

A portrait of Rachel Hale, a woman with long, wavy brown hair, wearing a black beret and a red leopard print coat. She is sitting in the driver's seat of a car, looking towards the camera with a slight smile. Her right hand is resting on her chin, and her left hand is resting on her lap. She has red nail polish and is wearing large silver hoop earrings and a ring on her left ring finger.

A Chat with Rachel Hale

What is the Power of a Song?

Written by
Michael Vybiral

Singer-songwriter Rachel Hale believes that music and words have power. For Hale, the process of writing itself has a deep personal impact that shapes her future direction. This partly explains her varied career path: over the past decade, Hale has been a Top 20 female finalist on American Idol season 12, led worship alongside multiple Grammy Award winner Cece Winans at Nashville Life Church, performed the national anthem at NFL sporting events, raised money for cancer research, and hosted a cooking show with industry-leading talent. Hale is on the rise - but she is always more concerned with what her audience needs than what she wants. "As a songwriter, I see myself in the business of service," said Hale. "Whether I'm writing for an artist, a company, a church, or myself, I start by asking - what is needed here?"

This intentionality sets Hale apart. It allows her to tap into the pulse of her audience, deepening her relationship with them and bringing them along with her each time she tries something new. But that does not mean that she operates on a continual treadmill of production. Instead, she's equally intentional about when she releases music.

"I wrote my song 'Promised Land', and then we didn't release that song for six years," said Hale. "We had that song finished and mastered, and I wasn't ready yet. I was finishing school at the

time, so I wouldn't have been able to give it the attention it deserved. Then, in the middle of the COVID-19 lockdown - that was the time."

"Promised Land" considers a reality without relief and the possibility that everyone is doomed to hopeless wandering, before rejecting it in favor of hope for a promised land, "that gives you strength to stand." Hale's instincts to hold the song until she felt personally ready allowed her to release it when hope was desperately needed.

"I was singing it over my own life during a difficult season. That's why I write the way I do: sometimes the song is for others, and sometimes it's to carry yourself through something."

Hale would sing "Promised Land" to herself as a way to encourage and inspire herself to keep going, especially whenever she found herself becoming more negative or letting pandemic-era fears overtake her natural optimism. "Your mouth really dictates where you're headed," said Hale, reiterating a central theme in her personal outlook and songwriting in general. "But if I'm the only person that hears what I'm going to write, then I pray that inspires me." Eventually, though, she realized that if the song was able to inspire her, then it was doing its job - and that meant it was time to help other people.

“Sometimes the most important thing you can do is release something you’ve been holding onto. That’s what it felt like when we finally released it - just letting it go.”

Hale writes through impact - spanning worship, causes, and other types of impact-driven work. That means that her songs are often universal and socially-minded, rather than literal romantic stories or breakup songs. To Hale, though, those social songs are as personal as it gets.

“I don’t often write about my private life in a literal way, but I express myself through impact. That’s how I tell my story,” said Hale. “For me, writing songs that serve and uplift others - that’s where my heart is.”

Hale’s experience on American Idol Season 12 allowed her to gain international recognition through her renditions of positive, rallying songs like Curtis Mayfield’s “People Get Ready” and “Nothing But The Water” by Grace Potter & The Nocturnals. Afterward, she co-wrote the hit song “Firm Foundation”, which became the title track on gospel trio Selah’s album, which won Inspirational Album of the Year at the 51st Dove Awards. “Firm Foundation” discusses similar themes of darkness, the force of fear, and the power of hope. Hale is a dedicated Christian and frequently visits Christian themes throughout her life, not only in her worship music, but also

in more general songwriting and her general approach to optimism, prayer, and focus.

Recently, Hale has found another way to reach audiences with her electric positivity. A former athlete and passionate sports fan, Hale was invited by the San Francisco Giants to sing the national anthem while she lived in California. That opened the door to performing for teams all across the country - NFL, NBA, and more. The national anthem is a famously difficult piece to perform accurately in high-stress, high-stakes settings, but Hale lives for the challenge.

“I write songs with big vocal ranges that are hard to sing because I want to grow as a singer and performer. The national anthem is one of the hardest songs to sing - and that’s exactly why I love it. It’s thrilling, it’s exciting, it pushes me every time. It’s like - wow, I really get to sing today!”

Always up for a challenge, Hale also has an Internet cooking series. “It started as a joke during the pandemic,” said Hale, whose series, ‘Hale’s Kitchen’, puns on Gordon Ramsay’s reality competition series Hell’s Kitchen. During lockdown, she began posting paleo recipes and building a fan base attracted to her positivity. Companies began sending her products to use and test in the series. Hale assumed that her fans were in on the joke, but after 33 consecutive

weeks of episodes and the loosening of pandemic-era lockdown restrictions, Hale's Kitchen has ballooned into a proper series which even features guest appearances from talent like Food Network Chopped judge Marc Murphy, filmed at Murphy's kitchen in New York.

Cooking provides a creative outlet for Hale to balance out the highs and lows of her music career. "You might perform for huge crowds and then come home to silence. That kind of swing does a lot to your brain, your mental health - but cooking gives me consistency."

Hale's high-energy joy in trying a recipe, using a new ingredient or bantering with a celebrity guest centers her natural charm and positivity. Joy is magnetic. When people are exposed to genuine happiness, it makes them want to experience it themselves - and makes it easier for them to do just that. Hale may not have predicted that Hale's Kitchen would gain a national following (or that she would host a cooking show at all), but she is not fighting the wave.

"It's one of those things where I've built a plane in the air, and it's flying, so we're gonna keep on going!" said Hale.

Hale intends to continue in that lane - staying high-energy and positive for audiences across

the country, whether through Hale's Kitchen, sports performances, or her upcoming music. Recently, though, she has been testing out some more personal songs - "private dating songs", she calls them - at live events to a positive response. "It still hits that empowering momentum, but they're a lot more personal." At the same time, Hale has also been focusing her attention on how her music can raise funds to directly impact and change people's lives. Her recent single, "Louder", during the NCAA debuted at the StaffDNA Cure Bowl. Hale performed it on the field with cancer survivors, amplifying the song's message of hope and resilience. Proceeds from "Louder" will benefit the Cure Bowl, which has raised nearly \$4 million for cancer research. The cause is close to Hale's heart. "Like too many others across the globe, cancer has left a deep impact on my own life," said Hale. "I lost my Grandma Peggy to cancer, and my dad overcame it when I was in high school. 'Louder' is my prayer for those currently living with cancer, those we have lost and their loved ones. It's a fight song and a call for hope that together, we can find a cure."

Whether she is at the front of the charge to fund cancer research, stepping onto a football field to belt out the anthem or quietly workshopping a song on her guitar, Hale's career and outlook are centered around service. In all her work, words carry power. And as long as there are people in need of hope, positivity, or a brighter day, Hale will start by asking: "What is needed here?"