

# 'American Idol' Alum Dixon Follows Faith To Success

BY JOHN J. MOSER  
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ALLENTOWN, Pa. — Even before Colton Dixon placed seventh on the 2012 season of "American Idol," when judges saw the rocker with the skunk-striped hair as a threat to eventual winner Phillip Phillips, Dixon says he wanted to sing Christian music.

"Man, I've been invested in Christian music since I was 10 or 11 years old," Dixon, 22, says in a phone call from a Los Angeles recording studio. "I remember listening to Steven Curtis (Chapman), Michael W. Smith. I remember when Casting Crowns first came on the radio. I mean, I was such a big fan."

But Dixon says his "Idol" success brought second-guessing.

"That was kind of like, 'Whoa, this is obviously a mainstream TV show and it wasn't really what I had planned,'" he says. "But God opened those doors and I was hanging on while he was pulling me through. I didn't know if that was his way of saying, 'Let's try this mainstream thing out.' So I was just keeping those doors open."

So after a surprise early elimination that judge Steven Tyler said left him "beyond shocked," Dixon says he and his management team decided to simply start writing for a debut album and see where it took them.

"And I started writing, and it was just pretty obvious that Christian music was where I was going to belong, and I was definitely happy about that," Dixon says with a laugh.

It looks like it was the right decision. Dixon's debut album, "A Messenger," released in January, went to No. 1 on Billboard's Christian and Gospel charts and to No. 15 on the overall albums chart.

It also produced a No. 1 Christian single, "Never Gone," and won Dixon a Dove Award for Best Rock/Contemporary Album of the Year and a nomination for Best New Artist.

Now Dixon is on the "Hits Deep" tour, one of the year's biggest Christian tours, with headliner Toby Mac and supporting acts Brandon Heath, fellow "Idol" alum Mandisa and others.

None of this should be a surprise for anyone who watched Dixon on "Idol." He openly shared his faith and even apologized for singing the Lady Gaga song "Bad Romance," saying it conflicted with his beliefs. He blamed his elimination for choosing to sing it.

"The message that was portrayed wasn't really who I was," he said then. "And that's normally the first thing that I think about, and for whatever reason I overlooked that ... and I lost sight of what I normally think of first."

Dixon says the direction of his career was clear even before he signed with the Christian record label Sparrow. Chart-topping Christian rock band Third Day — which he said is his father's favorite group — approached him about coming on its tour, which Dixon did this spring.

"I remember being on the 'American Idol' tour and getting a text message from (Third Day singer) Mac Powell, saying, 'Hey, would you be interested in coming out on tour with us?'" Dixon says. "I was just blown away by that — such a huge compliment. So of course I said yes."

The acceptance of Christian listeners has been heartening, Dixon says.

"I mean, first record out and to see it be so successful and to see fans and people liking it so much, it really is an awesome thing," he says. And to win a Dove Award "that was voted on by my peers really did mean a lot. I'm not doing this for public recognition or anything like that. But it's still nice to hear from your audience that you're on the right track."

Dixon says his management told him there was interest from major labels during his talks with Sparrow, but "I don't even really care who it was. I was happy with where I was."

Dixon is preparing to re-release "A Messenger" on



Dixon

Jan. 7, with some remixes. And he's in the studio recording his sophomore disc. "We're off to a great start," he says with a laugh. "The song we recorded yesterday is going to be my new jam for a while, actually. I've been writing since, gosh, since early summer, late spring even. So really excited to fi-

nally get into the studio and get the ball rolling.

"It's going to be a continuation of the first record, it really is. However, there definitely are some new elements to it. We're definitely exploring new sounds and new ways to create a similar effect. But as far as content and what I'm singing about — more or less the same things, just from a different perspective."

Dixon says he even has written with Toby Mac, probably Christian music's premiere artist.

"I've been a big fan of Toby for a long time," he says. "Great, great guy. I played a couple shows with him, and, yeah, it's just a great hang. ... Just thrilled to share the stage with him. It's a lot of fun."

Colton says he's still in contact with several of the contestants from his season of "Idol," notably winner Phillip Phillips, whom he says shares his Christian faith.

The show's mentor that season, record producer Jimmy Iovine, credited

Colton's elimination for solidifying the voting audience behind one young male contestant and paving the way for Phillips to win. But Dixon says he's not so sure.

"I know a lot of my fans are Phillip Phillips fans, too (but) the demographic for voters are the same for a lot of us, so I hate when Jimmy compared us that way," Dixon said after his elimination. "I don't think it was necessarily split ... Phillip is phenomenal at what he does and I'm happy he stayed."

These days, Colton says,

Phillips "is a busy guy (but) I would honestly say I hear from him the most."

"Me and him were, as far as I'm concerned, we were probably the closest on the show. He's a believer as well. So it was just nice to kind of be that accountable for one another, just with Hollywood surrounding you, you know?"

"He's a great guy, but yeah, he's been busy touring with this little no-name guy called John Mayer. It's ridiculous."

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