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American Idol Top 24: The Women

Posted February 21, 2008 | 01:43 AM (EST)

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I'm probably the only person who went from listening to jazz pianist **Gonzalo Rubalcaba at the Village Vanguard** and then ran home to watch my DVR recording of American Idol. After getting over a little culture shock -- what, no eight minute trumpet solos? -- I settled in. The judges stopped harping about making classic songs "relevant" but did offer up a lot of chatter to fill the two hour time slot. The main topic: colds and flu and I can relate, since I've been home sick for the past six days). But do we care? Not really. How can you grade someone on a scale when you don't know what they'd sound like normally?

Kristy Lee Cook -- the "Amazing Grace" gal who sold her barrel horse so she could audition. Cook looks very cute but as the show went on it was clear that virtually all the gals are really cute, so looks will NOT be a huge factor. She sang "Rescue Me" and was basically fine but all we really learned was that she has absolutely no soul. It wasn't anonymous exactly but I did feel like she was disappearing before my eyes. But she looked overwhelmed in a good (ie. vote-getting) way during the judges' comments and should go through. One of the really ailing ones, per the judges.

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JoAnne Borgella -- the plus-size model and one of my favorites. Till now. Was she sick, too? They didn't say so but her voice sounded so small on the Burt Bacharach classic "I Say A Little Prayer." She was rough and off-key and really just plain bad. But she looked great even though she barely moved on the

stage. She looked wounded when Simon was saying mean things, which can't hurt with voters either. Hopefully she'll get through and get a chance to redeem herself cause I'm sure she's better than that.

Alaina Whitaker -- it's her birthday on Thursday and Alaina's gonna get her wish of going through to the next round. She sang the Spiral Starecase tune "More Today Than Yesterday" (wonder how many blogs will get the name of the band wrong?) and did a much better job than Chikezie. She was a little weak on the slow intro but once it speeded up (and really, people need to

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come up with a new way to arrange these songs then slow to fast), she was good, especially strong on the chorus. And looked adorable.

Amanda Overmyer -- the rock chick sang the old blues jam "Baby Please Don't Go." It was fun and I liked it when she wiggled out in the middle but frankly her vocals were swallowed up and not even close to good. If she had a real bluesy voice, she would have shone here. I was surprised the judges spoke so strongly about her. She's different enough to get to the next round but not good enough vocally to stand out in the final 12. On the plus side, she did great in the post-song chat, being funny with Ryan and joking with the judges and looking enjoyably comfortable on stage. Clearly the producers love her. And does Simon really not know this song? Everyone has blind spots in music, but that's a weird one to never have heard.

Amy Davis -- tonight's trainwreck and worse by far than even "Moon River." She sang the Connie Francis tune "Where The Boys Are" and was absolutely dreadful from first to last. The judges should have been much harder than they were but perhaps they realized there was no reason to bother. I do give her points for not running off stage in tears in the middle of the tune, it was going so bad. You really just feel sorry for someone when they get this far and it goes so terribly wrong. Yeah, she's 25 years old but it still must be a miserable moment. I'm not sure if Simon was saying Amy is a country singer but couldn't bring that twang to this song or whether he was saying you need to have a country twang to deliver this particular tune (which makes no sense). In any case, it's an iconic tune but not a good one.

Brooke White -- the wholesome gal sang "Happy Together" just like one of the rocker guys. Are they told when someone else has already selected a particular song? (Usually they have to choose between a couple hundred options.) I find it hard to believe so many people would knowingly pick the same tune as one of 23 other people. If they don't know, it must be devastating to hear someone sing it the night before. Happily for Brooke, she did a better job. Never quite took off, but solid. As for her personality, I think Simon is suggesting not that she be naughty or mean but that nice can easily become bland.

Alexandrea Lushington -- A performance! She began singing the Blood Sweat & Tears tune "Spinning Wheel" while walking down the stairs? And crouching! And wearing suspenders! And in what was the closest to a political statement, Alexandrea wore giant peace symbol earrings. (No "I Had A Hammer" or "Simple Song of Freedom" but I'll take what I can get.) Loads of personality and loads of fun. I thought the judges would be much more enthusiastic. Simon was way off, even if her vocals weren't great (I'm not fond of her high register -- stay low, Alexandrea). And she has a strong presence when bantering. Totally fun. On a side note, I always like to check out how the other contestants react. The guys almost all stood for this performance, but the two rockers and Castro stayed seated. Hmm. Not fans of her or just not ready to cheer on a competitor?

Kady Malloy -- sang "Groovy Kind Of Love" (which she surely knows via Phil Collins rather than Mindbenders). She was very weak when she tried to riff and throw in some runs. But I thought her voice was solid even if the performance was a bit dull.

Asia'h Epperson -- my friend Aaron says the extra "h" is for extra hot. Who am I to deny it? I did believe she would go with one name a la Chikezie. But she did a very good soulful version of Janis Joplin's "Piece of My Heart." Solid all the way through and very fun. The guys felt obliged to all stand up for this. She also had on a cute outfit and I do like that the contestants are dressing age appropriate. I don't like it when they try and dress all "adult" and sexy and come across as trampy. They're all plenty sexy and it works better when they don't try to squeeze into cocktail dresses with plunging necklines or something trashy. I'm sure it plays better in Middle America anyway.

Ramiele Malubay -- sang Dusty Springfield's "You Don't Have To Say You Love Me." I didn't like the tinkling piano (which sounded too MOR) and frankly I was bored. She certainly wasn't bad and should go through but I spent the whole song waiting for it to begin. And I was surprised when the judges praised her so highly. Dusty is very hard to nail and she didn't bring any drama to it. But technically fine.

Syesha Mercado -- cute, cute, cute. She's the gal who lost her voice in Hollywood and is easily one of my favorites overall. She did the Lou Rawls classic "Tobacco Road" and went the rock and roll via Tina Turner route. She did a very good job and had a classic big vocal flourish at the end the way Idol loves. Why did Simon say she is "probably" one of the most talented singers among the girls? No, she's definitely one of the most talented singers, girl or boy.

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Carly Smithson -- they finally had her talk on camera about the fact that she had a major label record deal and an album that was released. Now they can fess up about all the OTHER Idols who have had record deals with Madonna or won \$100,00 on Star Search, etc. Carly reminds us that she was only 15 when she was signed and 17 when the album came out. But her claim that the label went bellyup simply isn't true. According to a [Wall Street Journal article](#) about her album's failure written years ago, millions were spent to record and re-record the album and it was released on Universal's MCA label and if executives left, it was clearly only after an extraordinary amount of time and money was wagered in trying to make the project fly. So no, this isn't the story of an album getting lost in the shuffle. Doesn't mean Carly doesn't deserve a second chance. Nonetheless, the album reportedly had the full weight of the label behind it for a long, long time before they pulled the plug. You can still [buy it on Amazon](#). Full and accurate disclosure as early as possible, though it does spoil the fun of "discovering" someone when you find out JoAnne won Mo'Nique's "Fat Chance" reality show and Syesha was on another reality show that ended after only two episodes. Tonight she sang "The Shadow Of Your Smile," another very tricky tune done well by Tony Bennett. I thought she was fine, not great. But Simon is right when he said it was too old fashioned for her. Besides, it's Sixties night. Sve old fashioned for big band night, if there is one. And to be petty, she was dressed prettily frumpily compared to the other gals and needs to get her teeth done. (Hey, so do I but I'm not getting close-ups on national TV.) I still find her high notes pretty consistently rough and unpleasant. But overall she is solid and certainly not bad enough to go home.

Again, it's too early in the competition to accurately predict who goes home because there are so many to choose from. I will say that Syesha Mercado, Asia'h Epperson, Alaina Whitaker and Alexandria Lushington should all easily be safe. Surely poor Amy Davis will be one of the two to go home, along with Kady Malloy (or perhaps Kristy lee Cook, because fewer people watch in the first hour so going early is always a big disadvantage). Who did you vote for and who do you think should go home?

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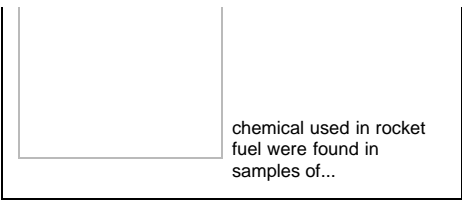
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I really like Ramiele, she's got a great voice, cute face and very appealing personality. Her take on a Dusty Springfield song was nice and controlled.
Also like Asia'h, she's a gorgeous girl and has a very distinctive voice, she doesn't sound like anyone else in the competition.
Those are the 2 girls I think has a shot at winning with Syesha an outside chance.

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Somebody still owes me an explanation about voting off Melinda Doolittle. Until then, this is all just re-arranging lounge singers on the Titanic.

You're right about Amy Davis pinning the agony needle, but I think you missed the boat on Ramiele Malubay. She and Carly Smithson, followed by Syesha Mercado, showed the strongest, best trained instruments. Amanda Overmyer was fun, but I'm not sure any of us wants to see her go through Burt Bachrach week (or whatever this year's equivalent is).

In a group without any really great singers, the Australian dude seems to have the most star potential.

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I agree completely about Overmyer. She's going to look very weak at some point soon. And the judges certainly agree with you about Ramiele. I too think she has a good voice (along with Smithson and Syesha). Just don't think she used it very well on that song, while Randy and Paula thought she was great. I do expect her to make it through and have better performances down the road. Like you, I ws rooting for Melinda Doolittle all the way. Her vs. Jordin would have been a more contrasting, exciting finale. But not to despair. She got a ton of great publicity and I'm sure she'll have an album out at some point. Hopefully they'll take their time and craft an Anita Baker-like CD and she'll have a genuine shot at chart success. You don't have to win Idol to win.

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Hope you're right. There are a lot of wonderful singers in the world, but the few who make me cry are the ones I'm anxious to hear more from. She's one of those.

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