

SIGHT & SOUND

**'The Voice' finalist
Joshua Davis to
play The Mendel**

- Page 6



The Mitten State's 'Voice'

Joshua Davis plays the Mendel Center on Saturday

By JEREMY D. BONFIGLIO
Sight & Sound Editor

BENTON HARBOR — Joshua Davis couldn't have scripted a better Michigan homecoming.

The singer-songwriter who's lived in the Upper Peninsula, Detroit, Lansing and Traverse City and has gigged in just about every other corner of The Mitten has enjoyed a hero's welcome in his home state since finishing third on NBC's popular singing competition, "The Voice."

"It's been a lot of fun, and really interesting coming off of 'The Voice,'" Davis says by phone from his home in Traverse City. "I've been a professional musician for 15 years, but coming back after 'The Voice,' and coming back to my home state to do these shows has been a blast."

Davis, who has played gigs across Michigan all summer, will enjoy three more shows on his home turf — including Saturday's concert at the Lake Michigan College Mendel Center Mainstage Theatre — before he begins a national tour next month in Colorado, riding the wave of national exposure he received from finishing third on this past season of NBC's hit musical competition show.

"It was probably the strangest six months of my life, but it was a wonderful experience," Davis says of "The Voice." "Everybody who works on that show is at the top of their game. I learned a lot and came away with a lot of stories and great experience."

Davis, 37, had never seen the show when producers called him and invited him to the blind auditions. His initial reaction was to say no, but after watching the show with his daughter, who was 9 at the time, changed his mind.

"I was hesitant," Davis says. "I had no intention of being on a reality competition program. It was something I just was not into at all. I think a lot of these shows are about breaking people down, but after watching it, 'The Voice' seemed to be building people up. The fact that I felt

comfortable enough to let my 9-year-old daughter watch it was the true marker for me that it was a positive show, which was only confirmed when I went to the audition."

Davis made it to the final six months later, where he sang three songs, including his own, Detroit-inspired, blue-collar tribute, "The Workingman's Hymn."

Unlike many of the other contestants on the show, Davis was already a full-time musician. He has spent the past 15 years performing on the folk circuit, first gaining attention as the frontman for the Lansing-based roots band Steppin' In It.

Davis also has three solo albums under his belt. The most recent is 2013's "A Miracle of Birds," inspired by a trip to Israel with the organization "On the Ground," which raises awareness for free-trade olive farmers in the West Bank.

Davis, who is Jewish, says the album details his own feelings about fighting oppression, and seeing people oppressed by the Israeli government.

Those experiences engulf songs such as "Waiting on the Dove," which questions his own views, and "House of Princes," which details an incident where people planting olive trees were met by IMF soldiers in riot gear.

"I met other artists, dancers and community leaders and soaked up a lot of culture and brought it all home with me," Davis says. "The album is based on all of those experiences."

Davis, who started playing guitar at 13, grew up splitting time between his mother's home in Detroit and his father's Upper Peninsula home in Marquette.

"There was always music around," Davis says. "I remember being at a bonfire party as a kid watching a guy play guitar and sing and bring people together. There was this great feeling of community and I felt like I wanted to do that."

When he was 18, Davis became a song leader at Tamarack Camps, a Jewish summer camp in Ortonville, Mich., which is where he decided to pursue a music career.

"I had been doing a lot of theater at the time, but that summer I realized it was really music that I wanted to pursue," Davis says. "The more I played, the more passion I had for the kind of songwriting where you create a moment with people. That's why I love playing shows. It's about those moments on stage that are unique to that space and that time."

In 1998, he formed the well-known Lansing roots music group Steppin' In It with Dominic John Davis, Joe Wilson and Andy Wilson.

His current touring band includes Dominic John Davis on bass as well as Steppin' In It veterans Geoff Lewis on drums, and keyboardist and accordion player Mike Lynch. Fiddle and mandolin player Brad Phillips rounds out the band.

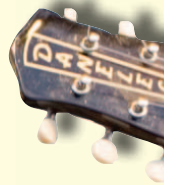
"I'm never going to stop playing with those guys," Joshua Davis says. "We grew up together and learned how to play together. They're my comrades. We're still going to do some Steppin' In It shows once in a while, but everybody has their own projects going on now. When we do have room to do a show together it's a really special occasion."

Davis says Saturday's set list will be a deep-cuts journey through his own material as well as a few Steppin' In It staples. It also will include a smattering of favorites he performed on "The Voice," including "Fields of Gold," "When I Paint My Masterpiece," "In My Life" and "I Shall Be Released."

Davis hints that he's also been playing some new material in recent shows as he plans for his next album.

"I've been doing a bunch of writing lately and more tunes are coming," Davis says. "I'm hoping to do some recording in the very near future. I've been talking to a couple of producers about some new projects. I can't publicize anything yet, but there's definitely some wonderful things on the horizon."

Contact: jbonfiglio@TheHP.com, 932-0364, Twitter: @HPBonfiglio



IF YOU

Who: Joshua Davis

When: 8 p.m. Saturday

Where: Lake Michigan College Mainstage Theatre, 2755 I Benton Harbor

How much: \$21-\$50

Contact: 927-1221 or Imc

Artist info: joshuadavis



J GO

College Mendel Center
Napier Ave.,

mainstage.org
music.com

**“The Voice”
finalist Joshua
Davis performs
Saturday at the
Lake Michigan
College Mendel
Center Mainstage
Theatre.**

Photo provided /
Joshua Davis