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American Idol Top 6: Andrew Lloyd Webber

Posted April 23, 2008 | 02:06 AM (EST)



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A very theatrical night for *Idol* as they perform the music of Andrew Lloyd Webber. A taped introduction insisted that "he's composed most of the important musicals of our time." Uh, no. But heck, you could say "he's composed some of the most successful musicals of all time," with *Cats* being surpassed on Broadway only by his own *Phantom of the Opera*. You could say he's composed "some of the most successful and acclaimed and influential musicals of all time"

and I wouldn't argue with you there, since both those two and others like *Evita* and *Jesus Christ Superstar* have gobbled up Tonys and huge box office returns. Really, with all the accolades one could shower on Lloyd Webber, why say something that in fact is quite debatable? It cheapens what he has accomplished by trying to insist on some grand statement that immediately makes you think, "What about Sondheim?" That's no way to celebrate someone.

SYESHA MERCADO -- Sang "One Rock N Roll Too Many," a song from *Starlight Express* of all things. Surely one of ALW's most derided shows, it's also been remarkably resilient, especially in the UK and on the road. (It's a bit of silliness about people on skates pretending to be trains.) He rightly said it was an "interesting choice." Then Syesha belted it out with gusto, looking very sexy in a red dress. She was so relaxed and confident, it was no surprise to find out she's a theater baby. She had a little rough moment on a high note right near the end but finished well and was very confident throughout. To my delight, the judges didn't seem to be watching a different performance this time. Randy raved and said she could be a huge Broadway star, Paula said "this is your happy place" and Simon said she was very sexy, spoiling it a little by saying this was one of her best performances so far. (Sysha looked a little mock peeved when he didn't say it was her best performance so far, bar none, but to me it looked cute not annoying, though I've been a fan of hers for a while.) Yes, she went first but this is the week where that stops mattering so much

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anymore because there are so few contestants.

JASON CASTRO -- Sang "Memory" from *Cats*. OK, he's not into theater, but did Jason really not know that *Cats* was about, you know, cats? ALW proved a useful coach throughout, convincingly saying he was there to serve them, providing good tips and subtly letting us into his opinion, in this case by saying about Jason's pick: "not sure I would have done it." Translation: don't think he can pull it off. He does, sort of, crooning the tune in the expected lightweight manner. Very rough on the low notes in the transition ("burnt out ends of smoky days") and basically getting through it. Not quite a disaster but not memorable either. Randy plays it off as being a genre unsuited to Jason, Paula says something nice and Simon nails it by saying Jason looked like someone being forced to sing a song they didn't want to sing at the family wedding.

BROOKE WHITE -- Sang "You Must Love Me" from the film version of *Evita*. ALW zeroed in on my biggest complaint about Brooke: she doesn't pay attention to the words (singing "Every Breath You Take" like a standard love song instead of the stalker anthem it is, etc.) He said bluntly that she didn't have a clue as to what she's singing and then related the story and context of the tune to her, with Brooke looking very weepy as he spoke. She begins the tune and then stops after about four or five words to begin again. The rest of the tune sounds wildly over-deliberate, with Brooke oddly enunciating certain words, getting out of breath, pausing dramatically ("You must...love me! You must love...me!") Nervous and weird, it seems to take twice as long as all the other performances. Train wreck, really, and it ends with very tentative, uncertain applause from the usually robotically enthusiastic audience. Randy is very negative. Paula pauses a long time before speaking (never a good sign) and then says simply, "You must never start and stop." before giving a mixed critique. Simon is very negative and describes her as "tense." To her credit, Brooke didn't comment or talk back this time, maybe because it went so poorly her confidence was shot. Ryan asked her what happened and she answered simply that she'd forgotten the words. Ryan asked Simon what he would have done in that situation and Simon said, "I would have done exactly what she did," the only positive moment of the entire night for Brooke. Paula said again that you should never stop -- just fake the lyrics and sing whatever comes into your heart -- and Simon said you can't do that and Randy chimed in that Simon was right. Guess what? They're all correct. Simon is right that to deal with a crisis, stopping and starting over can be the wisest option. But Paula is right that you should never put yourself in that position in the first place and that it would be better to fake it for a line and keep on going. Paula is also talking from the point of view of an elaborate live show where everything is choreographed down to lights and fireworks and major set and costume changes. Once that baby gets rolling, you can't just stop and start over (especially if you're lip-syncing and doing major dance moves); you've got to keep moving whether it's an arena show or a Broadway musical.

DAVID ARCHULETA -- Sang "Think Of Me" from *The Phantom of the Opera*, the longest running show in Broadway history and one of the biggest (if not the biggest) hit musicals of all time (though *The Lion King* and that darn *Mamma Mia* are looking awfully scrappy, they have a LONG way to go to catch up with *Phantom*, which is still going strong 20 years after it opened). ALW said it was "written for a diva" and enjoyed David's take on the tune but had one salient bit of advice: open your eyes! I hadn't realized how often Archuleta does that, but he admitted it was a tendency he was trying to work on. Now, along with his lip-licking and breathing, we can watch out for David and his eyes. The whole segment began very annoyingly with Ryan Seacrest inviting girls up to hug him which was tacky, rude to the other contestants (stop treating him like he's already won) and unfair to David who quite rightly had no idea how to react -- he's not a plush doll, he's a singer getting ready to perform. Finally, when he did perform, I spent the entire song laughing about David's constant struggle not to close his eyes, a tic he clearly fought again and again. I was watching via Slingbox, which doesn't handle rewinding very well, so I saw the entire show in order without any repeating of musical numbers like I usually do. That said, he was solid and had a very strong ending. Randy raved, Paula raved and Simon said it was pleasant. That's about right. Not one of his best but far from weak. (By the way, I lose a bet with myself since I was CERTAIN David would sing "No Matter What" from *Whistle Down The Wind*.)

CARLY SMITHSON -- Sang "Jesus Christ Superstar" from the show of the same name. I've often thought it was interesting that ALW and Tim Rice did this show after having done *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. You think they might have been worried over being pigeonholed as people who write religious musicals. But they ended that talk with *Evita*, which is ALW's strongest musical as a whole, with the best book combining with some of his best music and lyrics (by Rice). ALW also earned his money by quickly rejecting Carly's first pick of "All I Ask Of You"

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from *Phantom* by saying she has a big chest voice (I noticed!) and needed a big dramatic song. Carly came out in a smashing, fun dress and belted it out with aplomb. My only complaint was on the chorus -- the background singers overwhelmed her a bit and since she was following them vocally, I thought she got lost in the mix. In the verses, she was very strong and had a big finish. Randy was positive, Paula said she especially like the chorus (just to annoy me, I think) and Simon seemed positive though since she was the fifth of six singers, saying it was one of his favorite performances of the night was awfully tepid.

DAVID COOK -- Sang "The Music Of The Night" from *Phantom*, right down to the vocal tics of Michael Crawford from the original cast album (at least in the beginning). ALW has buckets of money and Tony awards but not much critical respect. However, he can be guaranteed to pull out one or two ironclad melodies for every show he does -- tunes that you will remember forever, whether it's "I Don't Know How To Love Him" from *Jesus Christ Superstar*, "Don't Cry For Me, Argentina" from *Evita* (see, you can't even read those words without starting to hum it), "Memory" from *Cats* or this song from *Phantom*. Crawford's original vocals on this tune still get me all tingly. Cook -- who I was surprised to learn knows his way around a show tune and dug musicals -- simply knocked it out of the park with his most confident, assured vocal since reworking Lionel Richie's "Hello" and vaulting to the head of the pack. Is there any doubt he'll be in the finals with Archuleta? He hit that big note in the middle tremendously well and did a slightly rockish and effective key change at the end that let him wail away. It's a huge recovery from being so-so last week and a train wreck when he tackled Our Lady Peace's "Innocent" the week before. If I was at home and had this on my DVR, I would save the performance.

THE BOTTOM THREE -- So who is it going to be this week? Well, Syesha went first but I think she's going to squeak into the top three past Carly. I predict the bottom three will be Carly and Jason and Brooke. Jason and Brooke are clearly the bottom two. He was bland but she was an awkward disaster, so Brooke will be saying goodbye. Talk to me. Jesus was back on *Idol* but since no one substituted "Shepherd" for "Jesus" in "Jesus Christ Superstar," I think the non-*Idol* fans will remain away this time.

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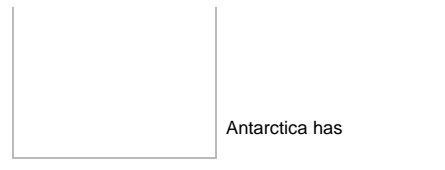
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Carly is officially out. Neither Brooke White nor Jason Castro were in the bottom two. AI has become a popularity contest, not a singing competition. Very disappointing.

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Wow. I'm away from home and the slingbox I'm viewing to watch the show had already erased the results show. I have to say I'm more shocked that Brooke wasn't in the bottom two than that Carly Smithson went home. Unless you think someone should be in the final two, at this stage it shouldn't be condemned when anyone goes home. Does the order really matter? The two Davids will be in the finals. Jason and Brooke and Syesha will be saying goodbye in the next three weeks in whatever order viewers pick.

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

Michael, liked your recap but your picture has GOT to be changed! You look like you belong on Rykers.

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

Artichoke hugely overrated. Comes across as the high school choir boy he obviously is. Earnest, to be sure, but not enjoyable to watch.

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cont'

5. Carly- she looked very nice tonight, covered the tats and sang pretty well. Shouty at times but at least she looked like she was having fun. Maybe she realizes she won't win and so she's letting her hair down so to speak.

6. David C- for me the best of the night. Sang the song in a very straightforward manner, no shadings of emo lite. I thought it was a great changeup and now he can go back to what he does best next week. I disagreed with Simon, I liked this side of David, it was different and showed his versatility. Looking more and more like a very serious challenger to the other David.

The bottom three will be Jason/Brooke and Syesha. Even though Syesha was very good, she just doesn't seem to have a big enough fan base at this point of the game. Which is unfortunate since she could be hitting her stride. But I do think Brooke is gone tonight.

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ALW even looked uncomfortable sitting in the audience, frankly. But then he can go home and sink into a pile of hundred pound notes, so what does he care?

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

Another spot on assesment of the night. ALW was a good mentor, he gave good pointers and was too the point, not too much chit chat. He did look dreadfully uncomfortable at the end of the show on stage with Ryan and folks. I guess being the man behind the scenes will do that, I had no idea what the guy looked like till this week.

As for the singers:

1. Syesha- I think she did a terrific job with her song. She was sexy and comfortable on stage and it showed. I do agree that going first at this point of the game won't really matter since there are so few

singers left but it can't help either.

2. Jason- total trainwreck. That pretty much sums it up. This song was way beyond his range and scope of emotion it wasn't even funny. Would be worst of the night if not for

3. Brooke- 2nd trainwreck of the night and an even worst wreck than Jason. She lost total confidence in herself after that false start and it was painful too watch, but also fascinating at the same time I have too say. Not sure if her psyche will recover if she manages to get past this week.

4. David A- I know you feel he's the inevitable winner of this, but I have to agree with Simon it was bland and forgettable. I also think he messed up some lyrics though I'm not totally sure. Just dull.

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DCDan See Profile I'm a Fan of DCDan permalink

Syesha. Spectacular. Ridiculous how sexy she is. And not at all a bad singer either.

Jason. Three words: Put-the-bong-down. Owh, dude, like, I meant, FOUR words . . . Dreadful. It would be very okay if he went away right about now (make that next week, please, after Brooke).

Brooke. Guess what? I Don't Must Love You. Get out of here with your simpering earnestness. Enough. And for once Paula was constructive and pithy. In live performance, you never, ever, stop. (Unless you're Elvis Costello on SNL in 1978 doing Radio Radio.) Brooke had her mulligan with the Police tune. No more free passes.

David A. I really enjoyed his performance of a song I had never heard before. To me, it seems that's what it's all about: an entertainer being entertaining. Simon, on the other hand, gave his usual dismissive "didn't particularly like it," parenthetically, "cause I don't know the song."

Carly. Not so much. She was greatly assisted by razzle-dazzle lights and quick camera shots. She seems like a genuinely likeable person though. That helps.

David C. First time I recall liking him. He finally went an entire song without oversinging. All good until that very last big "rawk" note. A good singer knows he doesn't need to show off his range every time out.

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Michael Giltz See Profile I'm a Fan of Michael Giltz permalink

Thanks for the comments. "I Don't Must Love You" def the comment of the week. :) And namecheckng Elvis Costello in an SNL performance -- bonus points for that one.

♥ Favorite ⚙ Flag as abusive Posted 03:04 AM on 04/24/2008

JuanRamirez See Profile I'm a Fan of JuanRamirez permalink

Bottom three?

Jason, Brooke and David A. He is getting more forgettable every week.

Either Jason or Brooke gets the boot. The other gets one more week.

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Kashathree See Profile I'm a Fan of Kashathree permalink

With all of the amazing songs attributed to Andrew Lloyd Webber, the contestants made a lot of bad choices, I thought.

♥ Favorite ⚙ Flag as abusive Posted 11:55 AM on 04/23/2008

Michael Giltz See Profile I'm a Fan of Michael Giltz permalink

Actually, that was an issue I didn't tackle but I think you're right. Archuleta's choice a bit odd and now in retrospect Jesus Christ Superstar -- which is a good song in the context of a big rousing production number -- isn't so good as a solo tune. Has anyone covered this song outside a huge concert staging of the musical? I don't think so. And "Memory" is one of the few bombastic ALW numbers so it was maybe the easiest choice for Castro, but clearly didn't do him any favors.

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DCDan See Profile I'm a Fan of DCDan permalink

"Superstar" did pretty well for Murray Head in the context of a 45 rpm. The single, released from the original soundtrack, went Top 20 in U.S. 1971.

However, I agree with you, it didn't work well for Carly in this case. Having said that, it certainly wasn't the worst performance of the night and she didn't deserve to get booted for it. For once, Randy came up with something salient: it's coming down to popularity and fan-base size (if it wasn't already all along). The fact that Syeesha was second from the bottom -- after giving almost inarguably the best performance of the night, especially within the framework of a true Broadway production number - - certainly substantiates Randy's assertion. Doesn't matter what Syeesha does, how great she looks, or how well she performs; she won't win.

Carly would have been better served covering "I Don't Know How to Love Him" (ditto Brooke) rather than channeling Amanda Overmeyer in a lame attempt to earn her Rocker Chick bona fides. The whole thing was shrill and redundant.

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

Syeesha ruled the night. Sucked they put her on first. Castro was painful. Brooke is done. See ya. And I hope I never hear the phrase "G-rated nanny" again for the rest of my life.

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

I disagree with your bottom three pick.

I think Carly's performance was much more exciting and memorable than Syeesha's performance. Syeesha has bored me to tears this entire season.

I think the bottom three "should be" and "will be" as follows:

Brooke, Syeesha, and Jason

With Brooke going on home.

Carly, David A., and David C. will be safe and rightfully so.

The contestants from American Idol 7 are by far the most void of personality than any other season so far. I hope next season they look for singers that also have some personality. Danny Noriega had the most personality of all the Idol 7 contestants.

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

You're certainly not alone in being bored by Syeesha since the judges and the voters seem to agree with you. This group doesn't seem to have any sharp edges personality-wise, which is ironic since this season the producers devoted themselves to....staying more focused on the contestants. Danny Noriega had oodles of personality, but for me David Hernandez had a better voice than half the people in the final six.

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kls9331 [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of kls9331](#) [permalink](#)

Winner of the night: David Cook!!! Who knew he could sing a showtune???
Loser: Definitely Brooke White who seems to be getting worse each week rather than improving!
Most honest mentor critiques: ALW!

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

Thanks, kls9331. I thought I was the only one who thought Brooke was a loser from the beginning. Such a phony! No voice, no stage presence, no understanding of the lyrics. Please--let her go tonight and let the audience out of its misery.
Carly was fantastic and so was Syeesha. David Cook is really doing an amazing job among the male contestants. Glad he got his mouth under control and got the purple out of his hair.

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