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Michael Giltz

Freelance writer and raconteur
Posted: February 26, 2010 03:45 AM

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Idol Season 9: Top 24 -- The First Elimination

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RATINGS UPDATE: The Olympics beat an *American Idol* results show, according to [The Hollywood Reporter](#). This is only the second day the Olympics beat *Idol*, which is a testament to the strength of *Idol* and the poor ratings of this year's Olympics. The Olympics -- highlighted by the most popular event, the women's ice skating finale -- scored 22.9 million people on Thursday. *Idol's* results show hit a season low of 17.8 million. Four years ago at Turin, the Winter Olympics were historically low. But eight years ago on US soil in Salt Lake, the Olympics

were drawing 30 million+. Perhaps because no women were medal contenders, this year's finale for ice skating was down 10% even from low-rated Torino.

SHOW COVERAGE: *American Idol* contestants faced their first possible elimination on Thursday night and no wonder so many of them looked freaked: very, very few of them have given performances that stand out. Going home are Janell Wheeler, Ashley Rodriguez, Joe Munoz and Tyler Grady. When each one was paired off with another singer and they knew one of them was going home, three out of four times the person saved looked genuinely stunned.

When Janell said goodbye, young Katie Stevens was probably too shell-shocked to react. But when Ashley Rodriguez was paired with Didi Benami, Ashley looked confident and Didi looked miserably resigned to going home. It's hard to say which one of them was more surprised.

Joe Munoz and Tim Urban were told one of them was going home and, again, Tim looked crushed. When Tim was told to sit, he dropped down so fast it was hilarious. For the next minute the camera kept cutting back to him because his look of disbelief (and almost embarrassment) was priceless.

Finally, Tyler Grady and Alex Lambert were paired off. Alex had a woebegone, hangdog expression. When Ryan announced in fact it was Tyler going home, Alex was anything but speechless: he freaked out

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and then wrapped his arms around Tyler and said something expressing his amazement that was so colorful it had to be bleeped. Thank goodness for five second delays, right Fox?

The group sing-along at the beginning was lip-synced which is disconcerting and wildly out of whack with everything the show stands for. Is it just impossible to get 24 people to rehearse and perform a song decently? If so, don't do one. Allison Iraheta sang her single "Scars" with a good amount of style, proving this young singer could still develop into a real artist.

Kris Allen did a cover of the Beatles classic "Let It Be" (quite a good one) while footage showed him visiting Haiti. (The song is a benefit single available on iTunes.) By the way, his new tune "Live Like We're Dying" just broke into the Top 20 on the Billboard Hot 100 chart, where it sits at #19. So Kris's benefit single isn't just pro forma niceness. If people buy the "Let It Be" cover and ignore his hit, that could stall and never make the Top 10, not to mention weaken the album in the eyes of some. So if you're a fan, buy both.

All the acts saying goodbye performed one last time and reinforced the idea that no mistakes had been made. Sure, some of them deserved to hang around for another few weeks -- there were certainly worse performers -- but none of them seemed destined for the top 4. Tyler was especially stupid in blaming the judges for his early exit. Way to blow any good will you might have, Tyler.

I'd studied the Facebook and Twitter rankings of the contestants to see if that could indicate strong grassroots support...and it was a bust at predicting who would go home. However, John Park's huge online following is one indication of why the worst performer of the week gets another shot.

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catcancook 10:16 AM on 3/01/2010 
140 Fans


I agree about the girl who warbled, "I want to hold your hand". Terrible. Just shows who's voting doesn't it? I really am starting to believe those who accuse the show of being rigged. I also think that as time goes by--Simon will have a heart attack while listening to Ellen sum things up with "your adorable" comments! Love Ellen on Ellen but here she is becoming the joke herself. I only watched the 2 shows of the 24 perform and no pre Hollywood shows but cannot watch anymore because it's really low brow.

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER 
Michael Giltz 06:09 PM on 3/01/2010
59 Fans


There;s absolutely no reason to think the show is rigged. Too many times to count where a really popular contestant didn't make the cut, one that the show was clearly supporting. Last season they clearly wanted Alison v Adam and clearly wanted Adam to win. But ultimately they don't care who wins. It all makes good tv. This early on, the people who stay are just the ones with a strong built in fanbase via family friends, some particular appeal (like faith or ethnicity or region). This early on, a determined small town voting hard can make the difference in keeping you alive.

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CAMBEL 03:54 PM on 3/02/2010 
304 Fans

Simon made the comment to that one singer that they made the right decision when they left him out of the top 24 the first time. What I want to know, is....how is it that somebody who can't sing even got that close?

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SILVANUS 04:07 PM on 3/04/2010 
125 Fans

Everything is HellWood is rigged babe.

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dantcomedy 04:38 AM on 3/01/2010
0 Fans

What kind of drama could the show fabricate if everyone gave his/her best performance this early? Come on, folks, it's TV.


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curiousasheck 09:42 PM on 2/28/2010
114 Fans


You don't compete music. Kids need to grow up and appreciate music and stop seeing it as competition.

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Michael Giltz 03:02 AM on 3/03/2010
59 Fans



Well, there's a long history of talent shows and talent searches. Ella Fitzgerald broke out via the Apollo's Amateur Night, along with countless other great artists. Yes, you name a "winner" but as Idol has proven repeatedly it's not a zero sum game where one person wins and everyone else loses. Despite Simon's insistence that you should be a killer and not root for anyone else, the truth is that many of the people in the Top 12 get a genuine shot at a career. As long as you shine, you don't have to feel jealous or worry about someone else shining as well. So don't think of Idol as a competition so much as a change for a dozen people to take advantage of a huge platform and develop their artistry.

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kirtlandpat 08:30 PM on 2/28/2010

164 Fans



My suggestion for simplifying the process:

1. Make Crystal Bowersox and Casey James the finalists right now.
2. First episode: Let them have one show where they each get to play what they think are their three best songs with either their own bands or solo, whichever they are more comfortable with, in their entirety, Take a vote
3. Second episode: They each play cover versions of three songs selected for them by the judges (preferably the same song for each of them). Take a vote.
4. Third Episode: Review the performances and announce the winner. Done.
5. Winner gets to record a combination of covers and originals.
6. Loser has to record horrible Clive Davis produced drivel.

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BlueKansas 01:48 PM on 2/28/2010

139 Fans

They really need to ix-nay the group numbers. Even if it isn't lip synched, there is no way to select a song that will suit everyone. Last week's opening group number reminded me of watching The Brady Bunch Kids lumber around the stage. Three of the best performers, Crystal Bowersox, Alex Rodriguez and Casey James looked genuinely mortified to be conscripted into that choreographed mess.

For God's sake, they're not auditioning for a Bob Fosse show. Srop subjecting them, and us, to this torture!

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anonimost 09:49 PM on 2/27/2010

6 Fans

Ashley looked P.O.d at the results. I am disappointed to read that John Park has such a huge following - a big voice that has not impressed thus far but certainly not worthy of a huge following. But everything in life is a popularity contest.

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HUFFPOST COMMUNITY MODERATOR

SadieGirl 07:07 PM on 2/27/2010
9 Fans



This is going to be one boring season. There's only 3 girls with good voices and oh gee whiz, who is AT&T going to pick as the winner this year? No point in watching and your votes will not matter.

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SILVANUS 04:22 PM on 2/27/2010



125 Fans

There are some good voices and sweet kids. Original? Probably not. I mean the whole thing is geared for the bean counters and hucksters who are desperately looking to manufacture the next broad appeal Glitiz-Porn Siinger or Retooled Auto-Tuned Country Lass. And for anyone over 30, that becomes less and less interesting every minute.

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dotwall 03:39 PM on 2/27/2010

0 Fans

Michael

Everyone is so critical of these young people who for the first time is performing live in front of audience, judges and critics like yourself. Give them a chance

By the way Jermaine Sellers is a great singer, He sings Gospel music which is mostly improvisation and some serious runs. You heard of Aretha she came from that genre. She is rated best singer of all time.

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marred 06:56 PM on 2/28/2010

25 Fans

What are you talking about? They're on American idol, that's their chance! FFS!!!

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER

Michael Giltz 06:15 PM on 3/01/2010

59 Fans



Dotwall, I agree. Of course I critiqued their performances, but I also point out repeatedly that playing with a band for the first time is a big adjustment, not to mention a huge audience, millions on TV. Even just using an earpiece is a new thing to get used to. I say that all the time as an explanation for why performances are shaky this early on. Nonetheless, you gotta compare one to the other. As for Jermaine, I hope he does better. I love gospel music of all sorts and Aretha is one of the greats. Her live album Amazing Grace is one of my favorites (as is the film, Say Amen Somebody, which introduced me to a host of artists). But good gospel singing is just like good pop singing: indulgent runs and trills divorced from the melody can be awfully self-indulgent and boring to listen to. I don't dislike runs, but way too many young artists start vamping like Mariah Carey before they've even sung the melody once. And riffs and runs are easy to do but very hard to do well.

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HUFFPOST SUPER USER

mrlmsw 04:14 AM on 2/27/2010

21 Fans



I want to know why the AI has vocal coaches and stylists when they repeatedly send these young singers out with "the wrong song choice" and either dowdy or un-hip clothing? I agree that the young singers need to look more hip - that Katielyn looked like a caberet singer, for heaven's sake. I get annoyed with the poor song choices - maybe AI needs better vocal coaches to guide the contestants and help them find their style and image more effectiveiy and sooner.

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Burnsey 10:29 AM on 2/27/2010

14 Fans

vocal coaches coach them on the VOCALS, thus the name. They are NOT allowed to get any input on song choice. David Archuleta's father was banned from rehearsals and some segments of the show for just that reason. Part of the reason they do not allow them to get influence is to see what kind of ideas they have as an artist. They are majorly controlled in most areas of the competition, but not in song or clothing choices, it's all a test.

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER

Michael Giltz 06:18 PM on 3/01/2010
59 Fans



I'm not quite sure about that Burnsey. I do know that family and friends often make song choice selections. David Archuleta's dad was reportedly banned for interfering or making a nuisance beyond what was allowed. There is no objection to family or friends giving input on anything. The artists can talk to them on the phone at the very least. I'm sure the behind the scenes folk do sometimes talk an artist into something they shouldn't do and other times can't talk the artist out of something they think is a bad idea. Burnsey is definitely right that ultimately it does come down to the artist themselves. They aren't puppets and must make the final choice themselves. I'd love to know more about the process of back and forth but they don't want to pull back the curtain and spoil the mystery, I think.

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HUFFPOST SUPER USER

porsche996 06:02 PM on 2/26/2010
381 Fans



Only 4 contestants left.....2 girls...2 guys...the rest is fluff and best watched with the sound down or muted. Worst year of ratings ever...betcha.

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER

Michael Giltz 02:38 AM on 2/27/2010
59 Fans



Ain't that the way it usually is? Four interesting performers -- which include Crystal Bowersox and Casey James, I assume -- will make for a good top 10. The first summer season had much lower ratings of course. And it's had an episode or two that were the lowest in years. It will show the usual soft decline and still be the #1 show in the country. That's almost inevitable since it's already dealt with the Olympics. That means Idol will be #1 for six years in a row which has never happened before in history. (Actually, no show has been #1 for six years either in a row or or not. You'll have to wait till 2012 for a big decline. That's when Idol will start episodes in January just after the brand new X Factor has had its grand finale in the fall of 2011 right before Christmas.

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Charity 03:18 PM on 2/26/2010

43 Fans

I dunno, Michael. In seasons past, I've picked out favorites during the selection process - Clay, for one, who I recall telling a friend that you "can't believe" the voice on that nerdy looking kid with the glasses and big ears; I told her I thought he had a great shot at winning - even though eventually as we all know, he didn't, but still - I was rooting for him among the top 24; ditto that Lambert kid.

This year it's hard to nail a favorite from the selection process, though I think the unlikely oddities are again my favorites - such as Lilly, Crystal and Siobhan. Casey, yeah, for his looks and persona - his voice is nice, too.

However - the real test will be if those I mentioned above can hack the different genres that AI requires. I noticed that Crystal (the sweet faced dred-locks child) seemed truly out of place among the other "Glee-like" robots, dancing and emoting for the camera. Just not her thing. Does she, by chance, write her own songs? And if so, are they any good? She may not make it far on AI, but hopefully, if she is a singer/songwriter and not just "another coffee house singer" as Simon pointed out, she can carve out a place for herself.

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER

Michael Giltz 05:27 PM on 2/26/2010
59 Fans



Crystal does apparently write her own songs though I've no idea if they're any good. I would like to be more enthusiastic about people and right now I'm just glad when they're not out and out bad. You have a point.

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CAMBEL 02:55 PM on 2/26/2010



304 Fans

I have to say, and I'm a little shocked, but I'm not enjoying Ellen as a judge. On the rare occasions when Paula would crawl out from under whatever fog she was in, she at least knew something about music. ellen so far has shockingly enough been wasted air for me, and in fact, as somebody who has always liked her, I find myself getting resentful when she takes up time trying to joke. The kids already have to trim the songs way down. I'm really not sure what is going to happen to the show when Simon Leaves. his comment to the one singer, with the harmonica who was acting somewhat snotty of "There are 10,000 girls just like you doing the exact same thing in coffeehouses all over the country" was just what she needed to hear to up her game and I don't think a judge like Ellen has it in her to give actual constructive criticism.

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER

Michael Giltz 05:25 PM on 2/26/2010

59 Fans



I thought Ellen would be better right off the bat given her track record in live TV. But she's really only had three nights so far. (In Hollywood Week, the judges mostly talk off camera with each other to keep the suspense high.) I always think I could do it but it's much harder than it looks and Ellen does look a bit like the new kid at school, sitting at the end of the lunch table and trying to fit in while the other kids joke around with each other. So just like the kids, I'm hoping/expecting she'll become more pointed and succinct. By nature, however, I think she is more of a Paula type cheerleader than a slap in the face person like Simon. His comment to Crystal was indeed a useful moment for her, though I liked that performance. She does write her own songs though I've no idea if they're any good. And she is an early favorite of mine. But you're right, we need a few more to step up to make an exciting show.

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wakupmagy 11:39 AM on 2/27/2010

8 Fans

If I had the inclination, I'd time the loooong boring commentary by the four (three was the perfect number) judges and add that to the endless commercials and come up with what? ten minutes of actual singing?
I like Ellen, too, but not here. She and Kara add nothing but noise to this process. I was an early fan of AI, but actually flipped channels for the first time. I think the shark has been jumped. Bring back Paula

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filmex 01:33 PM on 2/26/2010

42 Fans

Who knew last night's results show could top the boys' performance night on the badness scale.

Are people confusing Tim Urban with Keith Urban somehow? Would he still be around if his last name was Kowolski ? I doubt it.

The group lip-synch was surreal. Somebody at "Idol" obviously figured they'd sell more iTunes if they went the "Glee" studio route, rather than revealing how bad they could sound live. Either that, or they tried it live and it was such a trainwreck, they figured we have to sweeten this in the studio. Either that, or drop the group performances altogether.

Michael thought Allen's version of "Let It Be" was "quite good"?? Seriously? Ray Charles did a "quite good" cover of the song. So did Joe Cocker. That about covers the "quite good" covers. There's a reason John Lennon asked McCartney during the recording of it if the rest of the band should "giggle" during the solo tune. As Lennon explained, it could have (should have) been done by Wings, and was McCartney's Herculean effort to craft his very own "Bridge Over Troubled Waters". He succeeded all too well.

It's an insipid tune, which was revealed in all its insipidness by the lightweight craftsmanship of Kris Allen. One imagines after that performance that the Haiti Relief Fund was left pondering, "Haven't we endured enough?".

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Charity 03:06 PM on 2/26/2010

43 Fans

Spot on, filmex.

Perhaps young Urban had the "cute" non-threatening factor going for him with the young girls who furiously vote, because surely his performance was far worse than Tyler's.

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER

Michael Giltz 05:31 PM on 2/26/2010

59 Fans



Tim Urban does have cuteness on his side, never a small thing when battling for fans on Idol or the radio. I thought John Park was the worst of all. But the order of who gets dismissed when isn't that important as long as the people you think belong in the Top 4 stay alive. Who cares if Urban is dumped next week or three weeks from now or even makes the Top 10? What matters is that the people you think are really talented go far. As for "Let It Be," it's way down on my list of favorite Paul McCartney songs (as is "Hey Jude"), especially the syrupy string version that Phil Spector imposed on it which even Paul didn't like. But it's still a good tune and all I said was that Kris was quite good. I didn't say it was a masterpiece or brilliant or stunning. A good not great song given a quite good performance. That's all. But as for "Bridge," that's a would-be anthem I think really does work. But again, there are many Paul Simon songs I love more.

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DCDan 08:18 PM on 2/26/2010

2 Fans

Discussing the merits of Let It Be as a composition is inane. It's a classic. But all subjectivity aside, your claim that LIB was Paul's attempt at his own version of Bridge Over Troubled Water is beyond laughable. An extraordinarily great trick pulled off by Paul, apparently, as LIB was recorded in Jan. 1969, months "before" BOTW!

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER

Michael Giltz 02:42 AM on 2/27/2010

59 Fans



Damn, DCDan, well pointed out. I'm a fool for not giving that a moment of thought. I'm sure he could argue he was just using "Bridge" as shorthand for any inspiring pop song with gospely overtones and a big finale, but still.

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Burnsey 11:28 AM on 2/26/2010

14 Fans

It starts out just as crappy every year. I read the same statements every year at the start of the competition, but as they said last night, for some of the contestants it's the very first time they ever sang on a real stage, or in front of more than 20 people in a coffee house. I think it is proceeding just as it always does, and no, it's not the worst season ever, and I doubt it will be. I also thought that it was hilarious when Tim sat down so fast, we thought it was because he wanted to sit before they could change their minds...

And as for Tyler and his parting comments about the judges, I think he was spot on. His criticism that they did not say the things they did until it was too late to fix them was accurate. Just watch the clip of his "backstory" before he got voted off. All you got was people telling him how cool his look was, and praising his singing, very little critical input for him to take in, only then to be told his look was a gimmick and he needed to be more original. They told him he was groovy and hip up until they told him he wasn't. He got no constructive criticism until it was too late. I appreciated the honesty of his statement, and the fact that it didn't appear to be said maliciously, but as a simple statement of fact.

HUFFPOST BLOGGER

Michael Giltz 02:01 PM on 2/26/2010
59 Fans



I agree 100% with your comments about the early live performance shows. People don't appreciate what a completely new experience it is to perform with a live band in front of millions of people. What's amazing is how quickly some of them take to it. Just using the ear piece for a rhythm track or to hear your own vocals is off-putting and strange and hard to get used to.

As for Tyler's comments, I do agree with you and him that from the edited comments we saw he got a bum deal: you're cool, love the Seventies vibe, go home! But as far as public image is concerned, blaming the judges was not a smart move. He could be honest with them off camera. And more to the point, the constructive criticism of the judges is rarely that helpful. They often contradict each other and themselves from week to week, as I sometimes try to point out (like telling Andrew Garcia he should have done something like "Straight Up" -- rework a tune unexpectedly -- when that was exactly what he had just done). You could go crazy just trying to follow their advice. Ultimately, you've got vocal coaches and arrangers and family and friends and advisers backstage who are far more instrumental in what you do than the judges. I'd blame them if I thought there was something to blame. Personally, I thought he was fine and a little surprised he left early.

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CAMBEL 02:52 PM on 2/26/2010

304 Fans



Meh, public image really doesn't matter to these ones. Nobody remembers the people who only made it to the top 24 anyway.

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HUFFPOST COMMUNITY MODERATOR

SadieGirl 07:16 PM on 2/27/2010
9 Fans



The judges are not responsible for Tyler's horrific signing. He is. No amount of constructive criticism would ever help that boy become a good singer.

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