Taking care of business

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Up-and-coming singer-songwriter Sami Khan (BSM '11) plans to make music his full-time job when he graduates in May, but that doesn't mean the Freeman School senior is turning his back on business. Khan hopes to use the marketing skills he's learned in business school to build the "Sami Khan" brand and land a recording contract with a major label.



Freeman School senior Sami Khan embarks on his first tour under his own name this month. Photo by Claire Barry.

This month, Khan takes a big step toward realizing that goal when he embarks on his first tour leading a band under his own name, an acoustic tour of a dozen high schools across the Southeast.

"I told my friends and they laughed—'Why are you going to play high schools?'" Khan says. "But high school tours have been successful in the past. The labels actually break their artists into the market by these high school tours, so it's a commonly accepted way of getting artists a loyal fan base."

Khan’s booking agency, Cantillon Entertainment Group, has previously booked high school tours for acts including Taylor Swift, “American Idol” finalist Jason Castro and country band Gloriana, all of whom went on to sign major-label success. Khan hopes to follow in their footsteps by winning new fans on tour and then keeping them engaged via social media.

“Record companies are like rich, risk-averse investors,” Khan says. “They only want to buy if they see your stock is going up, and what they look for are YouTube subscribers and Facebook likes. On this tour, my biggest measure of success is not going to be the number of CDs I sell but how many of these kids come back on Facebook or YouTube, find Sami Khan and hit that button.”

Khan first started writing songs when he was 12 years old, but it took a soccer injury in high school to launch his performing career. Laid up in his room recovering from surgery, Khan was unable to complete his senior project—a requirement for graduation—so he proposed writing and recording a song to satisfy the requirement. The song he wrote, “100 Years,” became a huge hit with classmates at Destrehan High School and inspired Khan to continue writing and recording.

At Tulane student, Khan formed a band, Keeping Crescent, and performed at clubs around New Orleans as well as opening for Augustana at last year’s homecoming. When Khan’s lead guitarist—his older brother—left the band to focus on his law career, Khan decided to rebrand the band under his own name since he planned to commit himself to music after graduation. Since then, Khan has signed with a New York-based manager who also serves as director of college marketing at WEA Corp., a connection he hopes will help open doors for him.

In the end, Khan says he’ll be happy with whichever direction his musical career takes him.

“If my songwriting career takes off and I’m set for life, great,” he says. “If not, I’ll always have this marketing thesis for grad school.”

To see more videos by Sami Khan, visit http://www.youtube.com/SamiKhanMusic