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# American Idol Top 16: The Women

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It's Ladies Night and Eighties Night and the women...had their butts kicked by the guys. Lots of dull competence, but after a number of men had season-best performances, the women looked merely so-so by comparison. Yes, Carly Smithson, Syesha Mercado and uh, some of the others can still grow and compete. But right now it's looking like an all-male finale with David Archuleta and someone else who will insist they're thrilled about being runner-up because that kid is so adorable, while backstage they're shoving him out of the way in frustration. The judges, by the way, were out of control tonight -- it's fun to see them tease each other and watch Simon pester Paula, but enough already. At least pretend to focus on the contestants.

**Asia'h Epperson** -- She set the standard for the night with a competent - at best - version of Whitney Houston's "I Wanna Dance With Somebody (Who Loves Me)." (Boy, the Eighties loved using parantheses in song titles, didn't they?) Asia'h had a cute outfit, continuing this season's very positive trend of the contestants dressing their age in a fun, sexy, but not slutty manner. The lower register is definitely easier for her and she sounded rough on the high notes early on. But this is one of the easier Whitney songs to tackle and it's right in her comfort range. Which makes it all the more notable that she was only ok at best. "I'll take second-rate Whitney" ain't exactly fighting words, Asia'h.

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**Kady Malloy** -- She seemed to be wearing a plastic bowl on her head during the video intro and indeed, Kady remains goofy and fun when she's not singing. She tackled the Queen song "Who Wants To Live Forever," a ballad written especially for the fun fantasy flick *Highlander*. (Their song for *Flash*

*Gordon* was a camp classic but that movie flopped, while *Highlander* was a modest hit that turned into a mini-empire with movie, tv and other spin-offs. Queen's 1986 album *A Kind Of Magic* is an unofficial soundtrack.) I think the song works really well in the movie but it's not well known and I'm afraid her performance won't change that. It was anonymous and she was harsh on the big

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notes it called for. To top it off, the recap clip focused on one of her weakest moments and Simon called her a robot. She's going home. But not to worry Kady, you'll get either a sitcom or become the first person to go from *Idol* to castmember on *Saturday Night Live*. Get an agent and pitch Lorne Michaels on a cameo right away!

**Amanda Overmyer** -- Amanda's awful hair from last week was wrestled into submission and she looked a lot better -- more like a cool biker chick again instead of someone in a Halloween costume. She also did much better on her song, Joan Jett's "I Hate Myself For Loving You," the last Top 10 hit Jett ever had. Much better. Much improved. But still not that good. It's not that she's a bluesy singer. It's that she's not a very good bluesy singer. Janis Joplin could rock out, sing country, blues, ballads, sensitive, rough, sexy, vulnerable -- you name it. Amanda has about a two note range and emotions to match. She seems very cool and unflappable when she's not singing, so I like her, even though I'm afraid she'll beat me up if she reads this. Personally, I would have cut her weeks ago and that bum last note (totally ignored by the judges, along with all her other rough patches) didn't help. On a smart note, Amanda had the backup singers at full blast on the choruses and blended right in so it sounded much, much better than if you were listening to Amanda's vocals on their own. Paula said, "You found your niche." Huh? "Bluesy rock chick" has been her niche since day one; she just hasn't delivered. Simon said she was "fantastic!" Certainly, Amanda sticks out thanks to a group top-heavy with balladeers and clearly the producers like her in the mix for the final 12. And with the judges praising her both after her song and at the end of the show, I assume she'll make it through. Then they'll label her next performance or so a train wreck and she'll go home.

**Carly Smithson** -- Don't these people think about what they're saying in interviews and how it will play on national TV? Last night, David Hernandez talked about having a booger up his nose, which was enjoyably disarming except it was also icky. Tonight Carly talked about getting trashed and having her legs so entangled in a gate or fence or something that her drunk friend got butter and lotion to try and grease Carly out of it. That's not gonna play well in Middle America. She sang the Roy Orbison gem "I Drove All Night" and for the first time I liked her. She was still rough on the high notes but smartly rearranged the song so she could dig into it at the end and have a strong flourish. Still proudly showing her tattoos (which my friend Aaron predicted she would try to hide) so that's another reason to like her. Not the best of the night but the best she's been so far. Simon, bizarrely, insisted it's not a good pop song. No, it's a *great* pop song and if he was trying to suggest it didn't have the big vocal moments that this show lives for, he's even crazier. Carly couldn't quite hit them the way Orbison or Cyndi Lauper (who made it into her last Top 10 hit) or Celine Dion (who turned it into a car ad) did, but she certainly had a big dramatic moment or two. Another concern for Carly: she seemed rather unruffled, blase, dare I say "like a pro" during the compliments phase. Not cocky, but she certainly took high praise almost a little too in stride. A little more abashed thanks would be good.

**Kristy Lee Cook** -- Easily the winner when it came to the video intros (and believe me, that matters). Kristy said her most embarrassing moment was when she was a little kid and decided she was a dog and went around on all fours growling and barking at people. She even had her own doggie bowl that she drank water out of. Millions of men immediately flashed to the scene from *9 1/2 Weeks* in which **Kim Basinger** drank milk out of a bowl and Kristy unintentionally scored herself a lot of extra votes this week. She sang Journey's "Faithfully" and because she put the tiniest twang on the phrase "wheels go round and round," the judges praised her country feel. In fact, nothing else about the song (not the arrangement, really) was country except for a hint of steel guitar. But it was good and Randy and Paula were right to say it could be a hit on country radio. Still, when she tried to give it a little Steve Perry oomph right towards the end it was a disaster. (When pop stars got together to record "We Are The World," Bob Dylan walked up to Steve Perry and said how much he loved Perry's voice. Lesson: Perry has some of the best pipes, ever.) Simon thought it was forgettable, but in fact it was a good presentation of a very memorable song and that plus the doggie bowl anecdote should carry her through.

We then saw a shot of the guys on the sidelines. More and more of them are wearing scarves -- not because it's a fashion trend sweeping the country but presumably because the studio is freezing cold and they don't want to risk getting a sore throat.

**Ramielle Malubay** -- A cutie, of course, but I've always seen her as akin to one of those disposable pop idols that Asia churns out with frightening efficiency -- interchangeable and unmemorable. Ramielle continued in that vein tonight by singing the Phil Collins song "Against All

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Odds (Take A Look At Me Now)," the smash Number One hit that turned Collins into a Grammy-winning solo superstar. (Prior to that, his only Top 10 hit on his own had been a cover of the Supremes hit "You Can't Hurry Love.") Ramielle was mechanical and determined -- like Celine Dion, Malubay believes songs are meant to be *conquered*. The glimpse of Danny Noriega wearing her glasses was more entertaining.

**Brooke White** -- She's very sweet looking but Brooke does not have a great voice with a big range. She shines on singer-songwriter tunes with easy melodies that let her personality shine through. So Pat Benatar's hit "Love Is A Battlefield" was a bizarre choice. The song has had a kitschy air because of the video and the way Benatar and the backup dancers/whores shimmed their breasts at the camera in defiance. And it's definitely a belter. So what a surprise to see White perched on the edge of the stage, with only an acoustic guitar to back her up. But she sang with an unforced vulnerability, revealing a song that's not as tough as its swagger suggests. She strayed off melody at the very end to no purpose and gave a weird pronunciation of the word "promises" but it was absolutely great. If she can keep making canny choices like this and "You're So Vain," White can go far. To my astonishment, Randy said she brought nothing new to the song. Yeah, nothing new but an entirely different arrangement and vocal approach that revealed new depths to a familiar tune. Paula made the tired suggestion that Brooke should have begun acoustic and then brought in the band. In fact, that's the dull choice that most of the contestants make 98% of the time. If an acoustic arrangement works really well, why walk away from it? Happily, Simon praised her to high heaven. All he got wrong was saying at the end of the show that Amanda had the best night. No way, it was Brooke.

**Syeshha Mercado** -- She made the most of her going-to-commercial-break moment by making a goofy "What me?" face. My crush on Syesha remains intact, even though her performance on Whitney Houston's "Saving All My Love For You" was safe and too similar to the tone of last week's "Me and Mrs. Jones." Her big high note early on was a little thin but she came through on the finale and delivered it beautifully. Also, she looked great in those shorts. The song was Whitney's last Number One hit but it won't be the last we hear from Syesha. And I don't think she's come close to her best yet.

So overall, only Brooke White had a breakout performance and the women looked a lot weaker than the men. It doesn't help that so many of them are similar. I think Brooke White, Amanda Overmyer (thanks to endless praise from the judges), Carly Smithson and hopefully Syesha Mercado are safe. That leaves Asia'h Epperson, Kady Malloy, Kristy Lee Cook and Ramielle Malubay vulnerable. Kady Malloy is definitely going home thanks to a weak performance of a song most people have never heard of. (Rent *Highlander* and you'll remember it well.) And joining her should be Amanda Overmyer but instead I think it's gonna be...oh, I'd like to say Ramielle but I think her Asian peeps will protect her one more week so it will be Kady Malloy and Asia'h Epperson, the weak one-two punch that opened the show. Who did you like and who do you think is going home?

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Whew! Just got off the phone voting for my favorite girls so their not knocked out.....Ramiele and Asia'h. Well, here are my choices for favorites, semi favorite and least favorite of the night.

My Favorite:

1. Syesha Mercado- While I agree it was a rather pedestrian version of the song, it was solid and she seemed to hit the notes she had too, so I voted for her too. Plus she's smokin! And I have to say the Kristy Lee Cook looked mighty fine as well even though I didn't care for her version of a Journey song.

My semi-favorite:

1. Carly Smithson- I didn't agree with Simon at all. I thought the song was perfect for her and she sounded great. I seems to me she has the most solid voice of the girls, but there's that past she has with the record deal that just doesn't sit well with me.

My least favorites:

1. Ramiele and Asia'h- they just didn't sound that great to me, and Ramiele looked scared on the stage and Asia'h didn't sound confident during the judges comments either. I agree Ramiele does remind of the all the cute Asian girl singers I see when I travel to SE Asia. They all look alike! So I voted extra for these two, so I'm hoping their not knocked out!  
2. Kady Malloy- I like her, but she reminded of Chikizie last night, when she finished I totally forgot what song she sang. Not a good thing. I think she's out tomorrow.

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Thanks for commenting. Except for my thinking Kristy lee Cook did well on the Journey song, we seem in synch.

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