

# Mother's PRIDE

Girls Aloud's Kimberley Walsh talks toddlers and Disney to Simon Button – and reveals she's got a steely side, too

**K**imberley Walsh agonised before taking on her latest TV role because it would mean being away from her young son for the first time. But she needn't have bothered. She's just learned one of the toughest lessons about having toddlers – they don't miss you when you're not there.

The former Girls Aloud singer had never before left two-year-old Bobby for more than 24 hours. "I was worried he'd really miss me," says Kimberley. "I thought he'd be wondering where I was, and I was getting myself worked up. And you know what?" she laughs. "He didn't care at all. He was having the best time with his dad, having fun, eating ice cream after dinner – he was absolutely fine."

Bobby even ignored her when she returned home to London from filming her Disney Channel show, *The Lodge*, in Belfast. "Bobby wasn't interested in me – it was all about Daddy."

Kimberley was joined in Belfast by her mother and younger son Cole, now five months, while Bobby stayed with her husband, property developer Justin Scott, at home in north London. The couple, who married in 2016, are loving family life with their two boys. Cole is a seriously easy baby, says Kimberley, 35. "He's really laid-back and smiley. You don't have to work very hard to get a smile out of him. He's constantly giggling and as long as people are talking to him he's happy."

Bobby, meanwhile, is the doting older brother. "He always wants to know where baby Cole is and he's good at looking after him. He's really taken to the whole baby brother thing."

Kimberley may not be as globally successful as her former bandmate and best friend Cheryl, but she's no slouch, either. She has branched out successfully into stage musicals, with *Shrek* and *Elf*, and reached the *Strictly Come Dancing* final in 2012.

However, having trained at drama school, she is loving sinking her teeth into a straight acting role on *The Lodge*. It's the second series of the music-themed show and Bradford-born Kimberley plays Rebecca, a music producer. "She's a young – well, I say young because I want to make myself feel better – and warm woman who also has a steely business side to her. She knows what she wants and she'll do whatever it takes to get it," she says.

That doesn't sound like our lovely and likeable Kimberley. She laughs. "It's nice for me to play someone with a bit of an edge because I often get cast in parts that are fun and friendly with no sort of power behind them."

So does she have an edge? "Everybody has an edge, don't they? Whenever my harder side comes out, it's usually relating to business and important things like that. I don't get wound up easily but I won't be walked over either. I can draw on that a little bit to bring out that side of the character."

Being part of the Disney family has other advantages, too. The company has given her action figures, bath toys and outfits for the children, including a cute little Donald Duck get-up for Cole.

"Bobby recognised it as Donald Duck, too, which I didn't think he'd know, but he's quite into

trawling YouTube for cartoons. He must have come across Disney characters and been captivated by them just as I was as a kid.

"For me, it's absolutely amazing being part of something that as a child you were completely obsessed with. To be on the Disney Channel, the channel I was obsessed with as teenager, is incredible. We didn't have Sky, but my friend did, and we'd rush home from school to watch it."

Kimberley's own Disney heroine was Belle from *Beauty And The Beast*, the animated film that came out in 1991 when she was 10. "I love how she's got that sort of strength but she's also a gorgeous Disney princess. I always wanted to be her or Ariel from *The Little Mermaid*." And with a nod to Girls Aloud redhead Nicola Roberts, she adds, "Nicola wanted to be Ariel, too, and I think with that hair I'd have to give it to her."

What Kimberley really loved about working on *The Lodge*, though, was being surrounded by the enthusiastic young cast. "They're really hard-working and eager and that's how I started out," she says. "It's the sort of show I'd have done when I was their age if I'd had the chance."

While growing up in Yorkshire, Kimberley took part in an advert for Asda and was in a regional production of *Les Misérables*. She also had a part in ITV children's show *The Book Tower* as a teenager and while her big break also came through TV, it was in a reality show. In 2002 she made it on to *Popstars: The Rivals* and although dismissed after the initial auditions, she was recalled after another contestant left. She then joined Nicola, Cheryl, Nadine Coyle and Sarah Harding to form Girls Aloud – and pop history

PHOTOGRAPH: ANNA FOWLER





**Left: Kimberley and Justin with their sons, Bobby, two, and five-month-old Cole**

**Right: With husband Justin Scott, who was in boy band Triple 8**

**Below left: Kimberley plays Rebecca in *The Lodge***



*"I don't think raunchy is really my thing. I'll leave that to other people"*

PHOTOGRAPHS: DAVID M. BENNETT/GETTY IMAGES

was made. They went on to become one of the UK's most successful girl groups, with 21 Top 10 singles before they split in 2013.

Kimberley says, "It feels like I was just a child. I was only 21 when our first single came out – where do the years go?"

And the band's biggest fashion faux pas? "The silver outfits from our second video for *No Good Advice* will always be the biggest thumbs down in my opinion. They never made sense. It was like, 'Have we just fallen from space or something?'"

Kimberley remains close to Cheryl and will no doubt be happy to hand out tips and advice for looking after her two-month-old son, Bear.

After *Shrek The Musical* and *Strictly Come Dancing*, Kimberley is keeping it family friendly with *The Lodge*. "I don't have any desire to do anything raunchy. I like doing family friendly stuff and parts I connect with, and I don't think raunchy is really my thing. I'll leave that to other people," she says.

This is despite the fact her showbiz idol is singer and actress Olivia Newton-John, who wore skintight leather at the end of movie *Grease* and raunched it up for her *Physical* video. Kimberley met Olivia backstage during a Royal Variety

Performance and reveals, "They say you shouldn't meet your idols

but she was really lovely."

The singer took time off work when she was pregnant with Cole. "But I think with a second child you're ready to go back to work quicker and I'm happy being back in the game," she says.

"This is the perfect role to get me back to work because it didn't involve working every day for six weeks solid."

Next up is her children's clothing range, Kimba Kids, which she's preparing to launch this year. "A good balance is always what you aim for," she says. "You want to find the perfect balance of being a mum, seeing your kids grow up and not missing anything, but also being a role model for them by going out to work and showing them things don't come without a bit of hard graft."

During filming breaks in Belfast, she was able to get back to feed Cole at the hotel where he was staying with her mum, Diane. "Then I'd go back to the set and get on with it. That's the beauty of the job that I do – you can go back to work that bit earlier because you're able to bring the kids along a lot of the time. It's not

like a nine-to-five office job. I'm very lucky in that respect."

And her idea of a great day off? "What's a day off?" she laughs. "You never have a day off when you've got two children. But I love a family day where all of us get to go somewhere together, seeing the kids enjoying each other. They're amazing. They're really good boys and I can't complain."

She and Justin, a former member of boy band Triple 8, have been together for 15 years and he is used to her being away from home.

"He's really supportive and he's great with the boys. I didn't have any worries about leaving Bobby with him because I knew he'd be well looked after. It's nice for them to have that time to bond. I think if he's honest, he actually quite enjoys time alone with Bobby, too."

Kimberley wonders what Bobby will make of *The Lodge*. "It might blow his mind a bit because he doesn't really get what I do. He just thinks I'm Mum and occasionally when I pop up on things on telly, he's like, 'Huh?' He gives me a look as if to say, 'What are you doing on there?'"

See *The Lodge* on Friday at 5.30pm on Disney Channel.