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- BUSINESS
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- LIVING
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- WORLD
- CHICAGO
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Michael Giltz

Freelance writer and raconteur
Posted February 26, 2009 | 01:00 AM (EST)

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American Idol -- Top 36 Round Two: The Winners!



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LATEST UPDATE: So Thursday night's show brought **three more people into the final 12:** I was dead-on about 16 year old Allison Iraheta and musical theater dude Adam Lambert as (presumably) the top male and female. But I should have gone with my gut on Kris Allen instead of Megan because he made it through as well. According to **Marc Berman of Mediaweek**, the unusual Thursday telecast scored an 11.5 in the ratings, top for the night but almost 19 percent below the equivalent night last season.

The night began with endless recaps and intros -- honestly, I fast-forward through a lot of it so I missed the fact that 25 million votes were cast. The worst padding is when they ask contestants how they feel or force the judges to recap the same opinion they voiced the night before. Allison was a lock in the first group and I remain surprised that none of them ever say something to Ryan like -- how do I feel? Not so good since I know Allison is getting through and I'm in her group. In the second group, it came down to Megan and Kris and I was just as astonished as Kris when he made it. Genuine shock and delight always plays well, so that should help Kris build a fan base. And in the third group, the final showdown between the shticky comic and Adam was so ludicrous I almost worried that we'd get a shock and have to hear that song from *Dreamgirls* goofed on yet again. In the middle of the show, Brooke White came on and performed her first single. It's always smart of Idol to recognize the accomplishments of the Idol family -- it doesn't take away from the importance of winning to acknowledge that even people who don't make it to the finals can have a career. Finally, the most notable moment of the night was Simon's snarkiness to Kara. No, this stuff is not scripted and he certainly didn't do it to goose the ratings. I imagine producers would prefer the judges to be seen as one big happy family, not one bickering family. But Simon seemed very annoyed by Kara's rambling and his "take your time" comment certainly got under her skin. Add this to her buddy Paula's comment that a fourth judge is slowing the show up and we might have some real friction going on here.

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Are you glad those three made it? Is Lil Rounds the only lock next week? And does Simon really despise Kara or was he just mocking her mildly?

(My original post about the performance and an update on the ratings of Wednesday is below.)

WEDNESDAY SHOW UPDATE: According to Marc Berman of Mediaweek, American Idol scored a strong 13.6 rating and grew every half hour. That should put it well over 20 million viewers. Still, that's down 13 percent from a year ago. (But the top-rated show of the week -- if it counted -- would be Obama's speech to Congress, which reached a whopping 52 million people.) Berman thinks Kris Allen and Megan and Adam Lambert are the shoe-ins to go forward. And go to Entertainment Weekly to read Michael Slezak's rundown: he liked half of the performances -- which is three or four more than me and he too thought Kris Allen was better than the judges gave him credit for. Maybe there's hope for Kris after all.

ORIGINAL WEDNESDAY SHOW POST:

So the second batch of the final 36 was much weaker vocally and personality-wise than the first group. But with so many more people to wade through, it's easy to forget we only need one guy and one girl and a runner-up (two heirs and a spare) so the success-to-fail ratio doesn't matter much. Sure, it was a poor night of performances, mostly, but that just makes it easier to pick the top two. I'll update later with ratings and links to other coverage when available.

1. **Jasmine Murray** -- Sang "Love Song" and looked very cute but she was weak and flat, although marginally better on the chorus. When I get a chance, I love to check out the other contestants in the balcony when someone is performing. The smart ones know they might be on camera and try to look engaged and supportive. But some just stare down the competition -- like Adam Lambert during Jasmine. He didn't even nod his head. (Later, he grooved along with others when appropriate.) Don't they know the camera is watching? The judges were uniformly negative.

2. **Matt Giraud** -- "Dueling pianos guy" went for intensity on Coldplay's "Viva La Vida" and fell flat. He was weak and out of breath, had an awful "big" note and a mess of an attempt at a soulful run towards the end. Simon called him a "wannabe popstar," which was right on target. This is where we realize how they'll handle so many judges -- they rotate who goes first so you don't always start with Randy and end with Simon. Smart idea. Bad reviews from the judges all around.

3. **Jeanine Vailes** -- Sang Maroon 5's "This Love," and her attempts to gussy it up didn't come close; a train wreck really. She waved her hand around so much while singing it reminded me of the film "Going My Way" starring Bing Crosby, which contains a great piece of advice for singers. Bing is a priest listening to a young female parishioner sing a song for him and her hand moves up and down so much his head gets dizzy following it. Bing stops her and says something like, "Less this" -- and waves his hand up and down -- "and more this" -- and gestures towards his lungs, meaning, concentrate on the singing and forget the theatrics. The judges were in agreement on how poor it was. Vailes' friend in the audience looked just like America Ferrera in "Ugly Betty."

4. **Nick Mitchell** -- The clown who should have never gone this far sang "(And I Am Telling You) I'm Not Going." Again. Good comics know once they tell a joke on national TV they have to retire it from their live act because everyone will have heard it already. But Nick pulls out the same tired routine in just a few weeks? Way past his sell by date.

5. **Allison Iraheta** -- Thank God. 16 year old Allison sings "Alone" and in comparison to the others it's like hearing Luciano Pavarotti in his prime. Also, she looks very cute. A fun, polished performance.

6. **Kris Allen** -- We haven't seen much from the awfully cute Kris (who is so squeaky clean here he looks like David Archuleta's older brother) and he tackles Michael Jackson's "Man In The Mirror." Personally, I think it's a dreadful song and he's weak for a while, but once the song builds he's more convincing. I thought I was swayed by his looks but in fact except for Kara all the judges like him. I don't think he'll make enough impression to come back unless it's via the wild card.

7. **Megan Joy Corkrey** -- My friend Aaron (swayed by her looks just as I was by Kris) insists Megan was really good, even if she might have been doing a Corinne Bailey Rae imitation. I thought the song got away from her the further it went on, especially the stage where she tried to let loose -- weak, scratchy, off-key. The judges are mixed to positive, with Kara insisting with the

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right song Megan could be a commercial hit. That's the second time tonight alone she's discovered a radio-ready act that just needs a hit single. Of course, that describes virtually every unknown group with a modicum of talent out there. I'm falling a little out of love with Kara. The role of the other three judges has been so clearly defined. I'm not sure what new perspective a fourth judge can bring. She's earnest to a fault and too gushy with her superlatives. Kara is far from a negative, just not adding a lot at the moment. But this is only her second show live so she may just be finding her sea legs.

8. Matt Breitzke -- Sang a song by Tonic and I wrote down "anonymous" and "unconvincing." It's hard to sound tough and intense on "Idol," which makes Daughtry all the more remarkable. All the judges are negative, with Randy trying to be a little more nice. Simon says the song was dreadful and if he'd known Matt was going to sing it would have talked him out of it. Insisted believably he was a fan of Matt and his comment really reflected on the song's suitability for Matt, not Matt. But Matt bullishly insisted Simon was wrong, keying in to a night when many of the singers felt they needed to talk back to the judges. Then all the other judges echoed Simon 100% about the song and Simon asked Matt how he felt now. A smart contestant would have shown humility at that point, but Matt just ignored them. You know, when all four judges agree on something, you better admit you have something to learn from them.

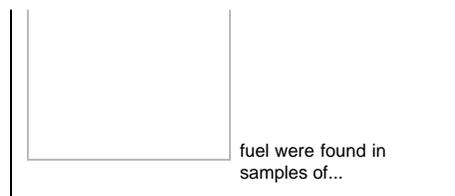
9. Jesse Langseth -- Sang "Bette Davis Eyes" and did a pretty good job, even though the way she tilted her head and moved around looked like classic bathroom mirror posing. But not bad and a nice little ending. All the judges were mixed but liked Jesse. She gave off a weird vibe during the comments, acting as if she was just hanging out with some buddies and talking it over, rather than a novice who should be listening and absorbing info from pros. Yes, a well-timed standing up for yourself can pay dividends (especially when the facts back you up or the audience loves you). But 99% of the time you should just shut up or say you'll learn and try to do better if America gives you another chance. Jesse just seemed to act above it all. However, I greatly disagree with Randy who dissed the song choice because he wanted her to sing a song that showed massive range. If every act sang a tune that ranged all over the place and had big notes to show off on, we'd do nothing but listen to ballads by Whitney and Mariah. Songs don't need flash or a big range -- if they're good and performed well, that's all the range I'm looking for.

10. Kai Kalama -- Sang "What Becomes of The Broken-Hearted?" He's a good looking guy, but I hated his hair and the carefully unshaven look he was sporting. He was out of breath while singing and just seemed to be posing for the camera. Paula was positive, Kara was mixed and Simon and Randy were negative. But Randy's wrong -- there's nothing wrong with Kai sticking to an old school vibe as long as he delivers.

11. Mishavonna Henson -- Looked cute and sang "Drops Of Jupiter." Simon thought it was all a bit too grown up. I thought she got better as she went along, albeit with a weak and rushed final note. Randy bizarrely insisted it was weird to hear solo acts sing a song made famous by a band, which rules out well over half of all pop music (including everything by the Beatles, the Stones, the Who, Led Zeppelin, Creedence Clearwater Revival and on and on) for people on Idol. Huh? All the judges were pretty mixed but liked her.

12. Adam Lambert -- The theater guy who said he learned so much from Kara's comments (apparently it's the first time he realized that a performance on TV needs to be much smaller than a performance geared for musical theater where people can be far, far away from you in an auditorium). And then he immediately delivers a flamboyant, over the top version of "Satisfaction" by the Stones that would have been perfectly appropriate for Giants Stadium. Mind you, "Satisfaction" certainly doesn't lend itself to subtlety anyway. The slowed down intro was weak and when he tried to be saucy it was not good. But once he got going, Adam delivered the goods, as long as the goods include out-singing Freddie Mercury in the theatrics department. I would cast Adam immediately for a road show production of "Rent." (That's a compliment, by the way.) He was by far the best male vocalist of the nite (small compliment) and deserves to go through. I'm just not sure he's a pop singer. But in a world of Mika and Queen, why not? Simon was a bit mixed, but the rest raved with Randy celebrating Adam to high heaven and apparently forgetting he finds it weird when solo artists sing songs made famous by bands.

To me, it seems obvious that Allison Iraheta and Adam Lambert are the top male and female. They were the best and the judges all praised them the most so there seems no doubt they'll get the most



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votes. But the runner-up? Not a clue. Me, I'd vote for Kris Allen but he seems lost in the shuffle. Megan Joy was the cutest, Mishavonna sang the most contemporary song the best and Matt fills the biggest genre hole. I'll go with Megan Joy as the runner-up.

Who did you like? Who will be the top male and female and who will be the third person to make it?

Go here to read the [Associated Press's coverage of the night](#).

Go here to see [Paula talking about how the fourth judge](#) makes the show too cumbersome.

Go here to see [a joke made by Simon about freezing himself](#) after he dies get taken seriously.

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Why have vocal coaches on American Idol if they continuously send these contestants out with the wrong songs? I had the feeling that Simon was angry about this when he said, "if I'd known you were going to sing that song, I would have advised against it." Most of the song choices so far this season have been wrong for the contestants. I say, get new vocal coaches!

I agree about Megan's movements - awkward and cutesy. She is beautiful and telegenic and her voice has an interesting quality to it, but I didn't think she was so great, which is why she likely didn't get though. I'm willing to bet she and possibly Matt or Anoop will be back with the wildcard.

Favorite Flag as abusive Posted 06:58 AM on 03/01/2009

InternationalObserver See Profile I'm a Fan of InternationalObserver permalink

Contestants should be allowed to choose their own songs without any direction by coaches or producers. To succeed in this business you need to make the right choices - otherwise you just become a puppet.

Besides, I've no doubt the vocal coaches *do* make suggestions along the way -- so if a contestant fails to heed their advice it's their own fault.

Favorite Flag as abusive Posted 07:26 PM on 03/01/2009

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I believe International Observer is right. I've never discussed song choice much with the people doing the show. In years past, they would have a fairly constricted list of songs to choose from since the show would have to pre-clear them for performance rights. As the show has become wildly popular, that's become far easier -- hence wide-open categories like "Hot 100 Singles" which is basically the last 40 years of pop music. With the caveat that not every song is available to them, I'm pretty sure the contestants (along with their parents/friends/advisers) make the song choices based on what's available to them, with input undoubtedly coming from the vocal coaches. The smart ones listen to them while being true to themselves. The dumb ones ignore them, just like they ignore the judges even when all four are in agreement.

Favorite Flag as abusive Posted 03:11 PM on 03/02/2009

Steamboater See Profile I'm a Fan of Steamboater permalink

All 3 winners were the right pick and Adam Lambert might win overall; he was sensational however he needs to be careful. All those gold chains he had on smack of cheesy Las Vegas and Elvis. I'm surprised no one, especially Simon, didn't mention that.

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It seemed so in keeping with his over-the-top theatricalness that I didn't mention it either. I'd love to see some subtlety from him next time.

Favorite Flag as abusive Posted 03:11 PM on 03/02/2009

anonimost See Profile I'm a Fan of anonimost permalink

It just seems to me with this format that there are 3 obvious choices in each group of 12. But not to worry if your fav did not get through. I think Anoop will be back in once the wild card show ends this winnowing out process. I did think Jesse Langseth was interesting. Too bad she's out. I think for good.

We record the show also because the recaps are excruciating but I understand some peeps are tuning in for the first time and Fox can sell the airtime. I still feel like we are waiting for the actual competition to start. This weeding out the weaker singers is more boring than entertaining.

I am looking forward to Lil Rounds (a lock) and the blind guy (sorry don't know his name yet) but ultimately I just want them to get it on with the final 12 competition. IKara does seem genuinely irked by Simon. It might be fun to see them interact as the show progresses through the season.

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I'm certain Anoop will get a shot on the Wild Card show, just like Megan and a few others. I never feel like the show really kicks in until the final 12 but I still watch the early stuff anyway. As always, the singers getting through seem leagues better than the others and then at some point during the Final 12 someone will be so weak I'll think, 'How the heck did THEY get through?'

Favorite Flag as abusive Posted 03:13 PM on 03/02/2009

InMyOpinion BayArea See Profile I'm a Fan of InMyOpinion BayArea permalink

Nice summary. I found last night to be totally painful. I'm slowly losing all respect for this show. As I was watching all I could think of was the people that they had eliminated. Was I really supposed to believe that these were 12 of the best from Hollywood?? Laughable. 4 maybe 5 deserved to be there, the rest should have been eliminated during the first day or two in Hollywood.

That being said... Allison and Adam should definitely advance. I'd like to see Kris Allen make it through too.

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This is the problem with this 12 to 3 format - it's inherently unfair to the contestants. This week, we'll have one great singer go through, one decent one, and one crappy one (Alison, Adam and whoever came next in the voting).

Compare that with last week, where we had three great singers go through, and at least 3 more great ones went home who were simply victims of grouping. I can name at least three of last week who deserved a spot in the top 12 more than any of the 11 this week whose name is not Alison.

If the goal is to find the best talent, why leave it up to chance like that?

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It's brutal. But of course the wild card three could all come from that first group, so maybe it won't seem so unfair once we're done.

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

Allison Iraheta by far is the top female of the week. I was doing schoolwork and stopped everything I was doing to watch her performance. This girl is amazing. It is amazing that at 16 years old she has such a strong and powerful voice that is so polished. Her stage presence is fantastic as well. Sadly the males did poorly. There were a few males that I enjoyed, but not a single one that struck me as amazing. Adam Lambert looks great and is a wonderful showman, but he is too over the top and not radio friendly. I also really enjoyed performances by Jesse Langseth and Megan Joy Corkrey. Jesse has a unique voice and a very likable personality, Megan is adorably cute and a good singer, but her silly dance sucked and was not a good performance by any means. I wish the old format of voting was still applicable because frankly the men did very poorly and there were at least 3 very capable women. The sure win of the week was Allison Iraheta, amazing girl.

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Thanks for reading. I think we're in sync. And I forgot to mention Megan's dorky little twist she kept doing so thanks for bringing it up!

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I really like your reviews on American Idol
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