

Maddie Poppe Talks Americana Single, People's Choice Nomination & Newfound Fame: Exclusive Interview



It was only a year ago when Maddie Poppe, a then-unknown singer-songwriter from a small Iowa town, played "Rainbow Connection" for *American Idol* judges [Katy Perry](#), [Luke Bryan](#) and [Lionel Richie](#). The trio sent her through to the next round with a golden ticket, and, unbeknownst to her, that piece of paper would change her life.

In the time since her first audition (Oct. 3, 2017), the 20-year-old indie folk singer has competed on *Idol* -- which she ended up winning -- performed on numerous talk shows, embarked on the *American Idol Live!* tour, released a Christmas single and worked tirelessly on her forthcoming debut album.

"It's like everything was going 100 miles an hour and I just had to jump on it and go with it," Poppe tells *Billboard* in an exclusive interview. "They always say it's like the fast track to fame, and that's what it was for a while."

Life might have slowed down for Poppe, but it certainly hasn't stopped. Her first original post-*Idol* single, "Keep On Movin' On," is set for release on Friday (Oct. 26) and will be followed by a music video on Nov 2. With a sound that brings to mind a [Lumineers](#) anthem, the Americana track stretches outside the pop confines of Poppe's [Julia Michaels](#)-penned *Idol* coronation song, "Going Going Gone."

"People can interpret that however they want to whether that's moving on from a relationship or moving on to the next step in life," says Poppe. "It sounds a lot different than everything else right now, and I think that's why I picked it; It's unique."

The entirety of Poppe's upcoming album will push genre boundaries by combining pop, country and easy listening elements. Although Poppe and her team haven't cut all the songs yet or even decided which ones will make the final cut for the likely spring release, she's been an active participant in writing and recording sessions in L.A. While the work has been exhausting for the budding young star -- as she spends long hours attempting to channel the vibe of artists such as [Brandi Carlile](#) and [Sara Bareilles](#) -- she's learned a lot from the songwriters she's working with.

"I can't just sit down for a few hours and write something completely," says Poppe. "But these people? It's crazy because you'll just sit down, and somebody will come up with a melody, and this girl will be able to map out the whole song then and there."



In November Poppe will get to share how she utilized the *Idol* platform to create a music career at the Billboard Live Music Summit and Awards in Hollywood, California. She will expand on her plans for the coming year alongside artists including [Shawn Mendes](#), [Taylor Bennett](#) and [New Kids on the Block](#), who will tell their stories of success and struggle.

"It's an honor, for sure, to be a part of it," said Poppe. "Billboard is a huge deal."

Poppe also managed to score herself a spot at the People's Choice Awards as a nominee in the Competition Contestant category without even realizing it. She found out she was in the running through Twitter but didn't want to get her hopes up because she was up against a cross section of television stars. Her excitement grew when she became a top-five finalist alongside Nikki Bella from *Dancing With The Stars*, *The Voice*'s Brynn Cartelli, *The Amazing Race*'s Cody Nickson and Eva Igo from *World of Dance*.

"I know people had my back on *Idol* because obviously they voted me through to win, but to still know that people are voting for me? That's really cool," she says.

Poppe's fanbase quickly coalesced during her *Idol* run and includes over half-a-million followers stretching across her social media accounts. While she appreciates all the support and kindness her fans have offered her, the fame has been an adjustment. "People know everything and everything you do," she says. "Like I'll see baby pictures of myself, and I'll be like, 'how do you have this picture?'"

Despite having much of her existence put on display, she's managed to hold on to a private life outside of the music scene's craziness. She began dating *Idol* runner-up Caleb Lee Hutchinson early in the competition, but news of their relationship stayed private until the finale. The couple has continued dating, but they've made sure to keep their private and professional lives separate, rarely talking to each other about their music industry careers.

"There's stuff that happens in my career and his career that we both have no idea about, and we'll find out and be like, 'oh my gosh, that's so exciting,' but we don't see each other as musicians," says Poppe. "I think I just kinda see him as Caleb -- he sees me as Maddie -- because when we first met, we were just friends like that. I think I'm really glad that we met before any of it happened."

Her unique perspective was formed by her pre-fame life, which she's kept in mind as new experiences stack up. "I can still see every circumstance as an outsider because a year ago, I was just wondering what this lifestyle would be like," she says. "I listened to songs on the radio and had no idea what was going on in the industry or how things came together, and now that I'm in it, I can see both sides."



Poppe hopes to perform music outside of the *Idol* universe on her next tour. While she had lots of fun on the *American Idol Live!* tour alongside her friends, she can't imagine how much more fun it will be to choose her own songs and determine what her shows look like. Although this dream hasn't come to fruition yet, she continues to rely on the superpower that has gotten her this far: staying true to herself.

"When I was on the show, I was singing songs that I would sing outside of the show," says Poppe. "I wasn't just picking songs like, 'oh, it needs to be a Disney song, but it needs to sound good on my voice.' It was more of, 'oh, I like this song, and it kind of fits my style.' *American Idol* just happened to be the platform that took me to the next level."

Poppe was right; *Idol* was just the beginning. If she continues to embrace the parts of herself that make her Maddie, a world of opportunity will surely open up for her.

"I'm not doing music to please other people," she says. "I'm just going to stick to what I like. I won the show doing it, so I think I'm going to keep going there."