

# DAVID COOK

Millions of people around the country fell in love with rock belter David Cook while watching him make other people's songs his own week after week on the seventh season of *American Idol*. Cook won the competition handily thanks to viewers connecting with his rich, unfettered voice and passionately intense performances, not to mention his down-to-earth Midwestern charm. Now, with the release of his self-titled major-label debut, this gifted 25-year-old is eager to show those fans what he can do when *he's* in the driver's seat.

"I went on *Idol* with a five-card hand and showed three of my cards," Cook says. "Now it's time to put down the other two. There's a lot I haven't shown the world, just as far as who I am and what I'm about. I have several layers as an artist and those layers are out there on this record. I don't see myself ever writing an autobiography; I'm just going to let the music speak for itself."

And it does — loud and clear. *David Cook* is a statement-making album, filled with bold, keenly felt songs that showcase Cook's powerful vocal chops and considerable songwriting talent, as well as the versatility that made him a star on *Idol*. The first single "Light On," with its Southern rock vibe, is light years away from the gut-wrenching ballad "Permanent," which couldn't be more different than the swaggering shredder "Bar-Ba-Sol."

"I wanted to make an eclectic album that went places," Cook says. "This is my first major-label release and that gave me some room to be a bit of a chameleon and try different things. So there's a diversity of influences on this record. When we were going through the process, I wasn't sure how we were going to tie everything together." That job fell to producer Rob Cavallo, a veteran studio wiz who has helmed hit albums for Green Day, My Chemical Romance, and Kid Rock, among many others. "Rob did a great job of tuning in to who I am as a person," Cook says. "He really made the songs fit me, as opposed to tailoring them to fit someone else's perception of me."

Cook also gives props to his songwriting collaborators, an illustrious list that includes former Soundgarden and Audioslave frontman Chris Cornell, Goo Goo Dolls frontman Johnny Rzeznik, Nixons singer/guitarist Zac Maloy, and Our Lady Peace frontman Raine Maida, one of Cook's longtime idols. Cook co-wrote three songs with Maida, including "Heroes," which he describes as an homage to his supportive family, and "Permanent," a song addressed to his older brother Adam who is battling brain cancer.

"We recorded 'Permanent' in two takes and everyone in the room was crying," Cook recalls. "I actually had to leave at one point because it was so emotional. As a musician, any time you can create something where the end result is exactly what's in your head, well there's a heaviness to that moment and it overwhelmed me. I've been writing songs for ten years and that was the first time I'd felt it. I think there's an honesty throughout the record that culminates in that song."

"Permanent" comes near the end of an album that is full of highlights, from the chiming opener "Declaration" (which Cook likens to "me standing on top of a building and declaring my intentions for this album") to the arena-friendly sing-along closer "A Daily Anthem," and everything in between, including the propulsive "Come Back To Me" and the poignant "Lie," both of which illustrate the album's recurring theme. "It's the idea of love amidst separation," Cook explains. "'Come Back To Me' is about loving someone you can't be near, whereas 'Lie' is about being in a dysfunctional relationship that you don't want to end because you still see the good in it."

Then there's "Life on the Moon" whose lyric "The life that I knew, it's through...I'm alone in this crowded room...It's like life on the moon" feels particularly fitting given how much Cook's circumstances have changed since he auditioned for *American Idol* on a whim back in August 2007. "What I like about that song is that it represents the last year of my life without perverting the last year of my life," he says. "It's written so that it could be about the whole *Idol* journey, but it doesn't have to be."

Cook may have gotten his first taste of fame thanks to Simon, Paula, and Randy, but his musical ambitions began long before he appeared in front of their judging table. Born in Houston, Cook was raised in Blue Springs, Missouri. He began singing in second grade and performed in his school's musical theater productions, but Cook found that rock and roll was more his style when he picked up a guitar at age 13. He formed his first band, Axium, at 15, though his attention was split between music and sports. "I thought I wanted to be a pro baseball player, but my fastball wasn't fast enough and I couldn't hit to save my life," he says. "Performing was the only thing I ever felt I was great at."

During his senior year of college at Central Missouri State, Cook recorded a solo CD called *Analog Heart*, which sold well regionally. In 2006, after obtaining a degree in graphic arts, Cook had to decide whether he wanted to be a musician or a graphic designer. "I gave myself every opportunity not to do music," he says, "but it was always there. I couldn't ignore it." He moved to Tulsa, Oklahoma, and was in the early stages of recording his second album when his younger brother Andrew asked Cook to accompany him to Omaha and lend moral support while he tried out for *American Idol*. Andrew didn't make the cut, but he encouraged a very reluctant David to try out. "He threatened to beat my ass if I didn't, so it's entirely his fault that all this happened to me," Cook says with a smile.

One week after being declared the winner with a record-breaking 56 percent of the nearly 100 million votes cast, Cook rewrote chart history when 11 of his songs debuted on *Billboard's* Hot 100 chart — the highest number of new entries in a single week by an artist since the Beatles in 1964. Topping the list was "The Time of My Life," which debuted at No. 3, making it the highest new entry on the Hot 100 of 2008. In July, Cook hit the road with his fellow *Idol* contestants for the American Idols Live! Tour, which visited more than 40 cities across the U.S. — an experience he cites as extremely valuable. "Being able to make a 16,000-seat arena feel intimate is one of the trickiest things to pull off," he says. "If you can get the people in the nosebleed seats to feel as though they're getting the same show as the people sitting front and center, then you're doing something amazing. That's always going to be my goal."

It shouldn't be too tough given that Cook will be performing the songs on his debut album. Gutsy and epic, but grounded in the personal, the songs are tailor-made for those magical moments when music, whether it be uplifting or heart-breaking, can transport you to another place, which is exactly what Cook intended. "I want my album to be an exhausting experience, in that you listen to it and have to take a breath to collect yourself, and immediately need to listen to it all over again," he says. "I want people to hear it and feel like they just ran a 5K marathon."

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