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American Idol Top 20: The Women

Posted February 28, 2008 | 03:27 AM (EST)

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Well, since the first five guys were weak and the last five guys were strong, the women decided to mix it up. The first five women were fine and the last five women were weak to awful. But the judges were in an especially nice mood. When they weren't urging women to pigeonhole -- I mean, "define" -- themselves, they were ignoring awful vocal performances and accentuating the positive. Maybe they feel bad because they can see the steamroller that is David Archuleta getting ready to flatten any female contestants in his path? The theme tonight again was the '70s. It sure would be nice to get a peek at the list of songs the contestants get to choose from. There's such a boring repetition of artists and songs that I'd like to know whether to blame the singers or the producers.

Carly Smithson -- another so-so performance from Smithson. In an earlier season, maybe she would have been dubbed as having that magical "studio" voice, which usually meant her appeal wasn't singing live but she had something to offer on recordings. Carly sang the Heart song "Crazy on You," the band's very first hit. And she insisted, "I always wanted to perform it on *American Idol*." Really, he said cattily? Even when you were 15 and signed to a major label and watching them spend millions on your first album? Surely you were dreaming of Madison Square Garden or Radio City and not a TV talent contest. I like that she proudly displayer her ink. But I still find her voice thin and sharp in the upper register. OK, but the judges insist she's the gal to beat.

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Sysha Mercado -- My biggest crush, Sysha 'fessed up about her pro past, which doesn't amount to more than regional TV commercials. Her imitation of a baby crying was really good but an awful segue into her mellow rendition of the Billy Paul hit "Me and Mrs. Jones." Simon said it was bizarre to change

the gender of the song (she naturally sang "Me and Mr. Jones") but that's a ridiculous comment. Gender changes on songs are done literally every day and there's nothing lyrically that stamps this song as inappropriate or strange for a woman to sing to a man. She looked just terrific with a vaguely period '70s scarf that wasn't too retro so she looked like she was playing dress-up. Clearly

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Sysha has great style. The verses were a little boring but she broke out on the choruses with measured force and a palpable look of pleasure over performing. Her final note was good if not great and I'm still waiting for a "I could win this sucker!" performance. But I think she's great.

Brooke White -- the wholesome gal looked super cool playing an acoustic guitar and dove into Carly Simon's "You're So Vain," the classic number about James Taylor/Mick Jagger/Simon Cowell/take your pick. It's funny but they've done Seventies night a ton and I rarely remember people hitting the singer-songwriter genre. It was a breath of fresh air. She was a little weak on the chorus when it got low and ran out of breath at the end of some lines but otherwise was confident and winning, like Castro on a really good day. Her excerpt at the end of the show did Brooke no favors: it came right from her weakest moment on the chorus. But raves should keep her safe ahead of everyone else.

Ramiele Malubay -- Dressed exactly like a wholesome teen idol and I really do appreciate this season's emphasis on the singers dressing their age -- fun and stylish but not trying to look trappy or 20 years older than they are. I know her performance of Thelma Houston's "Don't Leave Me This Way" wasn't groundbreaking. But it's the first time I "got" her and saw Ramiele as a long-term threat. Maybe she should have stuck to a mellow version since the quiet first lines were her best. Of course, since I finally liked her the judges thought she was weak. Huh.

Kristy Lee Cook -- just as I praise the singers for dressing fun, along comes Kristy in a shimmering silver top that is super-sexy and just this side of truly naughty. She sang Linda Ronstadt's #1 hit "You're No Good," a deceptively mellow song that dragged just a tad for Kristy. The attempt at grittiness got away from her and the ending was roughish but I liked it pretty much. Simon urged Kristy to find an identity and figured country is her bag. Obviously she avoided country so as not to seem too much like a Carrie Underwood clone, but she'll break out the twang soon. (By the way, Linda Ronstadt is ridiculously under-appreciated. If you love Americana, check out *The Best Of Linda Ronstadt: The Best Of The Capitol Years*, which contains four complete albums including one of her masterpieces *Heart Like A Wheel* all at a **bargain price**. One of my absolute favorite albums.)

Amanda Overmyer -- the night's first and worst trainwreck. Glimpses of Amanda before the break showed she had gone crazy with the hair, looking like Bonnie Raitt's mad sister or a Halloween costume. Really, her streaks absolutely took over and looked terrible with those jeans. She sang the Kansas breakthrough hit "Carry On Wayward Son" and it was just awful, with her voice bottoming out right at the start to a cringe-worthy degree and then it got worse, with Amanda trying to regain control but losing the melody, yelping louder and louder -- screaming, really -- and then for a brief moment I thought she might at least end on a decent note but she wavered from a strong moment and tried to riff, ruining even the chance of a single decently sung line. I expected the judges to suggest it might be over for her. Instead, they treated her with extreme kid gloves, with Randy ignoring the actual singing and telling her to focus on blues-y stuff and Paula insisting against all evidence that she was "a brilliant, brilliant artist." Even Simon didn't drop the hammer. I've rarely been so surprised. But I don't care that she has the rock tip cornered among the gals, I think it's the end for Amanda.

Alaina Whitaker -- sang the Olivia Newton-John smash "Hopeless Devoted To You" and did the only thing more dangerous than a disaster like poor Amanda's performance -- be forgettable. Forgettable is the worst thing you can do because an awful performance can elicit sympathy (she was better last week!) while a forgettable performance just...fades. Ballads really expose your weaknesses as a singer and Alaina has a lot, I'm afraid. Again, the judges are bizarrely nice.

Alexandrea Lushington -- sang Chicago's "If You Leave Me Now," their first Number One hit after 18 Top 40 singles. She had a rough low beginning and fiddled so much with the arrangement by the end I didn't even recognize the song and suspected she was working in a medley. (Is that allowed? I doubt it.) It ended with a very weak attempt at a soulful vamp. But again, the judges remained inexplicably friendly. Have they forgotten their job? Randy insisted the song was a "safe" choice but didn't mention that she sang the safe choice poorly which should be even a bigger sin, right? Simon made one very good point. He said the song was of its era, but really it gets down to the tune being a great record but not a great standard. That is, they delivered a great tune but you don't want to hear other people record versions of it. Every year at the Grammys people ask the difference between Record of the Year and Song of the Year. Record of the Year is a great tune but not one you expect a lot of people to cover. Think of Peter Gabriel's "Sledgehammer." Great song,

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but why would anyone record a version of it? Song of the Year? Think "River" by Joni Mitchell which has become a Christmas standard and deservedly so. "If You Leave Me Now" is a very good record but not a good song and thus not a good choice for delivering a cover on Idol. Alexandra was rescued a bit by a sweet interview with Ryan after her singing.

Kady Malloy -- another Heart song, this time "Magic Man." It really does seem tiresome how the same songs get chosen over and over again. She had a cool dress and a great ring and was unmemorable. Now the Carly Smithson Heart cover seems better by comparison.

Asia'h Epperson -- the final performance is Eric Carmen's hypermelodramatic "All By Myself" and it's another trainwreck. Asia'h is in major trouble after just a few words but covers her stumble with a gentle little laugh. Maybe she'll be okay? Nope. When she staggers into the first chorus her voice drops out completely and she's practically whispering. Terrible beginning, terrible middle and a screechy ending Ryan made a point of emphasizing Asia'h is very under the weather. That would explain Randy and Paula being gentle but it doesn't explain their praise. Her voice completely dropped out during the first chorus for heaven's sake and no one even mentioned it. Surely just as bad as forgetting lines is being incapable of actually singing. I'm completely confused by the judges tonight. (Though Simon brought a little reality by saying simply the song was too big for her and she made a mistake choosing it. I'll say.)

So many weak performances at the end, it's hard to know who will go home first. I believe Brooke White, Carly Smithson and (please) Syesha Mercado are safe. I have to assume Amanda Overmyer is going home. If I balance out the worst performance of the evening with the most boring, then she'll be joined by Alaina Whitaker. Presumably people will give Asia'h a pass because she was ill. So who did you like and who do you expect to go home?

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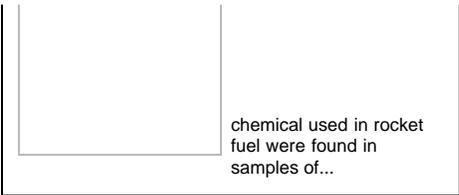
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I missed the women sing, but saw the wrap up tonight. Why oh why do they keep that nannie blond with the guitar? And by the way, that's Warren Beatty Carly sang about. Mlck sang back up on the record. And James Taylor didn't have a Lear Jet. IMHO.

Sorry to see that Amanda did so poorly because I had high hopes for her. But geesh, she looked like a fright. Sang that way too.

I'm liking Syesha and Ramiele very much. Syesha has much personality too and showmanship. And Ramiele has a lot of voice for such a little girl (sorry, but she's tiny!)

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mch755 [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of mch755](#) [permalink](#)

Great recap of the ladies. Boy, this was a rough week, esp for one of my favorites Asia'h. I think she has enough of a fan base to stay in the competition, I hope. I like Amanda, since she's so different from the other singers, but whoa...her performance was just awful. Plus she looked pretty scary with the hair and her outfit, not going to play well to Middle America. I think she's out. I also think Kady is out too, though she seems fun with the imitations of Britny Spears, her performance was not that great. So these two along with Jason Yeager and Luke Menard are out.

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67bug [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of 67bug](#) [permalink](#)

I hope Moon River guy and Killer Queen guy get the boot. As far as the girls, we need to get rid of a few of the blondes!

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auramac [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of auramac](#) [permalink](#)

As a huge John Lennon fan, I heard the buzz about "Imagine," and sought out the clip on YouTube. I became ill watching Paula Abdul in tears. He wasn't bad, but Lennon half-intoxicated singing a demo on a cassette player in the 70's would've blown him away. I find pretty much every single contestant this year to be unoriginal, inauthentic, and quite mediocre, if not downright weak. Watching Paula cry orgasmically or hearing the audience boo Simon for telling the truth does not reflect well on today's or tomorrow's music scene.

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I agree on who should go home but would prefer Amanda stays only because she isn't another blond clone. None of the blonds stand out for me. Sad, but true and I hate giving them that label but it just seems to work out that way.

And the Archuleta train? Hate it. I find him as phoney as a two dollar bill in his "aw shucks" cuteness. He gives me a raging tooth ache. Too bad teens are so fast at text voting. We're stuck with him.

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