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Posted: January 28, 2010 01:56 AM

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Idol Season 9: Auditions -- Dallas

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RATINGS UPDATE: *Idol* drew 24.7 million viewers on Wednesday, down 10% from the 27.4 million it reached one year ago, per [The Hollywood Reporter](#).

SHOW COVERAGE: *American Idol* finally has a breakout star this season. Unfortunately, it's not an unknown talent but the very popular TV, movie and Broadway star Neil Patrick Harris. He was funny and sharp, blunt without being rude and a nice foil for Simon. (And one more person Simon should keep in mind when staffing *The X Factor*.) The only missing

element to make his guest stint perfect? A sexy male contestant. Since Simon and Randy get to fawn over any women they find appealing, it would have been fun to see Neil sparked by one of the guys who came in. Joe Jonas was the other guest judge and he proved that hordes of screaming fans have taught him the useful skill of maintaining a polite persona during insanity. Otherwise, he barely was seen making a comment, much less a memorable one. Probably just too polite to make good TV, I imagine.

Overall, after the ghastly dearth of talent in Los Angeles, it was a relief to come to Dallas and discover 31 people worthy of going to Hollywood. To no one's surprise, some of them had tear-jerking backstories. Oh well.

LLOYD THOMAS -- Sang "Overjoyed," perhaps the last great pop tune written by Stevie Wonder. We saw Lloyd with his family and working the docks as a manual laborer. And though his performance was fine, Neil Patrick Harris was succinct in saying he wished Lloyd showed as much personality in his singing as he did before and after. Still, a winning personality can't hurt down the road.

KIMBERLY CARVER -- Sang an original, one of a shocking number of people who chose to do this very unwise option. People, you may have written a very good song (not likely, but possible), but surely there's a pop classic out there that might just be slightly better and therefore a smarter bet when auditioning? This ain't *Nashville Star*. Nonetheless, Kimberly had a nice jazzy sort of voice, though a bit cabaret as Simon might have said. So Randy Neil and Kara sent her through with Simon dismissing her

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as too one-note in her style. Though of course that hasn't stopped country gal Carrie Underwood, rocker Chris Daughtry et al from succeeding.

ERICA RHODES -- Sang "Free Your Mind" by En Vogue. This is the former kiddie star on *Barney & Friends* who showed up in a leather outfit and with a whip. God knows the kooks who think a *Let's Make A Deal* costume will help their chances don't need any encouragement. Fortunately, her sweet personality made it less of a stunt than it might have been and she can actually sing. In this case, I'd say the singing *overcame* the gimmick of her outfit. A light pop voice (just like her idol Janet Jackson), cute and with lots of charm. Hmmm.

DAVE PITTMAN -- Sang "Bring It On Home To Me" by Sam Cooke. Dave has Tourette's, which means he sometimes has facial tics (like eyes blinking and head movements and throat clearing) but says that all disappears when he sings. He was solid and his looks grew on me while he chatted. Still, the camera cut away once or twice when his twitching became notable as he talked and the judges discussed him. Got through but it's possible that on live TV Tourette's could prove a stumbling block in making people comfortable with him -- or humanize him and make people root for him more. Done with empathy, but not a sympathy vote.

TODRICK HALL -- Another original song? Oy! And yet, this one had *Idol*-specific lines that were relatively clever and cute. Appeared on Broadway (credited as Todrick D. Hall) in the role of Bobby in *The Color Purple* during Fantasia's acclaimed run. He has a limited but appealing and distinctive voice with loads of confidence and experience in front of live audiences that could serve him well if he makes it that far.

MAEGAN WRIGHT -- Sang "To Make You Feel My Love," which was written by Bob Dylan and covered by a gazillion people and is the last charting single (to date, I won't give up hope) by Billy Joel. Maegan's backstory is that...her parents divorced. Really? Is that even worth mentioning in this day and age? Still, she seems to have custody of her little brother, though I didn't catch that if it were spelled out. To me, she seemed rather tentative and colorless on the low notes but finally gained a little steam (as she got louder) towards the end. The judges all liked her more than me, but even listening again I didn't quite hear it. Not bad.

CHRISTIAN SPEAR -- Sang "All I Could Do Was Cry," the breakthrough hit by Etta James. Spear fought off leukemia at eight years old, which explains why the judges called someone they just met very brave. Good for her, of course, but I really didn't think much of her performance. It was very hard to follow the words she was singing (a sure sign of someone who isn't paying attention to the lyrics but just following the melody), stopped for a moment in the middle of lines and was generally loud but not especially good. On the plus side, she didn't oversing, especially for a 16 year old. I would have said, keep practicing and sing whenever and wherever you can and come back in two years, but the judges sailed her through.

So what did you think of NPH and Joe Jonas as judges? And what about the people who got through? Any strong agreements or disagreements with the judges?

--30--

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