

Danny Gokey returns to road, WNY, with 'Stand in Faith Tour'

Resilient 'American Idol' standout has found success in Christian music

BY JOSHUA MALONI

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After entertaining millions of people for months on end, Danny Gokey found himself where most reality TV music stars end up post-screen: without a record deal.

In reality, these shows exist to make their TV networks successful – not necessarily the artists who compete for a season crown. That's not to say the judges are insincere, but rather it's impossible for them to take myriad new artists under their wings year after year.

Where Gokey differed from so many of his castmates is that his purpose wasn't just to become an entertainer. He had a higher calling – and sought to become an inspiration to others. Pairing his natural talent with supernatural favor, Gokey was able to bounce back from his overnight success hangover and build a sustainable career as a performer in contemporary Christian music.

Over the past decade, the "American Idol" alum has garnered three Grammy Award nominations, while also taking home a Dove Award and three KLOVE Male Vocalist of the Year trophies. He's charted top of the pops with "Hope In Front of Me," "Rise," "Haven't Seen It Yet" and "Christmas Is Here," while cranking out hit singles "Hope In Front of Me," "Tell Your Heart to Beat Again," "Rise," "The Comeback" and "Haven't Seen It Yet."

His latest album, "Jesus Peo-

ple," debuted at No. 1 on the Billboard Top Christian Albums chart last month on the strength of songs "We All Need Jesus (feat. "The Voice" standout Koryn Hawthorne)," "Stand In Faith" and the Spanish-language "Cristo Es Necesario (feat. Christine D'Clario).

Gokey will bring his "Stand in Faith Tour" to The Chapel's CrossPoint campus at 7 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 21. Fellow "American Idol" alum Colton Dixon will support.

The singer-songwriter and founder of nonprofit Better Than I Found It recently chatted with NFP. An edited Q&A follows. Find more at www.wnypapers.com.

Q: *I talked with musicians at the beginning of the summer, and there was a lot of optimism, of course, about what could be done this year that couldn't be done last year. But then it was sort of very up in the air as we got to the end of the summer. What has touring looked like for you this year?*

Danny Gokey: It's been cut in half, it seems like. Or maybe cut in thirds. Usually, our tours are minimum 32 cities, sometimes up to 45 cities. And now my spring tour was 12 cities. This tour, all together ... it's like 14 cities we have in total. We have some shows that we added. And it's just small.

But I guess I don't mind at the same time, because I really enjoy being home with the kids. One thing about last year is that,



Danny Gokey will perform at the Chapel's CrossPoint campus on Oct. 21. (Image courtesy of Merge PR)

when I got to be home more, it made me really see a part of my career that needed to shift. And that is being home more and not touring as much. And so, I think I'm looking for a happy medium now.

Q: *So, even though you've had less shows, do you find that the shows have been better? Do you find that the fans are just so excited to be back out and seeing live music, that maybe the experience is better than it was prior to the pandemic?*

Danny Gokey: Yeah. I do notice that, actually. And it's funny: We go to different cities and some people will tell me, "This is my first show back and I can't wait."

One show that we did – a festival we did in the summertime – they were saying, "This is the first thing we've done; it's been two years; (you're) the first in the city." And, man, you feel that anticipation.

At the same time, I think we've

been used to it, because we've been touring more and more, but I have to remember that this is some people's first time back in a couple of years – to see a live show.

Q: *Of course, "American Idol" is coming up on season 20. There have been countless musicians that have gone on that show – even if you just think about the finalists over that period of time, versus the number who are actually working musicians right now. Everybody says when they're eliminated, "You haven't seen the last of me," and we're kind of just like, "OK." That's just kind of the way it is, right, because it's not sustainable – the market cannot sustain all these reality shows and bringing 40 more superstars in every year.*

So, the question is then, what did you do differently? How is it that you are among the few who have been successful at this, post-"American Idol"?

Danny Gokey: You know,

and that's a really good question, because when I came off the show, I signed a record label. That flopped. I literally signed my record label with great expectation; released the music; it didn't do as well; got dropped in 2011. You know, 2011 goes by. 2012 nothing. 2013, I got a new manager, and he basically sat me down and said, "Hey, without a record label, this is not possible." And he said, "Because you need someone to finance your radio team; get you exposure; we need to get you with great producers and songwriters."

So he goes, "I don't want to waste my time with you" (laughs). And he goes, "But I'm willing to take a risk on this."

We went to a couple record labels; everyone shut it down. Finally, we went to this other record label – it's BMG – they used to be Sony; they split apart. And he sat down with this guy named Richard Blackstone. And Richard Blackstone, he brought me up to the table, and Richard Blackstone said, "I don't know why I'm signing this Danny Gokey kid," but he goes, "I feel like I'm supposed to." And he looks at him and he says, "Help me not to lose any money! At least make me break even on this deal" (laughs).

And that was the confidence going in. But I went in – I think a big thing about me is my faith. I believe that God writes our stories before we even walk them out; and that there is gonna be challenges, but the challenge is not to abort a plan. You know what I mean? The challenge is stay focused. And vision is a big part of that. If you have a vision of what you want to be and who you want to be, that helps out.

And so, I made that record in 2014. It was the third or fourth quarter of 2014. I had my first No. 1 song – a four-week No. 1. And the rest is history.

It was literally five-and-a-half years after "American Idol" before I had any success.

And so, what's the secret? Really, I think there is no secret. I just think that you need to know who you are. And I think you need to – no matter what happens to you – stay on course. If you have that vision, keep chipping away at the vision, doing what you feel you're called to do. And you'll watch the pieces coming together.

It's interesting, because that's the thing: Not many people on "American Idol" – I don't know if anyone can say that – that they got dropped by their record label and rebounded. But I did, and I'm grateful for that.

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