



APRIL 5, 2009



THE GOD WHO WASN'T THERE

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Michael Giltz

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American Idol Week Three: Miami

Posted January 31, 2008 | 12:35 AM (EST)

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Another oddly balanced show, with about 13 full auditions in Miami, including nine "Yes's" and four "No's," -- but with three of those "no's" coming in a row at the end of the show. Bummer. One enjoyable bit is the highlighting of Simon's constant teasing of Paula. She's always insisted that some of her fluster during the live shows is due to Simon's off-mike comments that distract her. This episode we saw Simon teasing Paula about her short skirt ("Slutty!") and when Paula says one contestant's accent is too thick, Simon mutters over and over again "A bit rude" until Paula snaps. And then there were the auditions, including some of the more promising ones we've seen so far.

Shannon McGough -- she wouldn't get kd lang's vote, thanks to a life spent grinding beef at her family's meat shop. Rather thin, Shannon had apparently won a number of local talent contests, which made her failed audition rather interesting. She shouted out Janis Joplin's "Cry Baby" and -- perhaps understandably -- was totally shocked by their rejection. Randy said she might be tone deaf, Simon said "That was like the Hungarian version" and she just didn't understand. Paula pounced on a refrain she'd use again: "She's never been told no before." Unlike other clueless contestants who never sang in public and are miserable, Shannon was fine for karaoke and you could see why her friends might cheer her on at a local bar. Still, one of the grim pleasures of the auditions is seeing people appear stunned at not sailing through to the next round. It's not a mean sort of schaudenfreud feeling -- it's more just fascination over the fantasy world some people live in.

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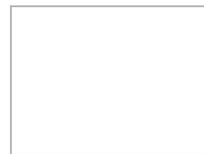
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Robbie Carrico -- one of the few men to make a good impression, Robbie was apparently in a boy band and he had a rocker personality (w appropriate long hair) and a very appealing, relaxed confidence while singing. His presumed experience in front of crowds could be a big plus and his voice sounds

versatile enough for other genres, unlike some of the rockers and country folk we hear. One to watch.

Ghaleb Emachah -- 25 going on 40 (or 50), Ghaleb is from Venezuela and insists he is filled with passion. His performance of a Marc Antony song was mangled thanks to a thick accent and a weak

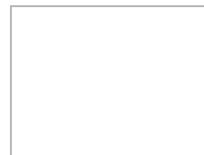
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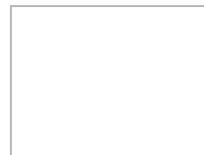
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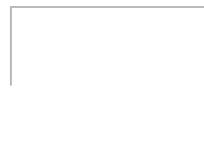
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voice. Simon nailed it when he said he might have enjoyed it if he were drunk and in a bar and Ghaleb started singing. But Simon teased Paula over her accent comment and just to spite him she and Randy put through Ghaleb, who didn't deserve it in the least. The kicker? Simon said yes, too, presumably because it didn't matter. If they don't take this seriously, we won't either. Are the judges feeling fatigue? (And don't forget, as soon as the show ends Simon heads to London and does it all over again for "The X Factor.")

Corliss Smith and Brittany Wescott -- two plus-size gals, one of whom likes skinny guys (Ryan) and the other guys with more meat on their bones (Hey, Randy). They both flirted with everyone in sight and had winning personalities without being clownish. Corliss sang the jazz standard "Take Five" and was frankly a bit harsh and lost the thread when trying to scat. Brittany was much better and had a stronger voice when singing "My Guy." Only Brittany should have gone through but in another example of personality over vocals, they both got the thumbs up. In truth, Corliss was alright, but if she auditioned on her own I'm sure she would have been politely turned down.

Suzanne Toon -- a single mom who tears up at the possibility of providing more for her little baby girl than she can now. That's great, but can we take a moment and suggest that maybe hoping to become an international pop star is not in fact the best way to prepare for your child's future? I just don't like these Queen For A Day segments and hope we never hear another word from their ailing relatives or cute kids once the real competition begins. But of course we will. Also, Suzanne sang Bonnie Raitt's "I Can't Make You Love Me" and frankly she lost the melody for a moment, something Randy noted. But she's pretty cute and ultimately rather winning even if the show makes her priorities seem messed up. Good potential overall; I was distracted by her backstory.

Ramiele Malubay -- an Idol singer of Filipino descent, Ramiele belted out some Aretha with a big voice but screeched quite a bit on the high notes Randy and Paula overlooked that because she was so darn cute. Nothing wrong with that -- that's how pop stars are made. If she just started in too high a key on that song and her voice is as strong as it sounded at moments, then Ramiele could be promising.

Syesha Mercado -- she seems to have read "The Secret" because she's been thinking positive thoughts and good things are happening. Her dad is an addict who just got out of rehab -- good for him, but I don't want to hear about it. She sings Aretha's "Think" very loudly and pushes it quite a bit but she's very pretty and deservedly goes through.

But please, if you're auditioning, there are ten zillion songs out there in the world. Don't pick a single by a former Idol and don't pick the latest radio hit and don't pick an *Idol* evergreen like "Think" or "Respect" or "Summertime" or god forbid "Falling." You'll please the judges just by not trotting out the same tired tunes.

Natashia Blach -- sang "At Last" (another over-performed tune) and has the amateur's problem of barely singing a single note straightforwardly (everything has a run or a little quaver in it). Not bad but not a lock to go through. She does.

Ilsy Porena Pinot -- another in a series of female singers who seem fine but aren't heard enough or don't distinguish themselves enough to make an impression. Goes through.

Richard Valles -- at the end of a montage of bad singers, we're tricked into thinking the decent looking Richard will ride to the rescue. Nope. He's dreadful on Rascal Flatts and Randy's very accurate comment that he sings nasally and through his nose is the sort of thing that people who criticize the show pinpoint as mean. In truth, at a real audition he would have sung for five seconds (at most) and then been booted off the stage. They might have tossed a "singing's not for you" rather than mocking the truly awful voice he had but of course we don't see the 99 banal auditions where they say "thanks but no thanks."

Julie Dubela -- a veteran of the short-lived *Junior Idols* show with preteens from four years ago, which I never watched. Dubela feels like a theater kid with tons of attitude, another interesting example of someone just stunned that they're being told uh-uh. In fact, she wasn't that bad and has a decent voice that might be fine for local theater or even for pop if she gets older and less imitative (hey, she's only 16). But she is really flummoxed that they all say she can't sing (she was a Top 20 finalist on *Junior Idols*, for gosh sakes) and Simon's suggestion she go to LA and become an actress goes over her head. Paula chimes in again with, "She's never been told no before," but in fact she's probably been told "yes" for community theater and school musicals and local karaoke

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and of course for *Junior Idol* so her shock is understandable. There's a huge gulf between "good enough for theme parks" and "good enough for *Idol*" and well, let's face it, if you tried to tell her that she'd never want to hear it.

Brandon Black -- the final act of the day (just to refute my comment yesterday that it often bodes well to be the last act) is a joker with no talent that makes Flava Flav seem passive.

The rough ending leaves a sour taste, but there were a few contestants we can actually expect to hear more from in Hollywood. Are you finding this season basically the same as the last few, more boring or more exciting? Who did you like?

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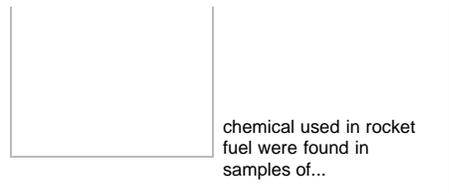
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