

Worship from a Wheelchair

Born with Larsen syndrome, a rare joint condition that confines him to a wheelchair, Canadian singer-songwriter Justin Hines never expected to live into adulthood.

“Every day was precious and I wanted to take advantage of it,” he says. “Combined with my sense of faith, it really compelled me to get into music.”

Hines first discovered his musical calling at age 14—oddly enough at a Toronto Raptors basketball game, where he sang the Canadian and American national anthems. He later taught himself to play the piano and incorporated it into his performances.

Hines, 30, performs around the globe in concerts and corporate appearances. And though he is known more across the border than in the U.S., his resumé speaks volumes: Since his professional debut in 2007, he has already sung at the Beijing Olympics, Vancouver Olympics and Pan Am Games; performed with the likes of The Canadian Tenors, Natalie MacMaster and Ron Sexsmith; and recorded four CDs.

But the rising musician has also kept things in perspective. He continues to be part of Toronto’s Abilities Ministries and holds at least 10 concerts per year at churches. For Hines, touring and performing in public are simply opportunities to display the real source of his inner strength: “Adversity brings about strength and faith. I have always believed that we are in our situations for a reason—mine has given me a lot of faith. God is a source of strength to me, and so is my supportive family.”

Married, Hines has an older brother, two parents and an 84-year-old grandmother he describes as the most devout Christian he has ever met. Not only has her faith had tremendous impact on him, he has seen it modeled his entire life. As a child,

Hines sang in the Pentecostal church she took him to in his hometown of Markham, Ontario. Years later, he's still trusting God to overcome obstacles.

"It is a new concept for people to accept performers with physical challenges, so we've gotten good receptions and more chilly receptions depending on the crowd. We're working on new ways to introduce my physical situation," he says.

"It is still an uphill battle in a way, but you are instantly identifiable and so you stick out in people's minds. That can definitely work to your advantage."