the time when Willow can become her own sous chef. "Baking together is something I really can't wait for," she says.

It's a simple pleasure that was missing from her own childhood. As truckers, both Kimberly's parents were absent a lot from the family home. Later, her revelation that she

had been the victim of sexual abuse as a very young child caused a massive rift after her mother and father were unable to accept what their daughter was telling them.

Bridges have been built in recent years. "I have a lot of compassion for my mum," says Kimberly. "She did her absolute best. She wasn't handed the most amazing deck of cards in her own childhood and I think she made the most positive changes she could with me. There's a way to go with different cycles that she wasn't able to change in her life that I can in mine."

"Although my mum and I might not be the closest ever, I love her. I've learned from her, even from her mistakes, though I do crave that



Kimberly with her fellow *MasterChef* finalists (below right, far left and far right) Sam Nixon and Rylan Clark plus hosts John Torode (centre) and Gregg Wallace ahead of her triumph last Friday. Her success didn't surprise husband Max, who says: "Kimberly approaches a challenge unlike anyone I've ever known or even heard of"



mummy/daughter bond with Willow that I didn't have when growing up.

"But I'm fortunate that I have great people in my life who inspire me in that way," she adds. "Davina McCall [a close friend and the former host of the Sky 1 talent show *Got to Dance*, on which Kimberly was a judge] is a fantastic role model to me in getting that balance of being a career woman but also being the foundation of the family. And my sister Kristi is the most amazing mother and homemaker – she is my blueprint. I miss her like crazy and wish so much we didn't live so far apart. But Willow and I are flying to the States this week to meet up with her and my two adorable nieces. I can't wait to see them."

With her win on *MasterChef*, it will be a double celebration. Is she sad or just plain relieved that the experience is over?

"A bit of both," she says, with a smile. "It's nice to be able to use my kitchen and not worry about a timer or have John and Gregg looming over me yelling, 'Two minutes to go.'

"What you see on screen might seem like a short amount of time, but effectively you give up your life when you sign up. Because I needed my 'mummy time', I'd come home from filming, drop everything to be with Willow until she went to bed, then be practising and practising until the early hours. Some days I was lucky to get three hours' sleep.

"Because Willow was only 16 weeks old when I started the show, my hormones were raging. As I got a little more confident, I decided I needed to test my new skills out on people so one night I had some friends over. Well, nothing went right and I ended up running upstairs to have a

little cry. That was the last time I invited people round. From then on, my husband was the only victim."

THE KITCHEN CABINET

Does her win mean that Max's talents at the stove are now redundant in their home? "No, we're still a team," she says. "I love that it's not just me who has been inspired by *MasterChef* – Max has developed a real flair for presentation now. He was behind me 100 per cent through the whole process and if I hadn't had him, I would never have been able to do it.

"Every dish I presented to him, he'd look at me with such pride at what I was able to produce. But I'd never allow him to completely enjoy it. I was forever asking him, 'What should I change about it? There has to be something.' I think he enjoyed being able to be brutally honest."

Lured by the temptation of freshly baked cake and the chance of a cuddle with his baby girl, Max has joined his wife in the kitchen from the sanctuary of his office.

"Kimberly approaches a challenge unlike anyone I've ever known or even

heard of so I wasn't really surprised she won," he says. "That doesn't make me any less proud, though. It's an incredible achievement."

Adds Kimberly: "We've always been supportive of one another in our respective careers but I do feel that Max and I are even more of a team now that we have Willow. We're working towards the same goal, which is building a future for our child.

"Life often takes you in unexpected directions and now *MasterChef* has opened up this whole amazing new world of possibilities and I'm excited to see where it takes me."

If the coconut sponge is anything to go by, the culinary world is her oyster. **H**

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For information on Kimberly's online fitness programme *Mum On A Mission*, visit kimberlywyall.com/mumonamission.php



PHOTO: BBC