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Michael Giltz

Freelance writer and raconteur
Posted: March 31, 2010 12:00 PM

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Idol Season 9: Top 10 -- Lee Dewyze Breaks Out

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After weeks of appearing uncomfortable, uncertain, unhappy and lots of other "uns," Lee Dewyze finally broke out of his shell (perhaps a pep talk from Usher helped) and delivered the best performance of his life on *American Idol's* r&b/soul night.

But first, *Idol* begins on Monday now. That's when the latest person to depart appears on *Late Show With David Letterman*. Paige Miles sat in with the band, chatted with Dave and sang a confident, winning

version of Stevie Wonder's Grammy-winning song "Living For The City." If she'd sung like that on *Idol*, she'd still be on. Indeed, it was miles better than anything she'd done for weeks. It's always good to remember that not every artist will flourish in the cut-throat, pressure-cooker atmosphere of a prime-time competition. Maybe we haven't heard the last from Paige.

On to soul night, where Usher was a very serious mentor who focused a lot on connecting with the audience and appeared to help a number of the competitors improve.

SIOBHAN MAGNUS -- Siobhan continues to rack up accolades from outsiders, with Usher saying "I think she's got a real shot at being an incredible artist." I thought he might be the sort to say this about everyone, but in fact we heard him raving most about Siobhan, Casey James and saying "wow" over Lee Dewyze's vocals when Lee was leaving the room. Siobhan sang Chaka Khan's 1985 gem "Through The Fire," one of those tunes Khan can deliver effortlessly but most other singers will sound strained and awkward on. That's exactly what happened to Siobhan, who had a crazy braid in her hair, too much lip gloss and was piercing and off-key on the chorus. It was her weakest performance in a long time and Simon rightly echoed what I said last week: the wailing bit she always throws in is getting boring.

CASEY JAMES -- Sang Sam & Dave's iconic hit "Hold On! I'm A Comin'," the biggest of their career. No one had ever sung it on *Idol* before, which is surprising until you realize so much of the song is built on the back and forth of those two. But Casey nailed it, looking supremely confident and happy and

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delivering an exceptional cover of the tune. My only thought was that he may have peaked too soon. To my surprise, both Ellen and Kara found it a bit obvious. But Simon and Randy rightly praised it. Casey should work in the blues every week, no matter what.

MICHAEL LYNCH -- Sang "Ready For Love" from India.arie's album *Acoustic Soul*. Lynch had been veering into lounge act territory, but he's righted the ship again, by sitting on a chair, strumming an acoustic guitar and nailing a song most listeners would have never heard before. The only problem was that the producers had him backlit too brightly so Michael disappeared in the light every so often. Very strong vocal and though he technically went off-key a bit towards the end, it didn't matter because the performance was convincing.

DIDI BENAMI -- Sang "What Becomes Of The Brokenhearted?" a classic Motown tune by Jimmy Ruffin and covered often but still somehow fresh. (Wikipedia says Whitney Houston was gonna cover it for her film *The Bodyguard* until Paul Young did it for another film and had a hit. That sent her to Dolly Parton's "I Will Always Love You.") This was a very strange segment and I'm not sure if Didi will get sympathy for it or not; she'll need it since the performance was flat most of the way, till she picked up some steam on the emphatic finale. First, she broke down in tears after singing the song for Usher. Then after the judges blasted her, Ryan tried to prod Didi into revealing some personal anecdote about why the song means so much to her but she politely refused and then looked ready to break down again. I do appreciate her refusal to mine a private moment on camera in front of millions and she looked lovely. I just wish her singing had been better.

TIM URBAN -- Sang Anita Baker's "Sweet Love," one of the great jazzy soul ballads of the last three decades. Surely tackling it was no crazier than Tim singing Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah." More importantly, Tim smiled and smiled and smiled and looked cute during the pre-song chat, in front of the judges and backstage. He's definitely ready for some acting roles after gliding through the whole process. Simon nailed it by saying it doesn't make a bit of difference what the judges say. But in fact I thought Tim did a pretty good job given his limitations and had a good strong *Idol*-like note at the end, the sort that plays well in the end of the show recap.

ANDREW GARCIA -- Sang Chris Brown's "Forever" (which was originally written for a gum commercial!). After weeks of desperately trying to recreate his Paula Abdul moment, Andrew finally did just that. He took a dance-y pop tune and did an acoustic version, sans the kitsch value of "Straight Up" in the context of *Idol*. He was especially good on the bridge. I wrote down "Andrew is back!" because I knew Randy would say that and indeed he did. Still, this wasn't revelatory, just a case of Andrew not sucking as he has the last few weeks.

KATIE STEVENS -- Sang Aretha Franklin's "Chain Of Fools," a song about a woman realizing she's been duped by a no-good dog of a man. Now I don't care how old you are, if you can sing a song you can sing it. 14-year-olds can deliver a nice version of a song about a dad proud of his new-born son. Why not? But Katie was all attitude and no depth, bopping her head in that soulful manner but looking more like a kid playing at dress-up than someone feeling actual anger or pain. Randy mentioned a disconnect between the lyrics and her singing and that's what he meant: she didn't seem to have a clue as to what the song was about, attitude notwithstanding. Very beauty pageant, as Simon might have said.

LEE DEWYZE -- Sang "Treat Her Like A Lady," the #3 hit from 1971 by the sibling act Cornelius Brothers & Sister Rose. Usher actually said "wow" about Lee's singing after a rehearsal when Lee was heading out the door and couldn't see him. And no wonder. Lee's voice has always been very distinctive, but he was light years better last night than he's ever been before. In the past, he's seemed like a deer caught in the headlights and generally miserable. He's repeatedly been told he needs to have more confidence in himself. But how the heck do you give yourself more confidence in a week? Obviously, Lee knows the answer since he was confident, soulful and absolutely commanding. Since Simon had been pushing him to "have a moment" I was certain that one or all of the judges would say, "You just had a moment." Maybe the others left it to Simon. But he went one better, saying, "This is the night your life may have changed forever." Suddenly, this competition is getting very interesting and despite the judges saying it's the year of the women, it looks like Crystal will be battling Casey and Michael and Lee and Aaron for the finale.

CRYSTAL BOWERSOX -- Sang "Midnight Train To Georgia," the sole #1 pop hit by the vocally brilliant Gladys Knight & The Pips. One of my favorite songs of all, Crystal delivered it at the piano complete with backup singers before standing up to finish it off. We learned she hadn't played piano in years, so I'm not sure if I would have known why this performance was slightly off. But having that info, it certainly explained why she was a little tentative and staring down at the keyboards so intently. Plus,

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Crystal had way too much makeup on. She shined at moments and it was only off compared to her flawless singing every other week. Crystal was still better than all the other women combined. The song was hardly a radical departure for her, but Simon was right to warn Crystal about losing her way. Bizarrely, Simon said she should have done the song without the backup singers, which is a little like saying you should do "Hit The Road, Jack" without backup singers. I suppose it could be done but the backup singers are intertwined with the song and inextricable from its appeal.

AARON STEVENS -- Sang a Bill Withers song and as soon as I heard that I depressingly knew it would be "Ain't No Sunshine." It's a great great song, but Withers has such a good, country-ish vibe that many, many of his tunes would fit the country-leaning Aaron better than this one, which has been overdone on *Idol*. Aaron's been growing by leaps and bounds so it's no surprise he would stumble. It wasn't disastrous by any stretch; just much weaker than usual for him.

That brings me to song selection, often a bewildering demand from the judges. But look what happened this week. The people who chose obvious songs (often done repeatedly on *Idol*) stumbled: "Ain't No Sunshine," "Chain Of Fools," "Through The Fire." Those who chose something contemporary but put a spin on it did well: "Forever." Those who chose songs rarely or never done on *Idol* and songs most people wouldn't even know shined: "Ready For Love," "Soul Man," "Treat Her Like A Lady."

So who goes home? It seems unlikely that the bottom three would all be women, but the three weakest performances were definitely Siobhan Magnus, Didi Benami and Katie Stevens. I'll throw in Tim since he's lived in the bottom three. The bottom three will be Tim and Katie and Didi. It'll come down to Katie and Didi and Didi will go home.

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JackND 10:54 PM on 4/01/2010

74 Fans

Who is Aaron Stevens?

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HUFFPOST SUPER USER

RichieB 01:04 PM on 4/01/2010

139 Fans



I'm predicting Lee and Crystal in the finals. There is a chance either Big Mike or Casey could make

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the finals. If Lee gets his confidence going, look out. He and Crystal are the best vocalists and Crystal has a lot of performing experience. Lee should take a cue from Big Mike and work on his personality. Don't see how Tim could survive another week but the voting is hard to predict because so many factors come into play.

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quivira 11:59 AM on 4/01/2010
23 Fans



Simon didn't tell Crystal she shouldn't have had backup singers; he told her she shouldn't have backup singers standing by the piano.

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Michael Giltz 01:52 PM on 4/01/2010
59 Fans



Hmm. Simon said, "The backing vocalists shouldn't have been there because it made it old-fashioned." I agree it's vague and you could interpret that either way: they should have been off to the side OR they shouldn't have been part of the arrangement and Crystal should have done the vocals alone. Given Simon's track record, I don't think it was the staging but the arrangement but you're certainly right in pointing out it was vague and not clear exactly what he meant. Here's the clip for anyone wh wants to make up their own mind: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aHiasC-6eNI>

Thanks for commenting. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/michael-giltz/emidolem-season-9-top-10_b_520118.html#

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stuck-in-paris 09:02 AM on 4/01/2010

17 Fans

Lee and Crystal are by far the best. I think Usher put a little flame under Lee and I was thrilled to see it!

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HUFFPOST SUPER USER

MaryscottOConnor 10:07 PM on 3/31/2010
470 Fans



Well, that's that. Didi's out, absurdly.

Once again, the teenyboppers choose. That's really the lamest part of this show -- the lowest common denominator factor.

But then, I guess that's what "pop stardom" means, really. Which is why Crystal isn't going to win this whole thing, no matter HOW much the judges try to make it happen; when teenaged girls rule the phones, it ain't gonna be a dreadlocked, gap-toothed Janis Joplin revival artist taking it home.

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Fletch17C 09:51 AM on 4/01/2010

14 Fans

You're probably right. Crystal may come in third, which is where Melinda Doolittle topped out. Despite that, she will have a more solid long-term career than whoever wins the title this year.

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HUFFPOST SUPER USER

libwingoflibwing 09:58 PM on 3/31/2010
178 Fans



Wow. Did someone let the judges do his thinking for him? To often the actual performance is forgotten after the judges go through their routine.

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I am convinced that the judges get direction from the producers. "This week bring down Casey a notch, especially you, Kara, be critical of him." "Pump Lee and Andrew this week, we want to keep them in the competition." "No matter how much Tim improves and how much charisma he has, be sure to completely dis him; he was supposed to not make it into the top 20, much less the top 10!" "Stay on the 'got to be contemporary' jag with Katy, even if she gives a stella performance."

In my opinion both Andrew and Lee have outlived their welcome. As for Lee needing confidence? Wow someone again is buying into the producers' narrative. Lee is so arrogant I can't stand him. He reminds me of Danny Gokey. But it is obvious the judges on the producers' orders want to put him in the top three.

The judges job on this show isn't to give advice to the contestants. The judges job on this show is to shape the opinion of the audience. Sometimes they are so off it is obvious they are acting on the producers' input.

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HUFFPOST SUPER USER

MaryscottOConnor 06:50 PM on 3/31/2010
470 Fans



In a just universe, Siobhan would go home. ENOUGH. And if not her, Tim Urban or Katie or frankly, Aaron Kelly. I am baffled as to why Aaron Kelly is so popular -- other than that ridiculous teenybopper thing, which just drives me insane. Ugh. Siobhan's one trick pony routine is officially crazy-making, Tim Urban is cute but utterly out of his league and Katie, while definitely talented, is simply not ready for prime time -- she needs at least another year of seasoning.

Those are the bottom four of the top Ten, the four who simply do not have what it takes to be stars Right Now.

If Didi were to go, it would be, simply, a travesty. The judges have been ludicrously unfair to her, week after week. She has an extraordinary voice, she is GORGEOUS, she picks songs (with the unfortunate exception of last night, more's the pity) that are outside the box... Didi could, with just the teensiest bit of guidance, be a star.

I wish to hell Simon would give that girl the proper push. But I swear, Randy, Ellen and Kara are hellbent on seeing her kicked off the show. For whatever reason, they have wanted her gone from Day One. It's depressing.

I hope to god she makes it through this round and one of those four goes home, because any one of them deserves to leave more than she does.

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MiraMcB 07:54 PM on 4/01/2010

163 Fans



Part of the problem is, imho, that this is a very weak season for talent. Out of the Top 12, there are, perhaps, 3 possible contenders and none of those, again jmho, is strong enough to make a lasting mark on the industry unless something happens to radically change their abilities.

As for Did - lovely girl. Very attractive, nice voice, seems very sweet into the bargain. Unfortunately, she can't seem to sing in tune for more than a couple of bars. She has had one or two reasonable performances throughout. The rest were, frankly, atrocious. Sorry, but that's reality. The reason she is now gone is because it was these weak performances, on on top of the other, culminating in that debacle Tuesday night. We were actually embarrassed for her and cringing during that mess.

I have no idea what's needed to get her shaped up - vocal lessons, tranquilizers, self-esteem counseling? Can't really say. Very unfortunate, but there it is. Bottom line, she deserved to be gone and so do most all of them.

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anonimost 06:38 PM on 3/31/2010

6 Fans

Right on review Michael. I've been a fan of Dewyze since day 1. Who knows why he has suffered from low self esteem - it might be a pretty bad episode in his childhood (one never knows), so to see him pull himself together was great.

I do think Katie would be great at Martina McBride songs.

The Idols redeemed themselves from last week. My grade:

Dewyze: A
Andrew: A-
Crystal: B+
Michael: B
Casey: B
Arron: B-
Siobhan: C
Katie: C
Didi: C
Tim: C-

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TankGirlz 03:18 PM on 3/31/2010
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If you haven't already, checkout Lee's 2 pre Idol CD's they are really good!

<http://itunes.apple.com/us/artist/lee-dewyze/id259611566>

I knew he'd bring it!

Casey is good but the GRIN..ugh!

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Burnsey 01:50 PM on 3/31/2010

14 Fans

I think Tim will finally be sent packing. Can't say why, really, just a feeling, but his time has come. I think Ryan over-stepped in his prodding of DiDi, I do not think I ever heard multiple judges call out for him to stop something at the same time. I think she wants to win or loose based on her ability, not on some sentimentalist issue. I actually admired her for trying to demure and answer without answering. I love her voice, but her song choices have been poor.

Lee rocked the house last night, and all because Usher removed his glasses and looked him in the eye. But as always I'm with Crystal, she has more abilities and talent than I thought she had. Who knew she could tickle the ivories too?

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anonomost 06:40 PM on 3/31/2010

6 Fans

I know. Ryan can be so obnoxious. I liked the old days when he really seemed to care. There's hints of the sweetness now and again but he crosses the line too much.

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bardgal 01:02 PM on 3/31/2010
888 Fans



Casey James did NOT sing Soul Man. He sang Hold on, I'm Coming.

Crystal needs to be cutting albums and going on tour - and not with these people.

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Fletch17C 03:19 PM on 3/31/2010

14 Fans

I've listened to some of Crystal's original material online. Very cool. She will be making great records once her time on Idol is over. I'm glad she came on the show. Otherwise, I might never have discovered her for myself.

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HUFFPOST SUPER USER

MaryscottOConnor 06:54 PM on 3/31/2010
470 Fans



Yep. Odd mistake to make, re: Casey.

I'm getting REALLY tired of Casey. Talk about wearing out a routine... Every song he sings sounds the same now. And he swore he was going to use the guitar EVERY TIME? Sheesh.

I know Crystal wanted to test herself but I think Simon was dead-on. This is one time where someone doesn't need to "show her range." Stick with your true self. The make-up, the heels, the skin-tight dress -- it all rang so false, I was very uncomfortable watching it. It was like, "Um, okay, now we know you can do that -- can we go back to the real you now?"

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MiraMcB 08:02 PM on 4/01/2010

163 Fans



Interesting that you feel Crystal should not change anything, but rely on the same things she has always done, not branching out or experimenting - mic, guitar, rug, sing.

For Casey, however, you say you are tired of the way HE performs. "Is he going to use the guitar every time? Sheesh!" A little exasperation there? Not a fan, perhaps? No problem, but what I see when I watch Casey is a classic front man. That's who he is. That's what he does. That's the album he'll record. He should stick with what he knows and who he knows himself to be, as should Crystal and all the others, many of which won't and that will be their downfall - that and a lack of talent.

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Michael Giltz 03:19 AM on 4/01/2010
59 Fans



Whoops. It was indeed their OTHER big hit. Thanks for correcting me. Crystal will be; no doubt about it.

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filmex 12:43 PM on 3/31/2010

43 Fans

Last night's show felt like a balloon losing its air.

Siobhan was a mess, something I never thought I'd say. But it seems whenever you have one of these kids sing a song they don't really know, they don't have the confidence to do it forcefully. More often than not, they're feeling their way through the melody. Siobhan sang it forcefully only to seemingly realize she didn't know it that well.

What the hell was Ryan doing badgering Didi about what that song meant to her? He asked, and she demurred, and anyone not an idiot would have left it at that. Didi seems to be morphing from singer to actress before our eyes. Katharine McPhee did it, as evidenced by her excellent turn as Chevy Chase's stepdaughter on "Community" a few weeks back.

Why not? It pays better. You keep more of the money you generate, and it certainly is a more dependable industry than the music industry, which has gone in the tank.

Crystal and Casey...still the ones to beat. Siobhan should be in the mix, but only if she picks songs she's comfortable with, and gives the screaming a rest.

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