

It's pretty hard to turn heads at Freemans, New York City's Lower East Side restaurant known for its taxidermy-heavy décor that could have been plucked from a Wes Anderson film set, and the eccentric clientele to match. But Kiesza (née Kiesha Rae Ellestad) does just that, thanks to her old-Hollywood style and Girl Scout demeanor. Once inside, she rushes over to coo at a fussy baby—add infant whisperer to her impressive CV, which also includes ballerina, fashion designer, opera composer, visual artist, capoeira martial artist, and tall ship sailor. But soon Kiesza, 25, will be best known for her music.

Her first single, "Hideaway," an addictive dance-pop number, shot to the top of the charts after its release in the U.K. Captured in a single take on the streets of Williamsburg, the song's video is evidence of a decade of classic dance training and displays a healthy dose of appreciation for throwback hip-hop video tropes. Shot by her brother, cinematographer Blayre Ellestad, it's been viewed more than 44 million times since February.

"I love the sounds of the '90s," says Kiesza. "I didn't want to go straight-up back there, but I'm blending them with more modern sounds. I love fusing things—in fashion, music, everything." Fusion is the perfect word to describe the polymath, down to her signature hairstyle, a sort of glam mohawk. "It's 1940s from the front and punk from the side," says Kiesza as she delicately delves into her black bean burger with a knife and fork to preserve her red lipstick.

Though she may already look like a pop culture icon, Kiesza is admittedly clueless when it comes to celebrity gossip. "I was on a TV show in Canada, and they were drilling me about the Kardashians—I had no idea about any of them," she says. "I was like, can you just ask me about space or genetics?" Obsessed with science since she was little, Kiesza is more likely to curl up with an academic journal than the remote. "It's just so fascinating what can be done," she says. "I mean, they're figuring out how to regrow teeth, just by doing an electric shock with a stem cell."

Born in Calgary, Canada—sometimes described as the country's Midwest, which would explain her unfailing politeness—

CALGARY-BORN SAILED, DANCER, AND SINGER-SONGWRITER KIESZA HAS MORE HYPHENS THAN SHOULD BE HUMANLY POSSIBLE. BY CELIA SHATZMAN. PHOTOGRAPHED BY SUNNY SHOKRAE

SEA CHANGE



Kiesza grew up in a creative family. Raised by songwriter parents, she learned piano as a kid and enrolled in ballet classes at three. She expected to become a professional ballerina until a knee injury sidelined her at 15. Instead, she decided to follow her second passion: sailing. Kiesza joined the Royal Canadian Navy at 16 on a whim, thinking boot camp would be fun. There, she won the Top Shot award after firing 15 bullets into a one-inch hole. When the army attempted to recruit her as a sniper she turned it down and learned code-breaking instead.

In the navy, Kiesza learned how to play guitar. "They would jam on the ship," she explains. "The first day I picked up a guitar I wrote a little folk song. I would sing people to sleep at night." She served part-time throughout high school and then went on to study music at Selkirk College, before earning a scholarship to attend the Berklee College of Music in Boston. During one of her frequent trips to New York, Kiesza met producer Rami Samir Afuni. "I was a folk singer and he was a hip-hop producer, and we were both trying to get into mainstream songwriting," she says. "We were so different that when we came together we had a unique sound. Eventually we stumbled on 'Hideaway.' I realized then that this was me; I'd found myself."