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Michael Giltz

Freelance writer and raconteur
Posted: March 10, 2010 01:16 AM

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Idol Season 9: Top 16 -- The Women

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The women went first this week on *American Idol* and Crystal Bowersox continued to prove herself a front-runner. The show began with Ellen DeGeneres sitting in the lap of Simon Cowell, whispering sweet nothings into his ear as he giggled. (It was a reference to his comments on *The Tonight Show With Jay Leno* in which Cowell said she would probably end up in his lap by the end of the season.) Why waste time? Ellen seemed a little more relaxed and succinct while Kara continues to unveil a new look every night. But on

with the eight performances.

KATIE STEVENS -- Sang Kelly Clarkson's #6 hit "Breakaway," which Randy declared was one of his favorite pop songs of the modern era! (If any Clarkson deserves that praise, surely it's "Since U Been Gone.") As with the very young Haeley Vaughn, Katie just seems way way too young to be performing on this show. Katie was flat and off from the get go in a painful vocal; even Simon felt bad for her and said she took notes well, giving her a 10 for 10 for effort. But what exactly is Kara DioGuardi hearing when she says Katie has "a great radio voice?"

SIOBHAN MAGNUS -- Sang The Animals' first and only #1 hit "The House Of The Rising Sun." Though it's a song about a bordello, she began it a cappella (which Kara declared BRILLIANT, as if no one had ever heard Whitney Houston begin a song that way), making it seem more like a prayer than the rueful, world-weary tune it is. But she gained some steam and had some good passionate moments, though when she really went for a strong note it made me more tense than excited (is it a certain tension in her voice?). Only Simon pointed out how dowdy her outfit was.

LACEY BROWN -- Sang Brandi Carlile's sole Hot 100 charting tune "The Story," which went to #1 in Portugal. (Thanks, Wikipedia!) I'm unfamiliar with the song and found Lacey's performance very good, from her green nail polish to her poise and lovely, quirky vocals. She began sitting on the edge of the stage and was smart to stay put. (Too many try to get up and move around.) Let the cameras do the work. She was confident and her voice sounded cool. Her best yet.

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BECK IN TROUBLE?

KATELYN EPPERLY -- Sang Carole King's "I Feel The Earth Move," the two-sided single (with "It's Too Late" on side A) that went to #1 for five weeks and propelled her classic album *Tapestry* to sales of more than 22 million copies around the world. (You don't own it? You should.) Katelyn had a keyboard on stage, but the producers kept her instrument so low in the mix, it looked more like a prop than anything else. She was fine but dull, especially on the moments where King got soulful and she paled in comparison. Katelyn also ran out of breath towards the ends of some lines. Simon's critique was spot-on in its cruelty: she sounded like a performer taking requests. Competent.

DIDI BENAMI -- Sang Fleetwood Mac's #11 hit "Rhiannon (Will You Ever Win)" from their breakthrough album *Fleetwood Mac*. Stevie Nicks is so iconic, you might think the song HAS to be sung while twirling around in gypsy clothing. But Didi strapped on an acoustic guitar and kept the song simple and true. She was very good and one-upped Lacey, who sings in a very similar style. (There was a weird audience applause sound when she finished, probably due to the sound mix not being adjusted properly right away.) To my surprise, Randy and Ellen were slightly reserved, while Kara and Simon gave her the much stronger review she deserved.

PAIGE MILES -- Sang "Smile," whose melody is by Charlie Chaplin, with lyric authorship somewhat disputed. Paige has been confused from day one about what to do, which is especially telling right now when you're not even limited to a genre or songbook of an artist but can do virtually anything you want. Terribly dull, as the judges all agreed.

CRYSTAL BOWERSOX -- Sang the biggest hit of Tracy Chapman's career, the #3 hit "Give Me One Reason." (It stayed there for five weeks, thanks to a logjam at the top between Celine Dion and Mariah Carey.) The very first line was a tad tentative and (purposefully) diverged from the song's melody. I wondered for a moment if Crystal would maybe stumble this week. As if. On playback even the opener sounded fine and the rest of the song was excellent, with Crystal jamming on electric guitar and dirtying up the bluesy number to perfection. More and more, she seems like an heir to Bonnie Raitt and I can't wait to find out if she's a decent songwriter too. Head and shoulders above the rest: they're competing; she's performing. The funniest part of the song was a very glum Katelyn spotted on the balcony, clapping along mechanically and looking miserable. My only question is when will Crystal fix her teeth? My guess is she'll wait till after the finale so she doesn't lose any authenticity points.

LILLY SCOTT -- Sang Patsy Cline's very first #1 hit on the country charts, "I Fall To Pieces." She sported a mandolin, but just like Katelyn's keyboards, it was miked so low the mandolin looked like a prop. Her dress was country store cute but her hand-crafted earrings looked like pot holders or something. She sounded terrible at first but sort of righted the ship in the middle. Still she had a lot of rough moments. Another problem is that she and Lacey and Didi all sing in a quirky jazzy sort of style. Fans of the style will naturally gravitate to just one of them as their favorite. To my surprise, three of the judges gave strong praise with only Simon thinking she might have faltered with her "quirky" choice. (Simon, it's a great standard for a reason; not a strange choice or dangerous one at all. It was her performance of it that could hurt her.)

Obviously, half of them are vulnerable and only two have to go home, with Katie Stevens almost certain to be one of them. She'll be joined by Katelyn Epperly, Paige Mills or Lilly Scott. My guess is it'll be the two K's: Katie and Katelyn, with Paige giving a huge sigh of relief.

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HUFFPOST SUPER USER

MaryscottOConnor

01:30 AM on 3/12/2010

470 Fans



Unbelievable. Katelyn and Lilly? Ridiculous.

Not to mention ALEX LAMBERT?

Never underestimate the stupidity of American Idol voters.

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benjak 05:35 PM on 3/11/2010

1 Fans

MediaCurves.com polled 2,966 American Idol viewers' perceptions of which contestants should be eliminated from the top 8 guys on tonight's results show. The contestants with the lowest percentage of votes, who should be eliminated tonight, were Todrick Hall, with 5.1% of the votes, and Aaron Kelly, with 7.2% of the votes. The study will parallel American Idol voting to determine the weekly winners based on a democratic, "one person, one vote" methodology.

More in depth results can be seen at: <http://www.mediacurves.com/Entertainment/J7756-AmericanIdol-3-11-10/Index.cfm>

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HUFFPOST SUPER USER

MaryscottOConnor

04:48 PM on 3/11/2010

470 Fans



Late to the party this time...

I'm going out on a limb here and predicting that if she keeps making the right song choices (as she did this week), Didi will give Crystal and Alex Lambert a MAJOR run for their money. They could be the top 3. I kid you not. That was an astonishingly good performance. PERFECT song choice.



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Crystal was great, yes -- she's going to have a problem with high expectation factor, though... The teeth? Are you kidding me, people? First, I agree -- she won't be fixing them for the duration of the show. Second... are people really CRITICISING her for her teeth? Good grief.

Anyway. Like I said last week -- Didi will surprise.

Paige -- good god. That was simply Awful. Just... dear lord, what WAS that? That was a "You're going home, dude" performance.

Katie, by all rights, should be going home with Paige. Period.

Siobhan and Katelyn were, in the banal words of Mr. Jackson, "just okay," but okay enough to be safe, in my world. I really don't think Katelyn deserved the ripping she got. You're right about the keyboard -- lame.

Lilly was better than okay -- not her best, but good. And Lacey is really hitting her stride. I dig her. She's just adorable.

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HUFFPOST SUPER USER

cindyfromfalls 08:28 PM on 3/10/2010

88 Fans



I am dismayed by people who mention Crystal's teeth.....does no one understand that she represents why we need health care reform. Unless you have government insurance (medical assistance) or are wealthy you cannot afford to fix your teeth. The average working stiff has to choose between groceries and dentistry.....

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Charity 10:48 PM on 3/10/2010

43 Fans

Not to get off on a tangent, but health insurance doesn't cover dental. That's always an "add-on." And the few times I decided to pay for the dental add-on, it turned out to be nearly worthless. You have to pay heaps of cash out of pocket to get much of anything done other than routine cleaning and work. What Crystal will need is a lot of cosmetic bonding or most likely a set of veneers. Very VERY costly. I'm just surprised AI hasn't sprung for more than a whitening (her teeth were far more yellow during auditions). But yes, she's just like the rest of us who simply can't afford expensive dental work, but hopefully her luck is changing and she'll have some solid cash after AI to take care of herself and her family.

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HUFFPOST COMMUNITY MODERATOR

aznurse 12:49 AM on 3/11/2010

366 Fans



Well, if it doesn't bother her, it's not gonna bother me.
I'd buy her record (or whatever) today.
What song do you think Crystal should sing next?

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progressivewithaP 08:21 PM on 3/10/2010

62 Fans

Michael I'm disappointed that you haven't heard Brandi Carlisle's song (it's amazing) and you seem to rank the value of each song by whether it was a pop hit or not.

Psst...there's a lot of great "hits" and songs out there that aren't Top 40 ;-)

I totally agree with you about Crystal. I'm completely impressed with her...she is definitely head and shoulders above the rest. I could see her having a great career, but it won't be in Top 40. She doesn't sing poppy ballads; she is much more of a singer-songwriter. She would seem to fit in with more the AAA and Alternative crowd.

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Hey progressivewithaP, my mention of chart history and other info about the songs is just to give some added value info to them, not any comment on their validity as tunes. Just showing off my research ability and pile of books on pop music. Check out my list of the best CDs of 2009 to get a taste for what I like, which includes pop music, world, jazz, country, folk, gospel, rap, and more.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/michael-giltz/the-best-cds-of-2009---i_b_462280.html

And here's my list for the best CDs of the decade.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/michael-giltz/the-best-cds-of-the-2000s_b_472016.html

I definitely agree Crystal is a triple A Americana sort of artist. She won't live on Top 40 any more than Bonnie Raitt (who had only 1 Top 10 hit on the pop charts, "Something To Talk About," which was written by John Hiatt, whose Bring The Family is one of my favorite albums of the 80s and an Americana classic. :)

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DCDan 10:54 AM on 3/11/2010

2 Fans

Just showing off my research ability and pile of books on pop music.

Ah, Michael, hate to point this out but, Bonnie Raitt had the hit with John Hiatt's "Thing Called Love" -- not the tune you referenced. Whoops! :-)

Point taken though. Although I don't really get what all the fuss over Crystal is about (yet?) she most certainly won't be a mainstream pop sensation.

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progressivewithaP 04:05 PM on 3/11/2010

62 Fans

Michael,

I did just check out your list and a lot of my favorite cds are on there :-). You certainly have varied taste and I'm happy to see it wasn't full of Lady Gaga, Beyonce, etc.

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JohnKevari 04:10 PM on 3/10/2010

2 Fans

Am I just totally missing the point of "American Idol?"

Am I even watching the same show as everyone else?

I thought Paige's rendition of "Smile" was great.

I also think the judges should get off this "artist" thing they keep promoting as in "You have to find what kind of artist you are."

Question..... Who was the better artist? Michael Jackson or Bob Dylan?

Probably Dylan..... Now who was the bigger star? Of course, it was MJ..... Not that he had more talent than Dylan it was just that Michael was the one you looked at. Michael was the one with the "Wow" factor.

Also, I miss Paula..... I miss Paula because she was the only performer who was judging these contestants.

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER**Michael Giltz** 04:54 PM on 3/10/2010
59 Fans

Well, that's the fun of the show. Seeing something the judges don't see yet and yelling at the screen that they're clueless. Though it's rare all four agree and are all wrong, I must say. But as long as you and other people keep voting for her, it doesn't matter what the judges say about Paige. And if she's around long enough, she's sure to score with them if she has the talent you believe.

Every season the judges latch onto a catch phrase: this year it's knowing what kind of artist you are. Originally, all the contestants seemed to fit into a pop/r&b mold. Then people who were clearly suited to country or rock or hip-hop broke through and it became more typical for them to appeal to fans of those genres. It doesn't mean you have to fit into a niche; it means you have to know what your strengths are and play to them, no matter what the genre is that week.

While few artists can compare to the influence of Bob Dylan, both he and Michael Jackson are huge, world-beating talents. Both were wildly influential. To date, Michael Jackson has sold more albums, by far. Either one would have been a fantastic contestant. Michael's all-around performer skills and Dylan's wit, ability to play to the camera and good-looks would have served both well. Both have the wow factor.

I miss Paula too and felt dumping her was a huge mistake.

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chitown 08:01 PM on 3/10/2010

18 Fans

"Question..... Who was the better artist? Michael Jackson or Bob Dylan?"

The subject was American Idol. But since you asked, there are many around the world who believe that MJ was far beyond Dylan, and it has nothing to do with "the wow factor". Every major artist has the wow factor, in spades. But these two have almost nothing in common as performers. If you like Dylan more, he's the best. If you don't, he isn't. Millions of fans prefer Taylor Swift to both of them. This kind of comparison is meaningless.

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER**Michael Giltz** 02:25 AM on 3/11/2010
59 Fans

Well, just because some people like one artist and some like another doesn't mean comparisons can't be made. Some people find ranking and lists meaningless; I'll agree, though they're fun and mostly a way to point you in the direction of artists you may not have listened to yet. But just because some kids like Taylor Swift and have never paid attention to Dylan doesn't mean anything. He is in fact one of the towering artists of the 20th century whose combination of music and lyrics revolutionized rock and whose singing opened the doors for so many (and the ears of so many more). He's been a great radio deejay, a great memoirist, the subject of at least two classic documentaries and produced a massive catalog of songs covered by more and more artists every day. Michael Jackson is an iconic artist and a world class performer, but his recorded output is far less substantial and will ultimately be less influential. You can own Thriller and a greatest hits 2 CD set and have most everything you need. Michael has three or four great albums; Dylan had four masterpieces in just 22 months (Another Side, Bringing It All Back Home, Highway 61 and Blonde on Blonde). It's impossible to overestimate the seismic influence of Thriller and that album and his work around it will live forever. But only the Beatles can match Dylan when it comes to overall impact.

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HUFFPOST SUPER USER**langstonhughesfan** 03:45 PM on 3/10/2010
16 Fans

While Crystal is my favorite, I'm starting to think she's just a tad arrogant. Remember she was never really into American Idol and only auditioned to get cash for her kid (not a bad reason). But she kind of thinks she's above it all, and though she's truly the best performer of the season, I wish she were a bit more humble--this is a HUGE break she's being given.

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER

Michael Giltz 04:57 PM on 3/10/2010
59 Fans



I haven't seen anything too obnoxious in the attitude department from Crystal. But it's certainly something she'll have to be careful of. If she starts behaving like she's won, fans will turn on her, talent or no talent. Mostly, I've just seen her trying to avoid pretending to be something she's not, like not bouncing around on stage like the other gals at the end of the show. That ain't her and she'd look silly doing it. But if even a fan begins to suspect she's arrogant, she would do well to throw in some bashful, aw shucks comments and keep her head down. Likability matters as much as singing.

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ensilager 02:34 PM on 3/10/2010

4 Fans

So glad you mentioned the similarity between Lacey and Didi--they both seem to use the same affected tone and I have trouble telling their voices apart--not strong enough voices in my opinion. I agree with anonimost that Didi sounded kinda sickly. Those earrings of Lilly's were LOL ridiculous. They looked like crochet balls or something.

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MiraMcB 03:33 PM on 3/10/2010

164 Fans



I know what you mean, particularly about Lacey. We've been asking ourselves for several weeks why this girl made it into the Top 24. She is lovely looking, appears to have a sweet personality, etc., but is so out of tune throughout 90% of her songs, it was painful. Granted, she has a lovely tone and that "quirky" thang going on that everyone seems so enamored of this season, but I don't get it. I will say, last night was the first time I've almost enjoyed her performance.

I did very much enjoy Didi's performance last night. When this girl finally gets past that whipped donkey backing singer thing and connects, she sounds wonderful. Her voice rings like a bell in a clear mountain morning. I was a little "eek" about the song choice at first, but I loved her rendition and arrangement. High point for me on her.

As for the rest, Paige, poor girl, what can I say? She appears to be clueless how to use her voice or where she is as an artist and I think we're going the way of Lil Rounds on this one. That performance last night - I expected any moment that she would burst into tears and bolt from the stage, it was that dreary. Katelyn - sleep-inducing.

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER

Michael Giltz 04:58 PM on 3/10/2010
59 Fans



Thanks for commenting! Paige herself mentioned emotions might get the best of her! she thought it was because the song was so moving, we thought it was because the performance was so not....

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anonimost 01:22 PM on 3/10/2010

6 Fans

You do make a lot of good points Michael.

Katie and Paige should go.

I was surprised when Kara said she had no idea what kind of artist Siobhan could be. I have warmed to this girl a lot.

I agreed with Randy on Didi. it was just okay for me. It sounded a bit sickly.

Lily Allen reminded me of being at a club and a good but drunk singer gets on stage to perform.

Mesmerizing in its awfulness with moments of being interesting. Too bad, she was an early fav of mine. Now she rubs me the wrong way ever since she pulled a face a week ago when Simon said Crystal had done better than her. I am not sure why Allen got the choice closing spot.

Katelynn was very karaoke. Too bad, she is great to look at.

Crystal is good but has a bit of a standoffish-ness. Lacey was a nice surprise.

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MiraMcB 03:38 PM on 3/10/2010

164 Fans



I find Crystal Bowersox to be very interesting. If the promos are to be believed, she's never even watched Idol, which might be a good thing, coming in fresh with no bad habits or preconceived notions. She DOES have an air of reserve about her. I'm thinking it's just her personality. I also think she knows exactly how good she is and doesn't need to hang on every word the judges utter. The appreciation of the judges and audience are nice for her, but really appear to have absolutely nothing to do with her own sense of who she is and how well a performance went.

I see Sioghan in somewhat the same place, but a tad less self-believing at this point - probably the difference of age and experience. This is also a very interesting person to watch. I agree with Michael. There is tension there; a sort of edge-of-the-seat thing when she sings. Not sure if that is good or bad.

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER

Michael Giltz 05:00 PM on 3/10/2010

59 Fans



Thanks for commenting. Clearly Crystal has to take herself down a peg or two in the intros and responses to Ryan and the judges so her standoffishness is dissipated.

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DCDan 12:10 PM on 3/10/2010

2 Fans

By saying Katie Stevens has a great radio voice, I believe Kara meant Katie has great tone (which she does, imo, especially her lower register) and her voice would record well. She's certainly not a good performer, however; at least not yet. Katie and, as you mentioned, Haeley Vaughn epitomize my same complaint every season on Idol. They need to raise the minimum age for entry into the competition. For the show's purposes, 16- and 17-year-olds are not ready. Great potential sometimes. Just need time to develop their talent. And as some of the judges say over and over, they don't know themselves yet artistically. They don't know who/what they want to be as entertainers. They don't know how to check their nerves for live singing. They don't necessarily understand what they're singing about. How could they at such a young age?

Perhaps Randy was confusing "Breakaway" with "WALK Away" -- to me, KC's ultimate hit song.

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER

Michael Giltz 01:47 PM on 3/10/2010

59 Fans



I know singers can be autotuned to death, but when someone can't carry a tune (as Katie has failed to do for several weeks), I find it strange to refer to them as having a great radio voice. But then, Taylor Swift is the top-selling artist at the moment and she's no better, so what do I know? You're certainly right: Kara was referring to her tone, but I just don't hear it as anything special, on key or off.

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MiraMcB 03:01 PM on 3/10/2010

164 Fans



I agree. It's doubtful they will ever have a very young contestant take the crown as American Idol for the season. I worry that too much exposure and the rough critiquing could easily squelch a promising young person. Looking at poor Katie Stevens, we have an example. We've watched her confidence level come crashing down, week by week.

I think Katie Stevens has a really good voice. The problem I see with this girl is that the producers and judges have completely missed the mark on who this girl is. Because of her age, they've pigeon-holed her in the teenie-weeny bracket and want her to crank out teenie-weeny song choices and performances.

IMHO, everything about this girl screams adult. She has the poise, tastes and voice of a 30-something, not a 17 year old and I don't think that is necessarily a bad thing. She is just much more mature than her counterparts. Unfortunately, AI has been trying to force the round peg into the square box and she has been desperately trying to accommodate them. Finally, last night, I think Simon "got it". Too little, too late. They shouldn't have tried to fix what wasn't really broken, but I have a feeling it's too late now. A shame for her.

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FreeSpeech4All 04:19 PM on 3/10/2010

51 Fans

I disagree the age should be raised. Allison Iraheta was one of the best singers to come out of AI and she was only 16/17 on the show. Plenty of older singers weren't "ready," either. I think sometimes the wrong people make the top slots because of looks or a personal story rather than talent, and I agree with some of the other commenters that many get pigeon-holed into pre-conceived styles. A really good singer can sing the phone book, period.

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER

Michael Giltz 05:03 PM on 3/10/2010

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I agree katie might (might!) have benefited from coming on Idol five years from now (or 10!). I think any age can sing any type of song if they do it well. Maybe she'd be better at the adult songs she favors with more experience. FS4A is right about Alison. And let's not forget Jordin Sparks, who was 17 when she won it all. Her career is very much in the early stages but she has had very consistent success and some GREAT singles like "Battlefield" and "No Air." I honestly believe she is in it for the long haul and will prove one of the notable winners of the show.

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