

Gospel Music Hall of Famer Bill Gaither has criss-crossed the country for more than 40 years singing songs of hope.

From small-towns to the Kennedy Center in Washington to venues in England and Ireland, Gaither has played just about every type of venue imaginable.

On March 26, he'll be one of the first acts to play Corbin's expo center, and the eight-time Grammy winner is excited at the prospect of playing at the brand new arena.

"I'm from rural America, and I just feel more at home playing in small towns," Gaither said in a phone interview before his show in Corbin. "I'm very excited to see what I hear is the beautiful town of Corbin."

Gaither has spent time in Appalachia learning about bluegrass music and visiting the hometown of the Carter Family in the hills of Virginia, but March's show will be the first time Gaither has played in Corbin. When his promoter told Gaither he would be one of the first acts playing at Corbin's new expo center, he said he was excited to be part of expo center's history.

The seasoned performer also sang the praises of Corbin's city government for investing in the arena. The expo center is somewhat of a departure for Gaither's Homecoming Lovin' Life Tour, which has played at venues much larger than the expo center. But Gaither believes medium-sized arena's like Corbin's expo center are part of the music industries future. The smaller arena's can cater to people who don't live in or directly next to big cities.

"I just think your (Corbin's) city fathers are being very progressive with the arena," Gaither said. "And we are very excited to play in Corbin, and be part of its history."

Plus, Gaither says, he just likes visiting small towns like Corbin.

Gaither who will be turning 73 two days after his show in Corbin, was born in Alexandria, Ind. a town with a population of just over 6,000.

And despite touring all over the country, Gaither says in his 40 years in show business he and his family have made it home virtually every Sunday for church services in Alexandria.

"The most dreaded part of the morning is when you have to bow your head, because sometimes we have just gotten off the road and are very tired," Gaither joked. "But we just thought it was really important when our kids were young attend their home church."

During 40 years in the music business Gaither's main writing partner has been his



wife Gloria. Together they've written hundreds of songs, all of which Gaither says carry the message of the Gospel.

"And to me the message of the gospel is that on Friday the Lord died, and it was a depressing time. And then the good news came with the power of the resurrection," Gaither said. "It shows that life wins, and is hopeful."

Many of the stories and inspirations for the songs come straight from real life situations Gaither said.

"You've got to be involved in life," Gaither said of songwriting. "We, my wife and I, have a highway cafe, and that's where a lot of local people hang out. A lot of our writing comes out of talking about their experiences in life ... you've got to live around folks, they all have situations that help us come up with ideas that need to be shared."

Gaither also credits the education both he and his wife had as English majors in school. Bill met Gloria when both were teachers at Alexandria High School in the early 1960s. The couple began writing songs, and in 1963 Bill formed the Gaither Vocal Band with his sister and brother. The group has had different members since 1963 including some young and upcoming gospel artists who have since become gospel stars in their own right.

Last summer the Gaither Vocal Band taped a reunion DVD featuring past and present members of the group, including

two Grammy-winning soloists Russ Taff and Larnelle Harris.

"It was pretty awesome," Gaither said of the reunion, "It sort of happened overnight, and the response was really good."

The Gaither Vocal Band's latest CD, which is also the namesake of the current tour, "Lovin' Life" recently won a Grammy, making it the eighth Grammy for Gaither. Gaither said he appreciates the awards, but they are far from the reason he got in the business in the first place.

"I don't think any writer or artist starts off with the idea of winning awards in mind," Gaither said. "That's just a bonus."

The main force behind Gaither's music is it's message — and that message of hope is particularly important in today's economic climate. Gaither admits that throughout his life he's been a bit of a "news addict".

"But I haven't been turning on the TV news a lot these days," Gaither said. "There is a lot of depressing stuff, but I remember in the 70s hearing very much the same negative news."

When the Gaither Homecoming group hits the stage on March 26, Gaither says the goal will be to bring some hope to what is a gloomy time for some.

"We hope to bring the message of the meaning of hope," Gaither said. "We want to give people an opportunity to turn off the TV and hear something positive for a night."