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From 'American Idol' win to megahit 'Home,' Phillip Phillips going with the flow

He will open for band Matchbox Twenty at a concert Tuesday at the Embassy Theatre

By James Grant of The News-Sentinel
Wednesday, February 6, 2013 - 12:23 pm

What a difference a year makes.

February of last year, 22-year-old singer-songwriter/guitarist Phillip Phillips was chosen as one of the Top 24 semi-finalists on the 11th season of television's powerhouse talent competition show "American Idol."

A year later, Phillips has won the coveted title, recorded his first album and now is on tour as an opening act for Matchbox Twenty, including at their concert Tuesday night at the Embassy Theatre.

Phillips, a recent college student who worked at his parents' Pawn Shop in Georgia, has become a major-selling music act with the success of his first single, "Home."

The song has topped six different Billboard charts over the past eight months and is the biggest-selling debut single or coronation song the "American Idol" franchise has ever produced, selling over 3 million copies so far.

"Home" seems to be everywhere; from its major exposure in last summer's London Olympics to an insurance commercial to its non-stop radio play — the song is simply inescapable.

With all of the media attention focused on Phillips, you would think he would be first in line for a swelled head. Not so says Phillips.

"I don't feel too famous," he said in a recent telephone interview. "I guess my only thing is that you don't have as much privacy anymore."

"This whole past year is just a blessing," Phillips added. "And I'm thankful for that. It's definitely a tough year. Definitely went through a lot, but it's a year that I won't forget and I'll always be thankful for."

While the whirlwind pace of the last year is evident in Phillips' voice, he does seem to exude a confidence and maturity that is disarming for someone so young.

Phillips said he likes to meet with people while he's out on the road and often tries to mingle with them and talk if he can. He is fully aware people are curious about him, and he can relate to how they feel.

"Before the show yesterday with Matchbox (Twenty), there's some people outside, you know. I'll have a talk with them," Phillips said of meeting with fans.

"As long as they're not too crazy, I can talk with them and kind of just chat a little bit," he added. "Try to get to know them a little bit while I can."

"Because, you know, they just want to talk with who they look up to, too. I'm the same, ... we're all the same way. We want to talk to artists or whoever they are, actors, whoever it is, you want to talk with them and just kind of get to know them a little bit."

Phillips said some of the people he has met in the past year have also shared stories with him about what the song "Home" has meant in their lives. People obviously have responded to the song in a very personal way, which is likely the reason the song has such staying power.

"I've heard so many great stories come from the song man," Phillips said. "How it's helped families through life situations about losing a son or a daughter."

"Somebody losing some family member or, you know, it was used in Hurricane Sandy. There have been so many crazy, touching stories that have come through the song."

This opening spot on the Matchbox Twenty tour is not only a good career move for Phillips. He's a big fan of the group's music, especially Rob Thomas.

"Rob Thomas, he's one of my heroes, man. He's one of my favorite lyricists, so it's an honor to be on stage with them every night."



More Information

In concert

What: Matchbox Twenty in concert with opening act Phillip Phillips.

When: Tuesday, February 12 at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday

Where: Embassy Theatre, 121 West Jefferson Blvd.

Cost: \$42, \$68, \$78. For more information call the Embassy box office at 424-5665. Tickets can be purchased at the Embassy box office, as well as through Ticketmaster outlets, by going to www.ticketmaster.com and at on the Web or by calling 1-800-745-3000.

Listen in

An audio interview with Phillip Phillips:

The News-Sentinel

Audio interview...

6:12

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"It's nerve-racking as well because I'm opening up for a band that I grew up listening to, so it's kind of a little unreal for me."

"I've got a 30-minute set, ... it's me on acoustic guitar, a cello and percussion," Phillips added. "It's going really well, man. The crowd seems to really enjoy it."

Now that he has a little perspective on what it means to win something like "American Idol," the only advice he would give future winners of shows like "Idol" is to have fun, be themselves and know what they want out of music.

As for Phillips, he just wants to continue making music and performing.

"For me, man, I kind of just go with the flow," he said of what's ahead for him. "I'm hoping to have a bigger fan base and to just keep doing the friendship with the fans. You know, and put more music out there and just touring."