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American Idol Auditions: Week Two

Posted January 23, 2008 | 12:24 PM (EST)

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I don't care if the ratings are momentarily down a tick -- *American Idol* is still the number one show on TV and I still watch it avidly. This season seemed to mark the beginning of a kinder, gentler *Idol* with the scenes of judges and bad singers emphasizing their kid glove treatment. And of course the major switch was a renewed emphasis on the backstory of the kids auditioning, which meant lots of single parents, ill relatives, cute kids and most heart-tugging of all, cute kids with serious illnesses. This "Queen For A Day" approach has always been there. But forgive me for hoping the biggest sob stories don't get out of Hollywood -- I hate to think of people getting votes for their personal tragedies and triumphs rather than for their singing. Tuesday's notables:

Tetiana Ostapouych -- She walked in looking smug and self-satisfied. Ooh, I thought, our first villain if she can actually sing. And she can, warbling "Someone To Watch Over Me" in a manner that begged for the dreaded "cabaret" or "Broadway" slam from Simon. Tetiana was surprised but aggressive when Simon criticized her and she was ready to make any changes, but said so in a way that made you feel she didn't think she really HAD to make any changes. With a nose that Streisand would be proud of (that's not a slam; it's the one thing that keeps her looks from dull beauty), she has the aggressive air of someone that can't let you appreciate them for whatever appeal they have because she already appreciates it before you. Simon, as usual, nailed it when he said "Obnoxious!" after she left. But fame-hungry artists often ARE obnoxious. It's part of the drive that keeps them going. So keep your eye on Tetiana as one you might love to hate but which can't be denied if her singing is more versatile than it appears.

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Perrie Cataldo -- a single dad who sang Boyz II Men. Our first heart-tugging entry. I remember his kid better than I remember his better-than-average singing.

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This Story to Digg ▶ **Michael Johns** -- a married Australian, Johns gave a Michael Bolton approach to Otis Redding's "I've Been Loving You Too Long." (By the way, I love it when people auditioning introduce their song as if it's a hidden gem. "I'm going to sing an Otis

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Redding song called "I've Been Loving..." No, you're gonna sing the world-famous Otis Redding classic, please.) Good but he may be a little affected. Plus, he's married which cancels out his solid good looks.

Valerie Reyes -- if the first week of *Idol* went astray in any way, it was including too many people on camera who were just grandstanding to get on TV. Clueless singers are fine. But people in silly get-ups or people pretending to be angry and going on an unconvincing tirade just because the cameras are rolling are a waste of time. A quick montage is plenty entertaining for the real losers. Reyes was genuinely clueless about her singing skills but she brought out the mean streak in *Idol*. Last season or so, Ryan Seacrest had developed a nasty habit of toying with kids he was interviewing by letting awkward pauses develop so that the kids would look stupid or blurt something out. He seems to do the same with Reyes. Perhaps he isn't given any backstory, but I assume he's clued in as to who is good, who has a sob story he might highlight and who is a dreadful singer. That certainly seemed the case with Reyes since Ryan interviewed her specifically about clueless singers and how they laugh at them at home. Then Reyes walked into the audition room and destroyed "Against All Odds." Cheap shot.

Monique Gibson -- here, they got the balance of how to treat a bad singer correctly. Monique was dreadful, but she seemed to take the judges' reactions in a good-natured way. They were friendly but blunt and it all seemed a relatively OK wake-up call until suddenly tears started streaming down her face. Randy and Paula and Simon all immediately comforted her and showed empathy and seemed taken aback since Monique had seemed stable. The show caught the pathos of her not realizing how little talent she had without making fun of her.

Samantha Musa -- this was the singer whose sister peched on Simon's lap. She sang Aretha and had a rough high note but was pretty good.

Blake Boshnack -- here *Idol* wrongly celebrates obsessive determination. This guy has auditioned in about ten cities, including the time he dressed up as the Statue of Liberty (a moment Simon rightly ended after about two notes). He sang "Stand By Me" and while Blake probably killed at his own bar mitzvah it was just absurd and sad for him (and his mom) to think he has a talent for anything more than karaoke. This was followed immediately by one of the new *Idol* songs -- sung by Rod Stewart over footage of Blake -- presumably meant for the montage scene when a singer is sent home. It included lines about how you should "never give up on your dream." Actually, that sentiment -- and the celebration of Blake's misguided, repeated auditions -- should be the OPPOSITE of the what *Idol* is about. In fact, you SHOULDNT pursue your dream if your dream is playing in the NBA and you're 5 feet 7 inches tall and can't sink a basketball. The constant message of the show (in ways both mean and kind) is that it's not ENOUGH to want to be a "star." You have to have talent. But that's not enough either. You also have to work really, really hard. And that's not usually enough either. You also need a little luck. If the judges say you suck and will never, ever be a professional singer, that doesn't mean you should "persevere." It means you should find a new dream and hopefully rethink the allure of fame. Talk about mixed messages.

David Archuleta -- a sweet-looking 16 year old kid who has the heartwarming backstory of fighting vocal paralysis. That's nice. His audition -- John Mayer's "Waiting On The World To Change" -- was pretty good, even though he forgot some of the words. (Oddly, I don't think the judges mentioned this. Even more oddly, Simon praised this as a great choice of song even though it's been done on *Idol* before so hardly counts as groundbreaking.) He was also nervous, tentative, and failed to make eye contact very much. Decent voice but needs a few years of seasoning and maturity. But he's somewhat Tiger beat-ish and the judges rushed him through, which seemed to have as much to do with his backstory as his performance.

Carly Smithson -- an Irish lass who auditioned in a previous season and made it to Hollywood but her visa expired before she could go. That's a pretty devastating backstory, though what the *Idol* producers failed to disclose was that Carly later signed a major label record deal and had millions spent on her debut CD before it all fell apart. That doesn't have quite the same tragic air about it, does it? I don't mind backup singers and people who've been on the brink auditioning (even though it doesn't feel quite in the spirit of the show). But I MUCH prefer full disclosure. If your band had a record deal and released a single on a major label, if you won *Star Search* when you were younger, if you had a hit single in Japan, I want to know. In fact, I need to know and I feel cheated if I discover this later. Full disclosure, *Idol* producers. Carly is going to Hollywood. Good, she has a fine voice. But she certainly knows the way there, in every sense and we should know that in advance.

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