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## Clay Aiken sings with classic style

'Idol' hasn't been idle, building a successful pop-music career

By James Grant of The News-Sentinel  
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Fans of the television show "American Idol" may find it hard to believe, but it's been nearly eight years since singer Clay Aiken took home second place on the mega-popular program in 2003.

Even though Aiken, who performs Wednesday at the Embassy Theatre, lost the "American Idol" crown by a very slim margin to Ruben Studdard, his albums ended up outselling Studdard to become one of the more successful "Idol" alumni.

The singer has gone on to release several best-selling albums, done several successful tours, co-written a best-selling book, performed on Broadway as Sir Robin in the show "Monty Python's Spamalot," as well as recently making a PBS special titled "Clay Aiken: Tried & True Live!" named after his current CD, "Tried & True."

Aiken says that, while the music he performs in concert will be the same as his PBS special, his live show does have its differences.

"We're doing it a little bit differently from the PBS special, just to kind of give us some flexibility in the music we do, ... (and) the order we do it in," Aiken said in a telephone interview.

"The PBS special was such a big production itself; in order to take that on the road, you kind of lose some of the intimacy that I like to have in the show ... It's the same vibe, it's the same sound, but it's not going to look exactly the same."

While the PBS concert was a big production, more important to Aiken was the fact the show was shot in his hometown of Raleigh, N.C., in front of family, friends and people who made an impact on his life.

"I had about 15 to 20 teachers who had taught me at various grades all the way from second grade up to senior year, college actually," Aiken said. "I had one teacher from every grade except for first and kindergarten who were at the show. That was probably the neatest thing, to be able to do it (the PBS concert) in the theater that I grew up seeing shows in and had not performed in before or had not performed in since 'Idol' at all."

Pop standards on "Tried & True" originally were made famous by the likes of Elvis Presley, Roy Orbison and Johnny Mathis.

Aiken performs them in the classic pop style of the recent past, not unlike that of Andy Williams with a little jazz and big-band thrown in and ballads to the forefront. Aiken is obviously comfortable singing as a balladeer and feels the songs on "Tried & True" are a perfect vehicle for him.

"They are singer's songs, that's why," Aiken said of what drew him to perform these songs. "It's not about the beat or the hook ... I took all of these songs, and I sang them either in the shower or in my garage just to kind of see how they sit in your voice. It's like trying on clothes ... you may even like it on the mannequin but until you actually put it on yourself you don't know how it fits or how it looks. That's kind of the way it is with songs."

In the last few years, Aiken has also made other aspects of his life fit in with his musical career.

In 2008, he welcomed the birth of his son, Parker, which triggered his decision to publicly announce that he is a gay man. Aiken told People magazine he didn't want to raise a child to hide things or lie, and that his first decision as a father was to be open about his life.

One thing that Aiken feels fatherhood hasn't influenced is his approach to music.

"I think if I wrote music it might," Aiken said. "It probably influences the way I build out my career because before it was always 'let's just have fun, who cares?' Now, well, I'm like I have college to pay for and everything, so let's work this. It changes that outlook a little bit."

With all the activity of his career and fatherhood, one thing Aiken hasn't kept up with is the show that made him famous — "American Idol."

"I haven't watched it with any regularity since Season 4," Aiken said. "I'm six years behind now. I caught one episode last year because Ruben (Studdard) sang. Once you know how the sausage is made, you don't want to eat it," he said, laughing.

"I know it's addictive, I imagine it still is," he added. "I know it's very different. It's changed quite a bit since I've been on it. What little I've seen, it's much flashier, ... it seems to be a little bit more manufactured now."



### More Information

#### Singing standards

**What:** "American Idol" alum Clay Aiken performs a concert of pop standards and other songs.

**When:** 7:30 p.m. Wednesday

**Where:** Embassy Theatre, 121 W. Jefferson Blvd.

**Cost:** \$29.50, \$39.50, \$49.50 and \$75; tickets available at the Embassy box office, Ticketmaster outlets and [www.ticketmaster.com](http://www.ticketmaster.com)

