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## [Michael Giltz](#)

Freelance writer and raconteur

Posted: February 10, 2010 12:33 AM

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# [Idol Season 9: Hollywood Week Day One](#)

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**RATINGS UPDATE:** Tuesday's Idol reached 27.7 million viewers ([per The Hollywood Reporter](#)) thanks to the start of Hollywood Week and the debut of Ellen Degeneres. The numbers were higher versus last week and last year at this time. Overall, according to USA Today, the audition rounds averaged 26.2 million viewers, which is down from the last two years but still makes it the #1 show in the country. The ratings were good and so were the reviews, from [a reserved LA Times](#) to [the fans online](#).

**SHOW COVERAGE:** Ellen. That was the big event of the day for me. How would Ellen Degeneres fit in? Would she get along with the other judges? As Ellen herself says, she may not be a music industry professional but she certainly knows a thing or two about entertainment. To me, she's the stand-in for the fan who watches at home and thinks they could pick a winner too. Though [in interviews Ellen suggested she found Simon a bit abrasive](#) (to the contestants), none of that was visible tonight. She joined the panel very smoothly, offering up criticisms and comments with the wry humor that comes so easily to her. We'll have to wait for some fireworks or head-butting to see how she does down the road. But so far, Ellen was a perfect fit.

Otherwise, we watched singers step up in groups of eight and perform a number. I won't say I took *pleasure* in seeing people go home when I questioned them getting a ticket to Hollywood in the first place. That would be mean. But having my initial impression reinforced by seeing them sent packing certainly made me say, "See, I knew it." But it

must be painful for folks like the Italian dude with a big family or the beatboxer or the two sisters from Jersey who all got plentiful airtime for their auditions but are now at home watching just like us.

So to flip it, let me focus on three people who didn't wow me in their auditions (or didn't get a chance to) but did much better here.

**CASEY JAMES** -- This is the guy who sang for about two seconds in his audition but spent most of his airtime taking off his shirt. Simon said it was embarrassing. Why? Here he sang "I Don't Need No Doctor," a modest hit for Ray Charles and covered recently by John Mayer (and co-written by Ashford and Simpson; who knew?). Casey played some serious blues guitar and was a lot more winning than I expected. He definitely made the most of his Hollywood shot.

**MARY POWERS** -- This 28-year-old mom looked too much like a Pat Benatar wannabe in her audition (and copycatted Benatar in her vocals too much) for my taste. Well, there's something to be said for maturity. Unlike so many of the kids (who looked like deers staring at headlights), she came on stage with quiet confidence and belted out Pink's "Sober" with aplomb. Still needs work on her look but she won me over.

**CRYSTAL BOWERSOX** -- Another audition that went by so quickly I wasn't sure what to think (though I did enjoy her laid-back spin on "Piece Of My Heart"). Here she strummed acoustic guitar and sang Carole King's "(You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman" with such winning charm that the kids in the audience spontaneously sang backup. Very, very winning.

The rest who got through were either new to me or reconfirmed the impression they made in their auditions.

**KATIE STEVENS** -- Very confident, no frills rendition of Stevie Wonder's "For Once In My Life."

**ANDREW GARCIA** -- A very cool, Raul Midon-like spin on Paula Abdul's "Straight Up." We'll be hearing this arrangement again, trust me. Playing an instrument is definitely a help, if you're good. Two skills are always more impressive than one.

**JANELL WHEELER** -- Sang Estelle's "American Boy," also accompanying herself on guitar. Very good.

**HAELEY VAUGHN** -- This was a bit iffy for me. She played the guitar okay and was quite sharp on her vocals. Very rough performance and yet I still kept thinking she was pretty darn cute and winning. (The giggle at the end helped.) Torn between putting her through another day on personality. Cute but not great. The judges probably felt the same thing but she'll have to get over her nerves and deliver or this is as far as she'll go.

**LILLY SCOTT** -- Sang "Lullaby Of Birdland" and played the guitar. Very Madeleine Peyroux and quite charming. (Lose the earrings, though.) Pegged the tune as by Ella Fitzgerald, which of course prompted me to look up authorship. I didn't know the music was by George Shearing! (Lyrics by George David Weiss, who also co-wrote "What A Wonderful World") Blossom Dearie had the biggest chart hit with it. And Lily did great by the tune. She's a comer.

**MICHAEL LYNCH** -- The personal trainer, Michael performed while his wife was potentially in labor with their first child. One assumes and hopes the birth went as smoothly, for Michael sailed through with a rendition of John Mayer's "Waiting On The World To Change." Not quite sure why Simon found it inventive since it sounded just like the original to me. I'm not quite won over yet, but he was fine.

**TIM URBAN** -- Cute kid who did not do a good job with David Cook's "Come Back To Me" but got through anyway.

So that's it. Wednesday is the dreaded group night, my least favorite section since someone can get torpedoed by the shenanigans of some loony in their group. Did anyone catch your eye tonight or convince you they had more than you first expected? And what did you think of Ellen?

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### Michael Giltz

Freelance writer and raconteur  
Posted: February 17, 2010 05:00 AM

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# Idol Season 9: Top 24 Named, Part 1

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**RATINGS UPDATE:** American Idol is beating the Olympics, which just goes to show how powerful this hit series. There's literally never been a show this popular for this many years in the history of TV. Idol scored 23.6 million viewers, ahead of the roughly 20.3 million viewers for the Olympics, **per the Hollywood Reporter**. That's virtually on par with this point at last season, when of course the show wasn't facing off against the Winter Games.

**SHOW COVERAGE:** So we saw more snippets of

lots of performances and Ellen's starting to have fun on *American Idol* Tuesday. For those who say she's not getting along with this or that judge or doesn't offer up much, they should remember that Hollywood Week gives us the least insight into the judges. Most of their deliberations are off camera so as not to spoil the surprise about which artists are definitely going through. We'll get a much better sense of how Ellen plays off Simon and the others once we hit the live shows. And she'll do very well, I'm sure.

Anyway, it remains frustrating how little of the performances we actually see. If *Lost* can launch an entire university online devoted to its backstory, why can't *Idol* post every single audition that snags a golden ticket and every single performance from Hollywood Week? it would certainly drive traffic. Are they afraid of having a **website that's too popular**? If there's any belief it would diminish the need to watch the show, they're crazy. That's like thinking someone buying Dylan bootlegs won't bother buying his official studio releases. That sort of fanatic fan is exactly the sort of person who will always watch the show.

But commenting on all of the performances we did see is moot since they started naming people into the Top 24. In fact, we saw seven go through and two sent home, which means *Idol* wants to keep it positive or we're gonna see a lot of tears Wednesday night. So here are the ones who got through and my thoughts on whether they deserved it. One note on song selection: for their final song, some people sang offbeat choices like Boston's "More Than A Feeling" and the Commodores classic "Brickhouse." So I ASSUME people had a fairly wide range of songs to choose from. So why do so many of them sing Michael Jackson's "Man In The Mirror" and that Jason Mraz song "I'm Yours?" For God's sake, if even

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one other person is singing a song, find something different so they only compare you to you and not four other people.

**MICHAEL LYNCH** -- Yes. The personal trainer sailed through, seeming like a lock ever since his baby was born. His run through the Mraz song was merely ok but he's been solid and appealing.

**DIDI BENAMI** -- Yes. She seems to melt at every stage but I've seen so little of her actual singing I can't be sure what to think of her. Still, I was surprised she made it.

**KATELYN EPPERLY** -- Yes. As with Didi, I wrote down "no" as they montaged her journey because it didn't seem like a winning one to me. And divorcing parents? She really needs to lose this backstory; it may be personally upsetting but in this day and age it hardly represents a stumbling block in life in any shape or form.

**SHELBY DRESSEL** -- No. This is the girl who sings out of one side of her mouth and insists that anyone watching should not worry about perceived problems and just be themselves. Good for her. But the snippet of her singing "More Than A Feeling" was not good; she was off a bit, which is too much at this stage. I never expected her to make it this far, which means it was a real shocker when she was sent home and Simon said, "That was the wrong decision." Cold comfort but still something she should savor. (And hey, audition for *The X Factor* next year, Shelby.)

**CASEY JAMES** -- Yes. The dude who took his shirt off as proven a real talent to me and an obvious lock for the top 24, as clips of his performances reinforced. Even his "weak" performance of Colbie Caillat's "Bubbly" seemed good to me and a sign of versatility. I like him more every time I see him.

**AARON KELLY** -- Yes. This 16-year-old kid has a good voice and is very appealing. But he screwed up two out of three performances during Hollywood Week. The group song was a disaster and he forgot the lyrics on his final solo number. (Though he recovered and stumbled through in a way that somehow seemed endearing.) I would have sworn he would benefit from another year or two of growing up before coming back but they put him through on the strength of his voice and innate appeal. Understandable, but maybe not the best for him long-term.

**LEE DEWYZE** -- Yes. Very appealing personally but he was another one whose montage didn't show the trajectory of a star. Not quite sure why he got through, but of course the judges saw more of him than we did.

**TODRICK HAL** -- Yes. The dancer who never took a singing lesson made it through despite being the gazillionth person to sing that Jason Mraz song, though happily with a lot of style. His performing career as a dancer should hold him in good stead.

**JESSICA FURNEY** -- No. She was off-key and sharp at moments in the performances we caught a glimpse of but argued strenuously that she was ready. Maybe most improved from last season (though not improved enough) but her hunger almost convinced me.

In short, Michael Lynche and Casey James were obvious picks and look likely to sail into the Top 12. Neither of the women have impressed so far and the rest of the men are wild cards of one sort or another. From what we saw, I'll be shocked if Angela Martin, Thaddeus Johnson, Siobhan Magnus and Crystal Bowersox don't make it through.

What did you think of the judges' picks and rejections? Anyone else stand out for you or are any of my picks to go through tomorrow off base?

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But if they showed the actual performances...then the audience would realize that they are not picking the best singers, but rather, the best looking people or the people with the biggest phony sob story/back story.

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**AmandaRuth** 07:34 PM on 2/17/2010

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Totally agree with you about showing more of the performances. In fact, I wish they would show much, much less of the city auditions, and much more of Hollywood week. The city auditions are always the same thing, and laughing at talentless people got old after the first season.

There is real drama in Hollywood week, and I am not talking about any individual performers backstory, but rather the group performances, and sudden death sing-offs. In a few of the seasons, it seems like Hollywood week was far more interesting than the actual final 24 competition. Show us

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those, please.

I hope the singer that gave us Paula Abdul's Straight Up makes it. To me, he is perfect example of what is so great, and at the same time what is so awful about AI. Rare, interesting performances that really shine, but also knowing that, like a lot of popular music, anything out of the mainstream, anything that hasn't had all the edge boiled out of it, may not appeal to the masses, and therefore, unlikely to win.

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**errol44** 03:40 PM on 2/17/2010  
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Furney was sent home... unless I watched the wrong American Idol last night... ??? She threw a tantrum when she found out.

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**mellene** 01:34 PM on 2/17/2010  
137 Fans



What a yawn. The show's gone to hell and Simon should quite before it gets cancelled.

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**Burnsey** 11:37 AM on 2/17/2010  
14 Fans

I wonder who is going to replace MICHAEL LYNCH. It has already been reported that he got booted because his father broke the confidentiality agreement and told a Florida paper that he made it to the top 24.

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**HUFFPOST BLOGGER**  
**Michael Giltz** 03:23 PM on 2/17/2010  
59 Fans



I hadn't heard that but there does seem to be truth to it. Presumably we'll see him booted next week. I wouldn't be surprised if they didn't delight in putting forth Jessica Furney just for the drama of it all.

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**HUFFPOST SUPER USER**  
**FlippyO** 06:41 PM on 2/17/2010  
17 Fans



Actually, there were later stories that said that Michael Lynch wasn't booted after all.

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