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American Idol Top 16: The Men

Posted March 4, 2008 | 11:19 PM (EST)

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Eighties Night as we finish up separating the wheat from the chaff and pick the Top 12.

Luke Menard -- It's never fun going first because viewership rises during the show. That means early performers are seen by literally millions of fewer voters. Some people who are fans will vote anyway but the vast majority who watch the show vote based on how you do that night, so Menard is at a terrible disadvantage -- because of his placement and the fact that he sang a horribly thin, weak version of Wham's "Wake Me Up Before You Go Go." He flattened out the melody, seemed to mess up some of the lyrics and his thin higher register -- where Menard seems to live -- all but disappeared on what should have been a triumphant "high" but really petered out. David Hernandez, I noted again, was a dedicated dancer, always moving along to everyone's performance. Paula said Luke's upper register is fantastic, which is insane. Simon dropped the hammer, called it a bit "girly" and said Menard "can't win." He's going home.

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David Archuleta -- Oh it's so boring when there's a presumptive winner but things can change dramatically when you hit the Top 12. (We've got three months of performances to go, so no one is really a lock.) Then David sits down at the piano and delivers the last and biggest hit from Phil Collins,

"Another Day In Paradise." (It was #1 for 4 weeks and the last #1 on the Top 100 for Collins. He also had a massive adult contemporary hit with the Oscar-winning "You'll Be In My Heart" from the animated flick *Tarzan*, but that's a different chart.) Is there anything he can't do? Well, maybe, but I'd look for a little Spanglish at some point since he mentioned singing a song in Spanish in the intro. And why in God's name did Ryan mention the fact that David had to pee? is he trying to nail down the scatological vote for the kid, too? Fine if not overwhelming performance but his so-so is well above average and the versatility on the piano was winning. Plus, he's against homelessness! Simon said Archuleta would "probably be in the final two."

Danny Noriega -- I thought Danny was dancing like a stripper, which is ironic since I found out

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after the show that **David Hernandez had been outed** as having worked as a stripper in gay bars. That makes at least two apparently gay contestants on this year's *Idol*. (Not a record, folks.) Danny's video intro was especially campy. He talked about being tripped up at the movies. "I fell in front of one of my crushes and I turned as red as a cute little tomato. And then I ran." (You know what caught my ear? When he said "one" of his crushes.) He sang "Tainted Love" by Soft Cell and I just know he wished he could do the medley version that segues into the Supremes classic "Where Did Our Love Go?" He sang in a lower register and personally I thought his vocals were just about as strong as he's ever been. But the whole presentation -- the shaking of the hips, the dramatic arm movements -- were super campy. Plus the purple hair streaks and his "whatever" retort to Simon. Obviously, he'll never win the whole competition because he's not one of the Top 4 or 5 singers. But even though I think he alienated a lot of viewers this week, he still gets the second most squeals from girls after David Archuleta (Danny's their BFF). It doesn't matter if a lot of people *don't* vote for you as long as some people do. Remember Sanjaya? And those teenage girls are demons on the speed dial. Hey, he's certainly entertaining.

David Hernandez -- I've liked David more and more every week and he didn't top last week's "Papa Was A Rolling Stone," but it was another solid, very *Idol*-friendly bit of vocal gymnastics, marred only slightly not by weak vocals (they were confident and great) but by a weird little thing he did with his eyes while singing. I thought Celine Dion's "It's All Coming Back To Me Now" was a very good choice for him because nothing secures votes like big notes, though Simon is right that soul is his wheelhouse, not ballads. But what the heck was it doing on a list of Eighties songs? Celine Dion had a hit with it in 1996. Yes, it was a UK hit for Pandora's Box in 1989: they went all the way to #51 with it. In other words, it was a very *minor* hit in the UK that even people there wouldn't associate with the Eighties. David was choosing from a list of songs provided by the producers that had anywhere from 50-200 items on it. So again, what was it doing on a list from the Eighties? As for David being a male stripper in gay bars and doing lap dances for the customers, as long as there's no scandalous video or really racy photos he should be fine. It's not illegal so the *Idol* producers have no issue with it. (The website Frenchie appeared on insinuated the girls appearing on it were underage which is why they dumped her. I still feel she got robbed but appearing on a website promoting desire for underage girls is far different than working at a club adults attend.) I voted extra for him this week in case there was a teeny backlash. But since he doesn't "act" gay, it probably won't matter since most people will forget, gay viewers will give him their support and teenage girls will love it -- this makes David Hernandez "safe" for them because they can lust after him without worrying about his wanting to reciprocate.

Michael Johns -- I've been very negative about Michael Johns (and Luke Menard) since the beginning. And nothing tonight changed my mind. I thought he was just terrible on the Simple Minds hit "Don't You (Forget About Me)." Rough beginning, very rough on the key change, screaming the notes towards the end and I just wince when he lifts up the mike stand in a rock star move -- everything he does seems like a pose to me. He too seemed to screw up the lyrics, though none of the judges said anything. I expected them to finally blast him, but instead they all said nice things and gave him their endorsement. Randy seemed to confuse this Scottish band Simple Minds with the Aussie group INXS -- "The Aussie boy goes home," he said. I seem to be alone on my dislike for him. Maybe I hate him because he's pretty? He doesn't need my support if he's got all three judges.

David Cook -- I haven't really been sold on David Cook yet, either. Till tonight. He did a rocked-up version of the ultimate wimp song, Lionel Richie's "Hello" and it worked triumphantly. It was indeed a great arrangement and I wrote in my notes that it could be a single before the judges all said the same thing. His vocals were very good too, despite a little thinness on the last few words before ending solidly. It really could be a hit and probably will be soon. The best of his by far. My only long-term problem is that the camera doesn't love him. He always seems to have a cocky, self-satisfied air about him. He just looks pleased with himself and there's really nothing he can do about it since it's presumably just the way he comes across.

Simon then mentioned he bumped into Lionel Richie at a Whole Foods store, with Simon buying carrots and Richie buying cereal. Ryan then said he didn't want to know what happened after Simon's shopping expedition, which I took to be a veiled reference to carrots as a sex device. Was that one of *Idol's* raciest moments or am I a pervert? What else could Ryan have been joking about?

Jason Castro -- I confidently said Castro would be crazy to dump the guitar because it was half

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his appeal. How could Paula even suggest such a dumb move? So he dumps the guitar, tackles the EXTREMELY vocally challenging Leonard Cohen standard "Hallelujah" and just nails it. A simple guitar accompaniment was perfect and even better was Castro's approach to the tune: it's got a huge melodramatic vibe because of Jeff Buckley's brilliant cover (not to mention Rufus Wainwright's similarly grand treatment) but Castro kept it very simple. He totally lost it right before the end and smiled awkwardly but pulled it together for the final note and was really, really good. Maybe he has hidden depths I didn't suspect. Simon -- who has seemed wonderfully clueless about pop music lately -- actually knows and loves the Jeff Buckley version and points out rightly that Castro is getting better and better and better.

Chikezie -- He changes the gender on a tune covered by Sister Sledge and (more famously) by Whitney Houston, "All The Man That I Need." Very smooth, very smooth, but almost dangerously forgettable, somehow. Don't ask me why I say that because I thought he did a good job. He still hasn't had a huge moment but he's been quietly consistent and he too can get much better. If he makes it through.

So there you are. David Archuleta, David Hernandez, David Cook and Jason Castro are locks. The judges were nice to almost everyone except...Luke Menard, who is a lock to go home. Who will go home with him? It's between Danny Noriega, Michael Johns and Chikezie. I'm very torn. I thought Michael Johns gave the worst performance, I thought Danny went too over the top on the non-singing portion of his appearance and I thought Chikezie disappeared in front of my eyes. I'd love to say Michael Johns and something tells me it's Danny but given my personal rule of choosing the worst performance and the most forgettable, I'm going to go with Luke Menard and um, uh, oh to heck with the judges, Luke Menard and Michael Johns.

Who did you like, who should be sent home and will Middle America be turned off by David Hernandez working as a stripper in gay bars?

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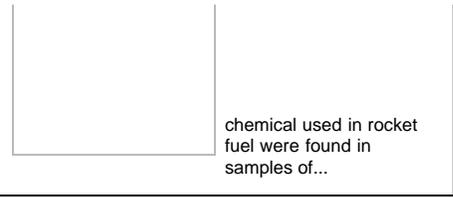
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Spot on commentary.

Luke and David Hernandez should go home on Thursday.

Luke is B.O.R.I.N.G and David H. is just eh! He doesn't do it for me and it has nothing to do with the stripping thing. He is just average to me.

Michael Johns has something left to prove and is so freakin adorable. His accent is enough to make me vote for him - that's bad!!!

Danny Noriega is just so pretty and entertaining. He makes me SMILE and laugh. My husband can't stand him and my 9 year-old son is on the fence....thinks he is a good singer but has a stupid attitude. I just want to see more of him. I hope he parlays this into work in the industry. I love him!!!! He is so damn pretty!

David Cook really shocked me last night. I loved his version of "Hello" and I too, will buy it on iTunes. I hope he didn't peak this week though.

David Archuleta is a excellent singer, but something about him bothers me. He seems contrived. I am sure he will go far, but I would like to see someone else win it all.

Chikezie is cool. He won't make it all the way, but I am enjoying him.

I hope America sends Luke and David Hernandez home tonight.

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Rest assured, Danny Noriega is too witty a la Carson from Queer Eye For The Straight Guy not to have a future at least on TV if not in music. Others agree with you about David Hernandez, which bums me out. Am I blinded by his career as an adult entertainer?

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Pretty much agree with your assessments of the guys.

My favorites were:

1. David Cook- I was raised on 80's music and danced to this song in junior high, and I almost didn't recognize it at first! It was a great version of a really dopey song and I'm buying it on Itunes. My favorite by far of the night.
2. David Hernandez- pretty good version of the song. Wasn't super impressed but overall did a good job. Personally I don't care about his past as a stripper, big whoop. He needed to make some money and he's a good looking guy, why not use what ya got? I also agree that people will forget about it and concentrate on the singing.

My Semi Favorite:

1. David Archuleta- I was surprisingly underwhelmed with little David. It was ok but I wasn't wowed. For the first time, I won't buy this on Itunes like I've done with his other 2 songs. Plus I'm getting tired of the puppy dog act, I mean, come on the dude's 17, not 12! He said the right things though with the homelessness comment.

My Least Favorites:



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1.Luke Menard- Poor guy, going first does no favors for a singer on this show. You could tell AI said to themselves lets just put him first since he's out on Thursday. His version of a Wham song I used to dance to in 7th grade was pretty sad, no pop or pizzazz to it at all. It was actually depressing, and thats not Wham!

2.Chikizie- I actually like this guy. He's a good singer with personality but tonight wasn't that great. I actually forgot the song he was singing after he finished, so not too memorable. I hope he doesn't get kicked off.

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When it comes to being eliminated, forgettable is more dangerous than terrible, so I'm worried about Chikezie going home too. He's my safety pick after Luke Menard and Michael Johns.

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American Idol: False Diety.

And speaking of false idols, didn't the First Commandment say "You Should Have No Other Gods Before Me?"

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Well, I haven't actually slaughtered the fatted calf during Idol or burned incense or prayed to Simon Cowell. I've just spent an inordinate amount of time watching it, which counts not so much as worship as enjoyable time-wasting. I could spend my time on more worthy endeavors, but that's what "Idol Gives Back" is for!! Whew.

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