

# The San Diego Union-Tribune

## For 'American Idol' winner Maddie Poppe, a wild ride to national stardom



JULY 25, 2018, 1:30 PM

**W**hen Ryan Seacrest crowned 20-year-old Maddie Poppe the winner of “American Idol’s” comeback season on ABC this past May, she was stunned.

“Being on the finale is my most vivid memory of being on the show,” says Poppe of the experience, where she dominated each round and impressed “Idol” judges [Katy Perry](#), [Luke Bryan](#) and [Lionel Richie](#). “When I look back at the entire season, I wish I had more memories every step along the way.”

Instead, Poppe says she purposely tried to not take everything in.

“I was constantly thinking that it wasn’t going to work out and would all be over soon.”

In reality, Poppe's wildest music dreams came true when the singer reigned supreme for the 17th season of the long-running competition series, which took her from midwestern obscurity to following in the footsteps of boldfaced pop names that include former champions-turned-superstars [Carrie Underwood](#) and Kelly Clarkson.

And as with every other summer following the final results, Poppe and the show's Top 7 finalists are hitting the road as part of the American Idol Live! 2018 tour, the San Diego stop of the nationwide jaunt taking place on July 26 at Copley Symphony Hall. (The local stop also includes an appearances from past winner Kris Allen and the boyband In Real Life.)

The juxtaposition between Poppe's pre- and post-"American Idol" run is stark. The singer grew up with a passion for song in Clarksville, Iowa — population 1,500 people. Meanwhile, the Copley Symphony Hall show alone has a capacity of 2,248 spectators.

"It's definitely awesome knowing that I can come from somewhere that small and make it on a show this big and have this platform," says Poppe as she mulls over that statistic. "I guess what I'd want to do is inspire people, like how I'm inspired by artists like Katy Perry. She was dropped from a few record labels and really struggled before she eventually succeeded."

Perhaps Poppe's initial wariness of her "Idol" experience stemmed from a handful of years toiling in obscurity, making due with gigs at open mics and farmer's markets.

"I went to college for a few years, but I always had music on my mind," she explains. "When I was supposed to be listening in class, I was writing songs and trying to find gigs. Basically I was playing any show I could possibly find and submitting my songs to websites hoping someone would take interest in me. I really didn't know if my break was ever going to come."

Three years ago, Poppe scored what was supposed to be her break in the form of landing a choice audition slot on another music competition series: NBC's "American Idol" foe "The Voice." The cutthroat show promptly sent Poppe packing.

"After that, I thought I just missed my whole shot," she says of the setback. "It seems once you're off that show, it's over for you. You don't see artists getting two shots like this on two different shows too often."

It's through sustained rejection that Poppe learned how to persevere to her current perch.

"I think it's important for you to fail before you succeed because it makes you that much more grateful," she explains. "I look back on myself a year ago and I don't know what to do next, I had no idea how I was going to make it and was trying everything I possibly could. I can't believe all of the opportunities that have come my way since."

Aside from basking in the glow of her top perch on the nationwide tour — it'll also be her first time visiting much of the country, including San Diego — Poppe is also behind the rising single "Going, Going Gone" (which peaked at No. 13 on the digital songs charts). In addition, she's also smitten, thanks to a burgeoning, much-ballyhooed relationship with a fellow contestant, runner-up Caleb Lee Hutchinson.

"It's so exciting because we all get along so well and play off each other, nobody's left out," she says of her "Idol" finalists and touringmates. "Everyone really enjoyed each other's company, and I don't think I could have asked for a better group of people to tour with."

## American Idol Live! 2018 tour, with special guests Kris Allen and In Real Life

**When:** Thursday, July 26

**Where:** Copley Symphony Hall at Jacobs Music Center, 750 B St., downtown

**Tickets:** \$35-\$85. VIP: \$195-\$495

**Online:** [americanidollive.com](http://americanidollive.com)