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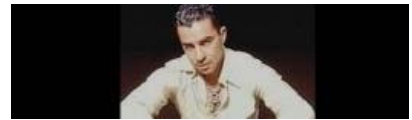
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Michael Giltz

Award-winning freelance writer

Posted January 15, 2009 | 01:29 PM (EST)

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American Idol Ratings Rise For Kansas City



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On the second night of *American Idol*, the audience grew bigger. Yep, the show seen by 30.1 million viewers inched closer to 31 million fans. (The ratings grew from 16.7 to 16.8 to be exact, according to *Mediaweek's* Marc Berman. That's down just 5% from the same night last season.) So the show bigger than anything on TV since the Olympics remains a juggernaut. Only the Super Bowl and the Oscars (one-time annual events) can compete with this weekly series. And who is performing the national anthem in Tampa before the big game on Feb. 1? *Oscar winner and Idol*

contestant Jennifer Hudson.

So on with the show. New judge Kara fits in so smoothly that I barely think of her as the "new" judge and it's only day two. However, her presence has messed with the power balance. You'd think a fourth voice on the judging panel would mean more diversity, more back and forth, more splits on the contestants. In fact, power has flowed even more to Simon Cowell. In the past, any one of the three judges just needed to convince one other person to agree with them to put a singer through. Randy needed Paula or Simon. Paula needed Randy or Simon. Simon needed Randy or Paula. They were all on equal footing. No more. Because Simon breaks ties, he still only needs one person to agree with him and now he's got three different judges to work on rather than two. And if Simon doesn't like a singer, ALL THREE of the remaining judges must agree in order to put the person through. (True, Simon could vote against himself in the case of a tie, but that's certain to be rare.) Simon is more powerful than ever -- hence the more frequent unanimous decisions I think we've been seeing. The result? They agreed more and I agreed less: I found myself strongly disputing their choices quite a bit last night.

Otherwise, Kansas City was just like Phoenix -- some promising talent with a serious emphasis on the good auditions. 13 of the 20 extended auditions we saw last night received a golden ticket --

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almost a 2 to 1 margin. So for every failed singer, we saw two people get through. And thank goodness. If there's any part of *Idol* I don't like, it's the train wreck singers. No matter how nice the judges may be, those folks are still being made fun of on national TV. Yeah, they know what they're in for, but it's still not my cup of tea. And a nod of thanks to the screening panel: there wasn't a single person who got serious airtime that was a gate crusher. If there's anything worse than a clueless singer, it's wasting time on someone who is just trying to get on TV by being as dumb as possible.

CHELSEA MARQUARDT (NO GOLDEN TICKET) -- nice kid who sings in choir and says her family urges her on even though she was so awful Simon compared it to the sound a cat makes when it's fallen off the Empire State Building. More and more, it looks like the four panel judging means Simon and Randy play bad cop by stating the obvious and Paula and Kara either stay quiet or try to say something polite. But why would Paula tell someone without any singing talent to "take something positive to help you" from the audition? It wouldn't have mattered anyway. The girl later said she just chose the wrong song.

ASHLEY ANDERSON (YES - GOLDEN TICKET) -- Cleverly chose a bonus track from the debut album of Leona Lewis (the winner of Simon Cowell's *The X Factor* -- the UK equivalent to *Idol*). Why was this clever? Because "Footprints in the Sand" was co-written by Simon Cowell. However, Ashley lost big points for immediately getting the words wrong and singing "footsteps" which prompted an immediate correction from Simon and then stumbled over the word every time it popped up in the tune. No matter. Even though she was ok at best, Simon jokingly said it was "probably the best song" of the entire audition season and put her through. The first of many golden tickets that I question. I mean, it is the NAME of the song she got wrong.

CASEY CARLSON (YES) -- a peppy girl who looked like Cinderella or some other Disney princess in her outfit (I'm the only one who thought that). She sang Vanessa Carlton's "A Thousand Miles" and while Casey was cute and had a friendly personality, she was flat on the lower notes, got lost in the melody, lost her breath and seemed to stumble in the middle of sentences. Imagine my surprise when they waved her through. I listened a couple of times but didn't hear what they hear.

BRIAN HETTLER (NO) -- Big guy who studied classical music and opera but dropped out and hasn't sung in two years, even though "It's what I dream of doing." He sang Aretha Franklin's "Think " and his train wreck sequed into a montage of people crying over their rejection. That was followed by another montage of four more disasters.

VON SMITH (YES) -- good-looking 22 year old with white hat who BELTED "Over The Rainbow" in the most melodramatic, Sam Harris fashion. Technically, he has a pretty good voice but Von seemed wildly over the top to me, pausing for about a minute during one part of the song to build up to a big finale and then brushing away a tear as he waited for their reaction. My gaydar was definitely pinging (a plus in my book) but instead of Simon dragging out the old chestnut criticism "theatrical," he made the more amusing dig that he imagined "your family LOVES IT" when Von Smith goes for those big moments. To me, Von needs a lot more training and experience so he won't oversing and actually learns how to use the voice he has. Another case where I was very surprised not just that he got through but that it was unanimous.

MICHAEL CASTRO (YES) -- Jason Castro's brother proves just as mellow but with snappier vocals as he works through Gavin DeGraw's "In Love With The Girl." Nepotism at work here, but at least it means he'll get a new hairdo and get rid of those awful pink streaks. Another montage of bad singers (including a guy singing about a banana) made Castro look good.

MATT BREITZKE (YES) -- A welder in real life, Matt stopped singing when he got married and had a kid. A burly guy, he was doing a fine job on the Bill Withers' classic "Ain't No Sunshine" but was stopped by Simon right before he had to dive into that thicket of "I know, I know, I know, I know..." on the bridge that makes the song so tricky. Alright, but I'm not convinced yet and neither was Randy.

JASMINE JOSEPH (NO) - girl with black and red and blue streaked hair who also sang "Over The Rainbow." (Do you think it's a Jason Castro influence or are people checking out [Sam Harris's Star Search turn on YouTube?](#)) Now Von sounds better. When the judges struggle to say something, Jasmine just walks away.

JESSICA FURNEY (YES) -- nice kid who lives with her 93 year old grandmother and sings Janis

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Joplin's "Cry Baby." To me, this wasn't even close: she was rough on the low notes, threw in a lot of unnecessary runs and trills (always a clear sign of a bad singer) and sounded very weak on the high notes. To my astonishment, Simon said, "I like you" and they put her through.

INDIA MORRISON (YES) AND ASIA MCCLAIN (NO) -- Two sisters who delivered a so-so rap about food. Then big sis Asia stumbled her way through a song before India did a decent performance and got waved through. The judges seemed astonished that two siblings could actually get along, with Kara saying "it's refreshing to see sisters who support each other." Really? My family isn't exactly The Brady Bunch but if one of them was auditioning for *Idol* and actually not going to embarrass themselves (or me), why wouldn't I support them?

JAMAR ROGERS (YES) At the audition with his best friend Danny Gokey, Jamar was the guy with the tiny mohawk who emoted his way through "California Dreamin'" by the Mamas and the Pappas with only slightly more restraint than Von Smith. Though the reviews were mixed, with "not bad" being a typical comment, he was waved through unanimously. Another time when I disagreed with the judges. Then his buddy auditioned.

DANNY GOKEY (YES) -- A music teacher (which usually means trouble on *Idol*), Gokey tearfully discussed the death of his wife just four weeks before the audition. Thankfully, Gokey was much better than his pal Jamar (sorry, Jamar) and did a spot-on run through of Marvin Gaye's "I Heard It Through The Grapevine." (It must really annoy the great Gladys Knight when she hears that because she sang it first in '67 and took the song to #2 for three weeks, only to watch Gaye cover it in #68 and take the song to #1 for a massive seven weeks.) A Robert Downey Jr. lookalike, Gokey's only warning sign is that it was a note-for-note copy of Gaye's version. But he's got a good voice and hopefully his own personality will come out later. Followed by a montage of more bad singers.

ANOOP DESAI (YES) -- "studied" BBQ (actually Southern myths and folklore as reflected in BBQ) during college and was the latest guy to do the Boyz II Men hit "Thank You." Very soulful and nice and the clean cut, preppy-looking Anoop was easily my favorite so far. Simon found him too vanilla but there was no question he'd be going to Hollywood. Another montage of bad singing followed by dumb costumes. Again, it's a huge improvement to get just glimpses of the dumb and clueless acts rather than handing airtime to people we'll never see again.

ANDREW LANG (NO) -- this was the gawky looking regular guy with two friends who showed up as cheerleaders to introduce him before he sang "My Girl" by the Temptations in a pretty karaoke style. Like a lot of poor singers, he could barely get through a single line of the song without throwing in tons of runs and trills. When he sang just as dramatically on another Motown chestnut, Lang was shown the door after Paula urged him to think about musical theater.

ASA BARNES (YES) -- We've had aging grandparents, deceased wives and now cute little kids, with Asa a band director who says rather awkwardly that "being a father probably is the most important thing to me at this point in my life." Probably? Surely that should be "definitely?" And won't it ALWAYS be the most important thing? Then he boldly says he wants to show it's OK to be a good dad. Sang Michael Jackson's "The Way You Make Me Feel" and despite stumbling over the words at the beginning and being a bit loud, he did a credible job. And his daughter is awfully cute.

MICHAEL NICEWONDER (NO) -- The best name of the competition so far, but his original tunes written for his mother (who told Michael -- rightly -- that he couldn't sing) and another one for his grandmother were not good.

DENNIS BRIGHAM (YES) -- A good talker, Dennis said he had a dream the night before where Simon said he was the best singer they'd seen so far. Not in real life, where Dennis is astonished that Simon wasn't thrilled with his rote run-through of Chris Brown's "With You" that was filled with awkward dancing and weak singing. But not as astonished as I was when Dennis kept talking and talking and talking and somehow charmed the other three judges into putting him through. Simon said at the end, "That's called being duped" and as usual he was right.

MIA CONLEY (NO) -- A montage of bad singers led into Mia, who delivered a very weak rendition of Minnie Ripperton's "Loving You" and later insisted repeatedly that God was gonna wreck vengeance on the judges for rejecting her.

LIL ROUNDS (YES) -- A nice looking young woman with a name like a rapper and a voice like a jazz singer. Randy went over the top when he said her rendition of Stevie Wonder's "All I Do"

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by Michael Giltz

sounded like a cross between Fantasia and Mary J. Blige but she was very good indeed. Simon nailed it again when he called her "classy" right after I wrote down that very word in my notes.

26 golden tickets (or was it 27?) were handed out and we saw half of them audition. But we didn't see 13 auditions except for brief glimpses of people (like this kid). Why oh why doesn't *Idol* post ALL the winning auditions online, say on Friday so goofballs like me can check them out? My two favorites were definitely Lil Rounds and Anoop Desai followed closely by Danny Gokey. Who were your favorites? And how do you feel about new judge Kara?

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

I agree with most of your assessments; however, if you had perfect pitch you would have noted that Casey Carlson was NOT flat on the lower notes. Listen again.

[Favorite](#) [Flag as abusive](#) Posted 05:23 PM on 01/17/2009

Ramsey -dj- [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of Ramsey -dj-](#) [permalink](#)

Wow -- talk about an in depth analysis. Nice work! You've made a job of analyzing the show! I thought I'd share with you the independent video blog I did when American Idol came to Kansas City. I got some auditions of my own on tape:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ApceMWHyz4Q>

[Favorite](#) [Flag as abusive](#) Posted 01:11 AM on 01/16/2009

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

Just watched your video canvassing the crowd -- very well done and entertaining. You even caught someone who made it on air. And you're smart to promote your stuff via other blogs about the show. Good luck.

♥ Favorite ⚙ Flag as abusive Posted 02:33 AM on 01/16/2009

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

Thx for the link. Between your behind the scenes footage and my analysis, we've got it covered. Too bad there's no pre-game show on FOX. Hmm.

♥ Favorite ⚙ Flag as abusive Posted 02:22 AM on 01/16/2009

Furry1968 See Profile I'm a Fan of Furry1968 permalink

Michael, looking forward to another season with you! And I couldn't agree more about seeing all of the winners online! Especially, as you stated "this kid." I really wanted to know his story more, and less bikini girl story!

♥ Favorite ⚙ Flag as abusive Posted 03:11 PM on 01/15/2009

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

Welcome back, '68 (if I can call you that). It's hopelessly uncool to watch Idol, so this column gives me an excuse to do it -- especially when people like you pay attention.

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njonesnycity See Profile I'm a Fan of njonesnycity permalink

Here's a playlists with some great American Idol moments...

<http://tv1.com/playlists/150>

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Thx for sharing the link.

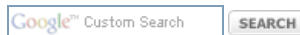
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