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Michael Giltz
Freelance writer and raconteur
 Posted: March 11, 2010 01:37 AM

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Idol Season 9: Top 16 -- The Men

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This season on *American Idol*, the judges have insisted the women are where it's at. But the men are certainly more consistent. While half the women are jostling each other on the way out, almost none of the men were genuinely bad this week.

LEE DEWYZE -- Sang "Fireflies" by Owl City, the out of nowhere #1 hit. The nervousness was visible in his eyes, but Lee gave a decent, more forceful version of the song. He relaxed as he hit the final line and

ended on a strong note. Randy bizarrely said it was a strange song choice. Why? Lee easily toughened it up. Kara even more bizarrely talked about how confident he looked when Lee didn't even look confident as she complimented him. Simon got it right when he said Lee could do better but it was fine. If Lee can get some swagger and really perform, he could shine.

ALEX LAMBERT -- Sang "Trouble" by Ray LaMontagne, which only hit #25 in the UK and never charted on the Hot 100 here but is quickly becoming an *Idol* favorite. They said last night that Katie Stevens has a radio voice, but surely it's James Morrison-soundalike Alex who has it. And he can hold a melody! He's still learning what to do with his voice and a lot more experience would help. When he sang the chorus, it sounded like, "...saved byyy ya woman." And if he's really in it to win it, he'll lose the mullet when he hits the Top 12.

TIM URBAN -- Sang the "Jeff Buckley" version of "Hallelujah." What? The guy who looked clueless two weeks ago tackling a standard performed by so many great contemporary artists, like Buckley and Rufus Wainwright and in a stunning version, kd lang at the Olympics opening ceremony. (Click [here to check out her performance](#) at the NBC Olympics video website.) A disastrous idea. But he actually sort of pulled it off. Tim wisely avoided the acrobatics of Buckley et al, which are beyond him. And he sounded very tentative and a little lost when singing just the words "Hallelujah, hallelujah." But he was strong on the verses and acquitted himself nicely. Certainly the producers pulled out all the stops, giving him a big rotating camera motion and dreamy closeups so the closest contestant to Shaun Cassidy got his *Tiger Beat* due. Randy was right on target when he said it was pretty good. But Ellen and Kara and Simon

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raved as if it were the second coming. I have no idea what Simon means when he says it's a "reacting song." Anyone? When they pushed Tim to thank one of them in particular, I was almost willing him to say, "Most of all, I should thank Leonard Cohen, who wrote the song." Oh well. At least he still looked amusingly stunned to get any compliments.

ANDREW GARCIA -- Sang Christina Aguilera's "Genie In A Bottle," her breakout #1 single. That follows his tackling of songs by Alicia Keys, Paula Abdul, and Adele. Instead of ignoring the bad advice to ape his success with "Straight Up," he continues to chase it, again with a **Raul Midon-like** acoustic guitar. (By the way, is the theme tonight guitars? It's starting to feel like the show was taped at a coffee house.) It was fine but generally unmemorable, which is almost worse than flopping outright.

CASEY JAMES -- Sang Keith Urban's Grammy-winning "You'll Think Of Me," one of 10 #1 country hits he's had to date. (That's one reason why he's **#28 on Billboard's list of Top Money-makers** last year.) It's still guitar night, apparently, with Casey sitting down and delivering the strong simply and directly. This could get monotonous week after week but as the average age of *Idol* viewers creeps up (the median age of viewers is now in the 30s), artists like Casey and Crystal Bowersox are right in their sweet zone. I thought it was a very good performance but the judges found it safe.

AARON KELLY -- Sang Lonestar's "I'm Already There," another #1 hit on the country charts. No guitar! It almost seemed radical after five straight acoustic performances. Aaron started off horribly, mumbling and swallowing the words til they were almost indecipherable. He got better, but the main problem was that he tried to turn a good country song into a big power ballad. Not that the song doesn't get grand, but it's a little more restrained than he wanted. He also bounced around in an awkward way, with his hands moving in a bit of a mechanical way. It wasn't awful, but the off and on vocals combined with the awkward posing wasn't great. However, he saved it with a big *Idol* note, the sort fans just love. And of course he's got the Justin Bieber audience all to himself (with Tim and Alex poaching off the more forward-thinking fans). Kara complained the song was crazy for him (a dad singing to his kids?) while Simon said her comment was rubbish and it was just a nice song and he did a fine job.

TODRICK HALL -- Sang Queen's #13 hit pop standard "Somebody To Love." First of all, Todrick looked absurd, with a military sort of jacket, goofy boots and sleeveless gloves. Good Lord. Especially when he was going for a gospel feel (a la **George Michael**), this was not a good outfit. Didn't anyone warn him off it? It's a shame because he looked foolish but gave one of his best performances yet. He built the song well, singing the first verse pretty straightforwardly before taking it to church and starting with some great runs. That's how you sing effectively in that faux gospel style. If you riff and run at the beginning, people don't have the melody to hold onto and know what you're actually riffing on. He wasn't great: the chorus was basically dull; it was the verses where he really grooved. On the other hand, he had a big *Idol* note to wow the audience and hopefully stay alive. But that outfit may have killed him.

MICHAEL LYNCH -- Sang "This Woman's Work," a #2 Adult Contemporary hit from Maxwell's album *Now*, **one of the best of the decade**. I love Maxwell, but thought this was a bad choice. "This Woman's Work" is a mood piece and doesn't have a strong hook that people unfamiliar with it can latch onto. But Michael did a good performance that I think broadened his appeal beyond just entertainer. Now he seems like he could be an artist. Nonetheless, I didn't expect Kara to burst into tears. NOTE: "This Woman's Work" is by **the great, wonderfully eccentric Kate Bush**. Maxwell covered her tune on his album and *Idol*'s reference to him hypnotized me into forgetting to mention Bush. Perhaps they thought Bush was too British and too little-known in the US to mention? Fans of Joni Mitchell and Peter Gabriel would be wise to check out **her classic Hounds Of Love**. Thanks to the readers who corrected me.)

So performance-wise, no one was really bad, though Aaron came close to derailing. Todrick definitely had the only goofy outfit, which sadly could make fans of his reluctant to vote. I think the voting will be very very close. Whoever goes, it'll seem pretty random to me. However, I think Andrew Garcia went the distaff route once too often and didn't do enough with the song he covered. But who will join him? I think Aaron gave the weakest performance but Todrick looked ridiculous and might go. (Am I making too much of it?) Throw in Alex and you've got your bottom four.


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MindyM 04:05 AM on 3/12/2010

32 Fans

Todrick's biggest mistake wasn't his outfit. It was trying to sing my absolute all time favorite Freddie Mercury song. When will these Idol contestants learn to leave Freddie and Queen alone? You are never, ever going to sing any of his songs better than he did. You will only come across as a bad, and I mean bad, imitation. He took on one of the greats and fell flat on his face. Simple as that. That's why he is gone.

I really like Lee, Alex and Michael. I think Andrew has a voice there, but his song choices are just killing him. He really doesn't have a clue who he is as an artist and what kind of song he should sing. I agree with the reviewer about Lee's nerves. Confident? Uh, no. I wish he was, because he has a distinctive, husky voice that is quite appealing.

I was most upset about Alex not getting into the finals. He had this raspy quality that was so interesting. But he was tense, stiff as a board and almost too frightened to move. What a shame that he's lost out to the likes of Tim and Aaron. Again I agree with the reviewer that Tim was surprisingly good until he got to the chorus, where he totally lost it. But he is not in the same league as Alex.

Michael really stood out this week. That song was difficult to sing and he pulled it off in fine style.

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Binea 11:08 AM on 3/12/2010

8 Fans

I totally agree.and as far as Alex goes..as I said on another blog,I hope someone like Neil Young,Dylan,or Petty was watching and decides to do the world a favor and take that boy on tour with them..we just can't lose a voice like that,and maybe,just maybe they will rub off on him,maybe help him become a songwriter ,as well as give him experience and maybe a bit more confidence.

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HUFFPOST SUPER USER

MaryscottOConnor 01:28 AM on 3/12/2010
 462 Fans



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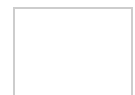
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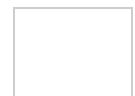
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Wow. Way to totally get it wrong, voters. Unbelievable.

What a total mess. Lambert gone before the Top 12? Ridiculous. They should have a Judges save for situations like this.

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Charity 07:53 PM on 3/11/2010

43 Fans

The problem with this season is they kept Kara DioGuardi as a regular judge. It's not so much the addition of Ellen that is bothersome - it's Kara. I couldn't stand her last season, and I dislike her even more this season. She is entirely unlikeable. I respect Simon's opinions a whole heck of a lot more than I do Kara's because he does seem to know what he is talking about - and presents his opinions rather matter-of-factly. Kara, on the other hand, always seems to approach every contestant as a competitor (particularly egregious last season with Bikini Girl). Surely within that big wide recording industry there was someone else they could have tapped as a judge for this show who didn't feel she was COMPETING with all of the contestants? Bad. Just bad, bad, bad.

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JohnKevari 04:42 PM on 3/11/2010

2 Fans

No one stood out last night..... Essentially they did as well as the girls.

Yes, too many guitars.

Is it just me or has Kara become the Chris Matthews of "AI?"

As you might remember Mr. Matthews once gushed over the President..... Since then he has bent over backwards trying to make amends for that being being critical of President Obama just in case some might mistake him as a progressive.

Kara has fallen int that trap as well.

In the beginning she gushed all over Casey James and now week after week she feels the need to criticize him in order to convince everyone she is not another Paula.

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HUFFPOST SUPER USER

MaryscottOConnor 04:31 PM on 3/11/2010

462 Fans



Moving on...

Lee Dewyze -- wobbly song choice last night aside, among the men, he's Alex Lambert's strongest competition... Alex Lambert, if he can just settle those nerves, is the one to beat among the males. That kid has amazing talent. Just amazing. And he has looks, too. You're right about the mullet (was anyone else relieved that Ellen DIDN'T remark on the mullet? Now, if she can dump the banana metaphor, I'll be a happy woman).

Funny about the name Lambert, huh...

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HUFFPOST SUPER USER

MaryscottOConnor 04:31 PM on 3/11/2010

462 Fans



Okay, it is time for Aaron to GO. My lord, that kid is so out of his league. That was excruciating. From beginning to end, I just ached.

Casey phoned that one in; it's going to kill me if this guy skates by weeks after week on surfer looks -- he has SOME chops, but come ON, DO something with it.

Frankly, Andrew has blown it for the last time, I think. That was just pitiful. Enough, already. Here we have someone with obvious talent but absolutely NO idea what to DO with it. I mean, if he is SO vulnerable to the judges constant bemoaning that nothing is as good as that Abdul cover that he keeps reaching to approximate it, that he cannot look into the thousands and thousands of available songs and find SOMETHING to blow us away... then it is time to say goodbye, man.

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Lynche has personality and talent... not sure about range. Just not sure. We'll see. Good song choice though (and that commenter above is correct -- it's a KATE BUSH song).

Todrick -- CLOSER to decent song choice, to be sure. And yeah, those clothes, my god. Ugh. I like this kid, I just wish he'd settle down, he's making me nervous.

Tim Urban might skate by this week, but he just doesn't have it; he might be good looking, but let's face it, his "instrument" (ugh) is NOT strong enough for this competition.

Continued...

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Burnsey 03:07 PM on 3/11/2010

14 Fans

Tim Urban wasn't the only one to get the tricky camera shots. They were popping up left and right when Casey snag. I noticed it because of the focus on the guitar and his face at the same time.

Michael Lynch did NOT sing a Maxwell song, he sang a KATE BUSH song, that Maxwell covered. This Woman's Work, off of the Sensual Interlude Album of 1989 was written, produced and sung by Kate Bush and only her voice has ever been able to convincingly hit those opening and closing notes.

As for Cohen songs to be covered, I think that maybe something like Democracy or Closing Time would be great. But I do think Urban did a good job, but not as good as Kurt Nielsen (The World Idol Champion-he beat Kelly Clarkson after season one in the one and only World Idol Contest and he sang it for the Shrek movie soundtrack) and that lovely young girl, Maddy Curtis with the Downs Syndrome siblings, from Boston sang it during auditions and was pretty good.

I am sorry but Todrick Hall murdered Somebody to Love. Plain and simple he killed it (not in the good way) and I mourned the massacre of a wonderful Freddie Mercury tune (I think his outfit was supposed to be Freddie Like).

Crystal is the one to beat for now, but the front runner has NEVER won American IDol, someone always steps up with about six contestants left, to win it.

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Burnsey 03:17 PM on 3/11/2010

14 Fans

I was typing too fast, Kate Bush's album is Sensual WORLD, not interlude, I didn't edit down the post well enough, sorry.

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filmex 04:31 PM on 3/11/2010

43 Fans

BTW, maybe the outfit was supposed to be evocative of Freddie, but I was left thinking low-rent Michael Jackson more than anything.

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER

Michael Giltz 01:12 AM on 3/12/2010

59 Fans



Arggh, I forgot to credit Kate Bush as the originator of "This Woman's Work." (And me, Mr. "Credit The Original Artist" guy. I'm ashamed.) I don't love A Sensual World but Hounds Of Love is one of the best albums of the 80s and she has a very good body of work. ("The Man With The Child In His Eyes" would be great for some of the women like Siobhan or Didi.) You're right: Todrick's outfit was an homage to Freddie Mercury. But Freddie was pretty clueless on fashion too. To try and make up for my blowing the Kate Bush reference, I will mention a front runner who DID win it all: Carrie Underwood. Simon pegged her during auditions as an absolute deadlock and the rest of the season was simply a coronation since she was so much better than everyone else every step of the way. And she's proving the most commercially successful so far. Still, you're right: Crystal is far from a lock with two months to go.

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filmex 04:30 PM on 3/11/2010

43 Fans

I wouldn't say Hall "murdered" "Somebody To Love". It was actually an improvement for him, as he tackled a difficult song and for once, pretty much left the melody alone.

Having said that, Queen songs are SO notoriously difficult to sing as they are so identified with Mercury's voice, and he was such a freak of nature, everyone else invariably pales in comparison.

The only "Idol" contestant to ever really pull it off (IMHO) was Aussie Michael Johns a couple of years ago when he gave a spirited rendition of "Bohemian Rhapsody", and left most grinning in appreciation at the decent effort, and admiration for the bravery in tackling, perhaps, the toughest May-Mercury composition ever.

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Craig Copas 02:32 PM on 3/11/2010

8 Fans

I thought Lynch was terrible, his performance was cheesy! He can't move naturally and everytime he swung his legs out I laughed. The men are terrible. I only enjoyed Lee's performance. Can't we just crown him and Bowersox and start a new season?

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keene 01:15 PM on 3/11/2010
38 Fans



Who else sang Hallelujah on AI? I've watched every show since the first season and can't remember. Also, Elliott Yamin sang Somebody To Love. Thought Elliott's was much better.

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER

Michael Giltz 01:25 PM on 3/11/2010
59 Fans



I stand corrected on "Hallelujah," since I can't seem to find an earlier performance of it listed anywhere. See what I get for relying on memory? As far as I can tell, you're right and Jason Castro was indeed the first to perform it on the show.

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Michael Giltz 01:13 AM on 3/12/2010
59 Fans



Burnsey above says "Hallelujah" was sung during auditions.

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HUFFPOST SUPER USER

magicmary 12:27 PM on 3/11/2010
92 Fans



I never want to hear Hallelujah again, especially by someone too young to know what it's about.

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stratdude 12:17 PM on 3/11/2010

30 Fans

So many guys singing off pitch. Can you imagine entering a piano or guitar playing contest and your instruments are always out of tune?

davesf 11:59 AM on 3/11/2010



463 Fans

I think what Cowell means by "a reacting song" is that the song has a built in, expected, audience reaction - i.e.: it isn't cool to not like it. Same sort of thing as if someone sang "Today's Gonna Be A Good Day" - expected reaction: everybody dance now!

HUFFPOST BLOGGER

Michael Giltz 01:31 PM on 3/11/2010
59 Fans



Hmm, that could be it. Thanks for the suggestion. And are you mocking the Black Eyed Peas? When I hear that song, my instinct isn't to dance, it's to run for the nearest exit. Mazel tov!

HUFFPOST SUPER USER

magicmary 11:54 AM on 3/11/2010
92 Fans



Crystal Bowersox, hands down with Lynche in 2nd place.

HUFFPOST SUPER USER

magicmary 11:53 AM on 3/11/2010
92 Fans



Leonard Cohen is a saint in my religion but if I have to hear Hallelujah one more time I'm going to run out of the house screaming! That song is dead, overplayed and I never want to hear it again with the exception of a recording of Cohen singing it himself in maybe 30 years.

HUFFPOST BLOGGER

Michael Giltz 01:28 PM on 3/11/2010
59 Fans



Thanks for commenting. I can appreciate how tired one can become of people covering a song. On the other hand, Joni Mitchell got a little touchy when someone complained that anyone doing a holiday music album covered her song "River" and it had been done to death. Mitchell rightly said that when a song was so good that everyone wanted to cover it, that used to be considered a good thing. "It's called a standard," she said rather tartly. But I'm with you on this to a degree. When it's been done so well so often lately by world class artists, people should think twice before tackling it, especially when they're not a world class artist themselves. Sing Leonard Cohen's "Night Comes On" or "Tower Of Song" or "Dance Me To The End Of Love" for heaven's sake.

nonbitter 08:56 AM on 3/11/2010

0 Fans

Sure don't understand why when a contestant sings a past song done by another Idol the former Idol gets credit and comparisons. Last night when Tim Urban sang Halleluja there was absolutely no credit given to Jason Castro. As a matter of fact the judges made sure there was no mention. The only thing said was by Randy that Tim had some big shoes to fill.

Very strange that Jason Castro is not given the credit and props he deserves.

HUFFPOST BLOGGER

Michael Giltz 11:54 AM on 3/11/2010
59 Fans



It would have been fine and appropriate to mention Jason Castro's version, which was a similar approach. But when Jeff Buckley, Rufus Wainwright, kd lang, Justin Timberlake, Bono and a gazillion other artists have covered a song (none of whom were mentioned by name), I don't think it's telling that they didn't reference an Idol performance. Jason wasn't the first to do it on the show, of course. And an increasing number of songs have appeared before. No reference was made to earlier performances of "Trouble." When Crystal performed "Give me One Reason," no one felt obliged to mention that Jordin Sparks and Kristen MacNamara had done it before. I could give a dozen other examples. After nine seasons, so many songs have been performed, that not referencing a previous Idol performance is not a slap at anyone. By the way, as you may know, Castro's debut CD on Atlantic comes out April 13.

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filmex 02:04 PM on 3/11/2010

43 Fans

Credit Jason Castro??? Are you freaking kidding me?

Nothing drives me crazier than the absurd accreditation process used on "Idol". It is so ridiculous, and so deceptive, to note a current Idolist is doing the song by the person most recently known to having done it.

Year after year someone tackles the lovely and haunting tune, "Superstar" (A Song For You), and each year Seacrest credits Donny Hathaway, as if he's responsible for the song.

Start with Leon Russell, who wrote the song and whose version has never been equalled. Then try Bette Midler's version which was epic. Then, after Richard Carpenter heard Midler sing it on "The Tonight Show" for Johnny Carson, he picked it up for Karen and The Carpenters had a massive smash with it.

It was at that point that Donny Hathaway got around to covering it, but you would never know that from the misleading info offered by "Idol" over and over again. It would be nice to mention Leon Russell so someone might check out not only the origins of the song, but the most moving version ever.

Jason Castro mentioned? How absurd. That would probably have Leonard Cohen slitting his wrists.

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quivira 05:02 PM on 3/11/2010

23 Fans



Jeff Buckley was mentioned by Ryan Seacrest when introducing the performance.

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