

How a Charismatic College Groomed American Idol's Clark Beckham

Though Clark Beckham is the runner up *American Idol*, he's staying grounded in his roots.

"I don't know what the future holds, but I know who holds the future," Beckham writes on Facebook. It's a reflection of his character, one that was molded at Lee University, a Church of God school outside Chattanooga.

The star credits his time with the school's traveling choir—one of many—as what got him through the Hollywood experience.

"What I've done at Lee before here with Campus Choir and school taught me to work really hard when I'm really, really tired. Lee, my experience there, has been everything to prepare me for this."

Part of that has to with the rigor expected of those involved with Lee's music program. Of the touring schedule, Beckham says: "We'd sing for two or three hours every night. Saturday night, we would sing for a two-hour service, get to the hotel at 2 a.m. then load the bus at 5 a.m. to get to church, for sound check. For the services, we'd sing four to five hours, drive, sing again for two-to-three hours, then back to Lee at 3-4 a.m and have classes at 8."

So when it came time for Hollywood, Beckham was ready.

"I'd been doing (Campus Choir) for so long, honestly, that made the amount of singing we do (on *American Idol*) a breeze. Physically, not losing my voice, and for Hollywood week, it was three-to-four days with no sleep, all this pressure and

people dropping like flies, passing out, falling asleep everywhere, saying they can't do it, and I'd been doing that with choir ... even more with history department. It just sounded like finals week."

His alma mater has thrown their support behind him, championing him through social media and campus viewing parties.

"Everyone here at Lee is thrilled for Clark and the success he is seeing," Lee University Director of Public Relations Brian Conn says on behalf of the university. "We are proud of him, we think he's proud of us, and we want him to enjoy all the prayer, support and good will that we can possibly offer."

Beckham often performed shows at a local coffee shop, Inman Street Coffeehouse, and the managers, Joel and Cheryl Rogers have been hosting viewing parties as 'American Idol' finished off its season.

"Professionally he was always ready to give a show his all," Joel Rogers says. "He was also incredibly available: All I had to do was text him and he would come and play for us at the drop of a hat! ... He has also played a host of fundraising shows for missions trips and projects here, and when I had a worship leader who was sick, Clark filled in one night. He has a heart for worship, and he has always blown us away!"

And with that heart of worship, Beckham enters a new chapter in his life.