

# Kingdom Bound artists return to WNY, though festival is postponed to 2022

Kingdom Bound welcomes Zach Williams & Stephen Stanley; for KING & COUNTRY to perform at Erie County Fair

BY JOSHUA MALONI  
GM/Managing Editor

For more than decade now, a new type of musician has performed at Darien Lake. You might want to label the offerings of these artists as “Christian music,” but that would be inaccurate – especially to those who grew up with church hymnals and/or well-intentioned but somewhat contrived (read: corny) “Jesus jams.”

Yes, these performers are followers of Christ, and, yes, they believe in the Bible; but you wouldn’t necessarily know them by their (musical) fruits. That is to say, songs from acts such as Skillet, MercyMe, Colton Dixon, Matthew West, Ledger and TobyMac are on par with “secular” music in every way. Lyrics are hopeful, not preachy, while offering encouragement instead of pushing condemnation; and beats are rocking, oftentimes accompanying TV programs (even WWE’s “Monday Night Raw”).

With Kingdom Bound booking more and more artists putting out songs destined for stadiums, not sanctuaries, the Buffalo-based ministry, in turn, found more and more people attending its four-day summer festival.

Two summers ago, Marketing and Communications Director Dave Bruno said, “Kingdom Bound 2019 was a fantastic festival that drew crowds in recent festival record numbers from 26 states and three Canadian provinces to Six Flags Darien Lake. From the music on three stages, to art classes, to speakers, to activities for the whole family and more, 2019 was a great success.”

He closed by writing, “We so appreciate all those who attended and look forward to what is to come at Kingdom Bound 2020.”

Of course, there were no large-scale concerts last year, as the region joined the world in working to fight the coronavirus. Hopes were high that Kingdom Bound would return in 2021 but, alas, the following message was posted several weeks ago on the ministry website:

“Kingdom Bound is more than just a festival, it’s a family. When the last notes rang out as Skillet finished the final song of Kingdom Bound 2019, little did we know how special it was to be gathered together in that moment. Ever since that day, our team has worked tirelessly with the singular goal of reuniting our Kingdom Bound family once again.

“Due to the requirements, vari-



At left: for KING & COUNTRY’s Luke and Joel Smallbone (Photo courtesy of The Media Collective) • Above: Stephen Stanley (Image courtesy of Kingdom Bound Ministries)

Zach Williams will headline the concert, which also features Stephen Stanley, Nick Kish and Reggie Dabbs.

## for KING & COUNTRY

Fronted by brothers Joel and Luke Smallbone, for KING & COUNTRY’s modern rock sound, sophisticated production and knack for finding the perfect collaborators has made the native Australians a fixture on TV talkers and award shows.

FKC took a different approach to touring last summer, staging a series of drive-in theater shows. Though Joel said that was a blast, he is looking forward to more traditional concert stages – and a return to Western New York.

“We’re still early in the whole process of what it really means to hit the road properly. We just announced a tour, the ‘Relate’ fall tour ... and we’re announcing another one for later in the year,” he said in a phone interview.

Smallbone explained, “There’s so many layers of loss from last year. But one of them is the fact that, while we’ve been walking through so much socially and

racially, politically, spiritually and beyond, that we haven’t had the chance just to link arms and rub shoulders with people who look different, or think different, or act different from us. And that’s partly the function of live shows. You set aside your differences for a minute; you came together because you love that song, or that band

or that comedian, whatever it was; that church service. And so, to get back to that, I think it’s really important for all of us, really, as a human race, to get back to this live presentation.”

At the Erie County Fair, “We will be bringing a new show; we’ll be bringing a new design; we’re bringing at least one or two new songs,” Smallbone said.

He teased, “Provided that the roof can hold them – spoiler alert – we’ll be bringing two, we call them elevators, or portals, that will sort of go up and down from the bottom of the stage to the top of the roof.”

Read the full Q&A online at [www.wnypapers.com](http://www.wnypapers.com). For tickets or more information, visit <https://www.ecfair.org/p/entertainment/gustograndstand>. for KING & COUNTRY is online at <https://www.forkingandcountry.com/>.

## Stephen Stanley

Talk about a rollercoaster of a year. Not long after Stephen Stanley signed with Capitol Records, the pandemic kicked in and life was turned upside down.

“As soon as I signed a record deal, we’re all excited. I’m going to Nashville and writing songs with some folks, and we’re getting ready to go. And it’s like, ‘Nope. We’ve got to stop now (laughs),’” the Georgia-based singer said. “Which we didn’t stop; I kept writing on Zoom, and I did do some trips, and we wrote some songs and stuff.”

Stanley recently released his debut, self-titled EP.

“I started making covers on TikTok and Instagram, and they really took off,” he said. “And what I saw happen was it wasn’t just this platform that just kind of landed (Christians) in my lap; there was a lot of nonbelievers that showed up. And I sort of felt this responsibility, all of a sudden, to be able to try and speak to them about Jesus as well.”

“And obviously I love encouraging the church and making songs like that, but my heart is in a place of ministry, you know, trying to reach lost people – at least planting a seed for maybe them to be like, ‘Hey, what’s this all about?’ And I told the label that, and management, and just been like, ‘Hey, this is where I’m at. This is the kind of music I want to make; and these are the people I want to reach.’”

Stanley said it’s been “awesome” getting out performing in front of a live audience.

“Actually, before the pandemic, I played a little bit around like the Southeast. But this is like my first time traveling with a band and playing music live – my own music live,” he said. “So, everything’s very, very fresh and new. ... I don’t know what’s good, what’s bad. I just know I’m having fun.”

Read the full Q&A online at [www.wnypapers.com](http://www.wnypapers.com). For more information on “A Night with Kingdom Bound,” or for tickets, visit <https://www.kingdombound.org/july30>. Stephen Stanley is online at <http://www.stephenstanleymusic.com>.

ables on guidance, and continued challenges presented to those holding large events in NY State, we are heartbroken to share that despite exhausting all possible options and pursuing all possible solutions, Kingdom Bound has been postponed and has been rescheduled for July 24-27, 2022 at Six Flags Darien Lake.”

Though the ministry was forced to postpone its festival another year, that doesn’t mean Western New York will be without performances from those who fit the mold of the modern-day Kingdom Bound headliner.

Grammy Award-winning for KING & COUNTRY – fresh from collaborations with the likes of Dolly Parton, Tori Kelly and Echosmith – will headline an Aug. 18 concert at the Erie County Fair. The Chapel will host “A Night with Kingdom Bound” outside of its Getzville campus on July 30.

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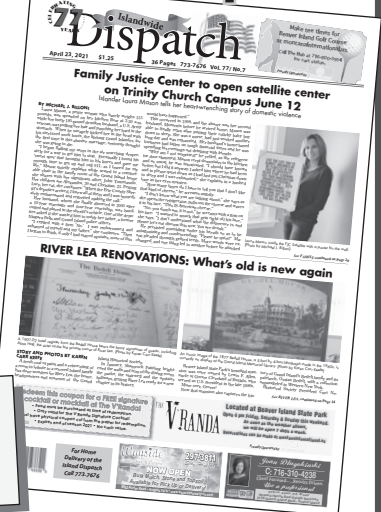
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