

Concert Tour Aims to Promote Unity And Racial Reconciliation

Kirk Franklin and tobyMac were to blend their musical styles for an 'I Have a Dream' concert tour beginning in October

On the heels of the 40th anniversary of Martin Luther King's "I Have A Dream" speech, Christian recording artists Kirk Franklin and tobyMac hope to fulfill their interpretation as part of a co-headlining 17-city tour. I Have a Dream: The Tour was due to kick off in Norfolk, Va., on Oct. 16, and if all goes well, both artists hope to expand the touring partnership into 2004.

"We're going to go out there and hope that we're not ahead of where people's minds are," tobyMac said. "We want to make sure everybody's feeling that this needs to happen like we do."

Despite the differences in their musical styles, tobyMac, who is white, and Franklin, who is black, have developed a close relationship in the last several years. The two have shared the stage at Billy Graham crusades, music festivals and the Dove Awards. Franklin also made a special guest appearance on tobyMac's smash hit "J-Train," and tobyMac appeared on Franklin's "Throw Your Hands Up."

"TobyMac and I are both very uncomfortable with the color barrier that exists between Christians," Franklin said. "It's almost an oxymoron to be Christian yet separated by race. We want this tour to be a seed-planter. God willing, it will be the beginning of something greater."

Their mutual dream for racial unity parallels that of the late King, and the name of their tour was decided upon long before anyone realized this year marked the 40th anniversary of the March on Washington, where King gave the historic speech.

In the spirit of King's fight for equality, both tobyMac and Franklin have been leading the charge within the Christian music industry. TobyMac has been championing the cause for Christian urban and hip-hop music since he founded Gotee Records in 1994, and he has helped pull down walls within the Christian music industry. Franklin made a concerted effort to bring the races together with his multicultural group INC.

"The truth is, it should be everyone's dream, that we're not divided culturally or racially and our children are playing together, at a concert together, at church together," tobyMac said. "We're going to spend eternity together. We just want to say something that really nails it. 'I have a dream' says it all."

Each artist will play an hour-long set and at times will join each other on stage. San Diego-based trio Souljahz will add their Latin-influenced hip-hop/R&B sound as the concert's opening act. Venues intentionally have been kept small to promote interaction. The largest hall holds just under 5,000 (Liberty University in Lynchburg, Va.), while the smallest building fits only 1,000 (930 Club in Washington, D.C.).

"A small setting tends to be less entertainment-driven and a little more art-driven and communication-driven," tobyMac said. "In a more intimate setting, the subtleties come across in a bigger way."

Included are tour stops in Philadelphia, Boston, Pittsburgh, Minneapolis and St. Louis, Mo., as well as the legendary House of Blues locations in Orlando, Fla.; Myrtle Beach, S.C.; and Chicago. In each of the stops there will be an art contest for children called Walking Out the Dream. In each city a nonprofit organization that works with children will be selected based on their efforts to promote racial reconciliation. Children from each group will be asked to draw a picture responding to the statement, "My dream is to ... "

From each city 10 artists will receive VIP concert badges and have photos taken with tobyMac and Franklin. Two grand-prize winners in each city will receive a \$100 savings bond toward their college education.

The winning drawings and their artists will be featured in a 12-month calendar to be published by NavPress. The Message brand manager Mike Kennedy said parent company NavPress will donate 2,000 of these calendars to each organization for fund-raising purposes.

Chad Bonham