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Michael Giltz

Freelance writer and raconteur
Posted: May 5, 2010 01:10 AM

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Idol Season 9: Top 5 -- Aaron Swings On Home

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RESULTS NIGHT -- Tim Urban can have the cover of *Tiger Beat*. Aaron Kelly probably has his sights set on country music after saying goodbye to *American Idol*. In Sinatra week, Aaron sang "Fly Me To The Moon" and audiences sent him on permanent vacation from the show. He was in the bottom two with Michael Lynche and received the lowest amount of votes. Kelly will be on the *Idol* tour, finish high school (maybe) and then weigh the offers to become the next Bryan White.

The show began with another dreaded group lip sync sing-along with the contestants keeping the mikes laughably high so they'd block their mouths and make

the lip-syncing less obvious. Interestingly, the numbers they soloed on probably would have been better choices all around than the songs they sang on performance night. I did chuckle over Aaron singing the line "When I was 17" from "It Was A Very Good Year" (and the album, *September Of My Years*, one of Sinatra's great autumnal albums. It sounds melodramatic at first, especially if you're young. But as the years pass, it becomes deeply moving. As a total Sinatra geek, I play it every year when September rolls around. No wonder I'm single....)

Lee was asked what it was like to get complimented by the judges and rambled on for about ten minutes. Dude, you need to rehearse your comments just like you rehearse your performance. Trust us, you don't want to wing it.

Then Lady Gaga did her thing: a wonderfully evocative, theatrical live performance of "Alejandro" (complete with bare-chested male dancers, fog, and a crazily eccentric costume) with the song almost an afterthought. Sometimes, she seems like Madonna without the catchy tunes. Harry Connick Jr. did a

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draggy "And I Love Her," from his latest album, a wan attempt to capture the lightning in a bottle that Barry Manilow caught with his collection of pop classics. I appreciated Connick's attempt to take a light breezy song, slow it down and give it some intensity. But for the most part it didn't work.

Then the kids did a medley of Connick Jr. songs, starting of course with his best original, by far, "We Are In Love." More lip syncing and then we found out Connick is doing a stand on Broadway in July.

Michael Lynche and Aaron Kelly were in the bottom two and Aaron was sent home, head held high. Nashville awaits Aaron; just give it a few weeks to dry out!

By the way, apparently there are people in this world who do NOT own Frank Sinatra's entire catalog. If you're intrigued and want to know where to begin:

For ring-a-ding classics, jump on any of these upbeat gems: *Songs For Swingin' Lovers*, *Come Fly With Me*, *Come Dance With Me* or *Sinatra At The Sands* (and for heaven's sake, skip the monologues).

For quieter, darker masterpieces, dive into *In The Wee Small Hours* (my favorite, at the moment), *Only The Lonely* and the new reissue of his bossa nova gems *The Complete Sinatra-Jobim* (written up nicely by fellow HuffPoster Tony Sachs).

This very selective list is what is known as scratching the surface. Then you've got the Christmas music, the pillowy perfection of the Columbia years, virtually everything from Capitol and on and on and on.

PERFORMANCE REVIEW -- *Idol* celebrated Frank Sinatra by swinging the standards. Harry Connick Jr. was the mentor and rivals Adam Lambert as the best of the season. He sat in with the band, did the arrangements, and put the singers at their ease while offering good advice. Heck, if he was more on top of pop music as opposed to just jazz, he could be another great choice to replace Simon. (Ellen was also very funny this week without letting it get in the way or feel like filler; she's come into her own the last two weeks and while not a stellar analyst is a welcome, cheerleading presence.)

I wish they'd done standards week around the Top 10 or 9 because it's such a crap shoot of a night and singing with strings and/or a big band is very very hard. At this stage, the singers should get to dig into the genres they can nail.

The short video explaining Sinatra to the audience was godawful, by the way. Most of the clips showed Sinatra in his much later years and it was a mishmash of random images and goofy asides; none of it gave a sense of the impact he had on popular music. Sinatra just invented the teen idol, the album, the concept album, the great American songbook, singers as actors, second acts, third acts, and he rivals Louis Armstrong, Billie Holiday and Bing Crosby in his influence on how singers sing. But I digress.

AARON KELLY -- Sang "Fly Me To The Moon." Tony Bennett often does an acappella version in his act but it's still Sinatra and Basie's swinging spin on this song that is definitive. Aaron stepped away from his country comfort zone but wasn't able to locate any swing in his voice. He also seemed to do everything BUT follow the melody when you need to let people know what it is you're singing before they can appreciate any deviations. Plus, his voice never relaxed in the moment. The judges were overly polite, even the negative comments of Kara and Simon. On the plus side, Aaron has never looked cuter with his swept back hair and vest and tie. Since he's the only contestant anyone under 20 can get really enthused about (the rest are waaay too adult), that might just save him.

CASEY JAMES -- Sang "Blue Skies," which of course Sinatra covered but still seems like Ella Fitzgerald's song to me, especially the version where she starts off slow and wistful, then swings the hell out of it. No one can do effervescence like Ella. Harry came over and joked "don't screw it up" with Casey right before he performed, which was fun. But his bluesy spin was awkward. Casey looked like he was afraid to move and had TONS of vibrato, which Kara also pointed out. Very stiff. Like Aaron, it was very forgettable and that's almost worse than being bad.

CRYSTAL BOWERSOX -- Sang "Summer Wind," a Sinatra tune I have never really enjoyed, though I was amused by the duet he did with Julio Iglesias since it made them sound like they were singing this love song to each other. She wore a big dress but the casual hair made it seem not too stuffy. I yearned to love it but it was just pretty good. She had some interesting phrasing at the beginning, built to a big climax and then had a nice quiet end. Not her sweet spot but far better than the first two.

MICHAEL LINCHE -- Sang "The Way You Look Tonight," while looking like he was in a costume for a road show of *Guys & Dolls*. Like the others, he sounded lost on the slow parts, which is where you can really see how tricky it is to sing with an orchestra. He had a good finale with a big *Idol*-pleasing last note, but it all felt a bit anonymous. The judges, perhaps looking to pretend the ultimate winner is not inevitable, praised him.

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LEE DEWYZE -- Sang "That's Life," a song that absolutely demands swagger. It seemed a disastrous choice to me and not the right song for Lee at all. Why highlight your weakness? And I had to laugh when he sang "riding high in April, shot down in May." As with everyone, Connick gave him good pointers, but Lee's idea of swagger seemed to mainly include gesturing with his hands a lot. At the end, the song seemed to stop, and then start up again and crawl to the finale. Still, it wasn't bad and after the judges praised him I listened again without the visuals and it seemed stronger to me. At this stage, he seems likely to be joining Crystal in the finale.

So, in a week I found underwhelming, who will be the bottom three? I'd say Aaron, Casey and Michael with Aaron and Casey in the bottom two and Casey going home. What did you think of the singers and their song choices? And I have a final question for Harry Connick Jr. My favorite albums of his are the piano-based, casually wonderful collections of standards recorded when he was **20, 25 and 30**, all of which were named after those ages. So where the heck is **35 and 40**?

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Holly Robinson: Saying Goodbye to Siobhan Was an Idol Shocker

My mind is still reeling from Wednesday night's *Idol* show, and it wasn't just from seeing Shakira quote Roosevelt after her barefoot gypsy dance and duet with country singer Rascal Flatts.




Michael Giltz: Idol Season 9: Top 6 -- Siobhan Sent Packing!

Crystal kept talking back when she should have taken her weak reviews humbly. The problem was that her singing wasn't very good.

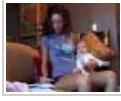
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JohnKevari 09:00 PM on 5/06/2010

2 Fans

Mike, gonna have to disagree with you on the group sing-alongs. I think they're great.

Was last night sing-along recorded? I couldn't tell.

I thought Casey would go home last night because I thought the Judges had more influence on the voting. Obviously I was wrong.

Right now I'll go out on a limb and predict that Lee and Casey will be the final 2. Now if Casey gives at least one more great performance he will definitely be in the top 2 and with another great performance after that he could go all the way.

Still think Crystal is headed for a breakdown on national TV..... If Simon gives her a bad review she's liable to snap.

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MaryscottOConnor 03:47 PM on 5/06/2010
462 Fans



Aaaaaand.... FINALLY they send Aaron packing. Finally. Thank the stars.

So. Big Mike goes next, followed by Casey and it's Lee and Crystal in the finale.

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HUFFPOST SUPER USER

JMK62 12:34 PM on 5/06/2010
38 Fans



I liked Harry Connick's version of "And I Love Her". It had a Mel Torme-ish feel to it that was smooth and appropriately understated. To me it stood out on a show that requires several screaming/belting elements in each performance to get a '10 from the Russian judge'.

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Michael Giltz 07:22 PM on 5/11/2010
59 Fans



I'd love to see harry on Broadway (assuming he doesn't lean too heavy on the latest album) so glad to see his fans are sticking up for him. He's definitely a talent.

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NHBill 12:14 PM on 5/06/2010

198 Fans

HC jr made a very good case for replacing Simon!

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CAMBEL 10:40 AM on 5/06/2010

311 Fans



The judges ALWAYS attack song selection. here is an idea. Each week the contestants pick a song and the judges pick a song for them. Stop wasting time with all the pre song interviews etc... That way we can stop the lazy judges week after week saying "Bad song selection" rather than having to give actual criticism.

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Don Parker 06:24 AM on 5/06/2010

52 Fans



I groaned when I heard it was going to be Sinatra night. Let the singers pick anything they want. Don't make them sing oldies and try to make them relevant. I know it's sacrilegious to say this (sorry, Michael), but while Sinatra was good and had his definitive style, he's overrated. Even within the Rat Pack, I liked Dean Martin better. The best singer of all back then was Nat King Cole. Frank was a great dramatic actor, however.

But then I heard it would be Harry Connick and I was ready to watch again. He was the best mentor yet. And it would have been more of a disaster if he hadn't arranged the songs and played with them and his band. Lady Gaga was sensational, especially the staging and choreography.

Lee was by far the best. He's a great singer with a terrific voice, but he's been inconsistent. Now he's hitting his stride while Crystal has slowed down.

Michael was next best, Crystal third. Casey was probably the worst but Aaron was not much better. I predicted it would be Aaron going home, but Michael is right that with more experience he definitely has a career ahead of him.

I still doubt that Crystal will win, simply because of the teeny boppers and the Christian vote, although I don't know who they will vote for. Maybe Casey still has a chance if he'll get back to singing like he did with "Jealous Guy."

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HUFFPOST SUPER USER

MaryscottOConnor 03:50 PM on 5/06/2010

462 Fans



Who is CHOOSING these evenings??? Seriously, "make it current, but here, do it with these incredibly old, awkward freakin' songs."

Good god.

Also, Crystal is screwing herself. Okay, we GET it, you have RANGE. Now, get back to what it is you DO. There is no TIME for indulgence, lady.

Sigh. Did she not hear what Simon was saying to her? If there is anything that annoys me, it is a contestant arguing with Simon. Do they not know that he knows a hundredfold what they know about this business? Good god. And especially when it comes to this CONTEST, for heaven's sake... he wants you to WIN, girl.

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER

Don Parker 06:26 PM on 5/06/2010

52 Fans



Next week the theme is Musicals from the 1890s. And hey, maybe Adam can come back for a second time as mentor. It was the Gay Nineties, after all.

And yes, whether they want to hear it or not, when Simon speaks they ought to

write it down and study their notes every day. No arguments or explanations. Beg him to tell you more. Glean everything you can from him. I feel like I've learned a lot from him. I try to predict what he'll say about each performance, whether he liked it or not, and what specifics he'll point to. An earlier commenter said the producers tell the judges who to push and what to say. HA. I'd like to meet the person on earth who could tell Simon what to say.

The other judges have always been stage props. Kara knows the business, writes some good songs, and sometimes says worthwhile things, but she's wrong or just out of touch most of the time Randy is essentially worthless....Yo.. listen up ... dawg... pitchy pitchy...in it to win it. He's a caricature of himself. I love Ellen, but we all know she's no music critic. I loved it when Harry C. said there is no such thing as pitchy.

Now I need to be excused; I've got to get back to reading My Left Wing.

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Halsey 08:33 PM on 5/05/2010

257 Fans



I was embarrassed for all but Crystal...I thought she did an okay job..it's a lovely song...but she could have BELTED New York tho!...oh well... the rest....even connick's fav..the last guy..just embarrassing..high point..was Ellen commenting on Harry's Organ...perfect timing..tah dum!

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER

Michael Giltz 12:33 AM on 5/06/2010

59 Fans



Yep, Ellen and Harry were ready to go on the road together as a comedy duo.

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HUFFPOST SUPER USER

greymom 08:28 PM on 5/05/2010

224 Fans



I am trying to imagine what Siobhan would have sung last night. It would have been great to have had an opportunity to hear her with the big band sound. What do you think she would have chosen?

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Michael Giltz 12:33 AM on 5/06/2010

59 Fans



Knowing Siobhan, something out of leftfield or thoroughly unexpected because it would be so conventional. Maybe "My Way?" That captures her perfectly.

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Tagrid 04:42 AM on 5/06/2010

21 Fans

Siobhan actually said in a post-Idol interview that she would've sung "My Way" because it was her grandfather's favorite song.

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sportsgamer 08:02 PM on 5/05/2010

23 Fans

Having woos kids like these do the timeless Sinatra songbook is like having pop culture bacteria trying to sing like God.

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HUFFPOST SUPER USER

Deborah Beck 07:24 PM on 5/05/2010
241 Fans



When you hear the "lounge lizards" (that is my term of endearment for the old rat pack) doing the "standards" the songs are enjoyable and seem easy! It's that "ease" of phrasing, attitude and vocals that leads to a belief that the songs are simple. They are complex tunes and the lyrics are all about phrasing. I don't think these contestants got that "standards" are very unforgiving of errors, if you don't know what you're doing just stay away!

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER

Michael Giltz 12:34 AM on 5/06/2010
59 Fans



True, but they had no choice. Standards night is always a toughie which is why I wish it had come much earlier, when the stakes aren't as high.

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CAMBEL 05:47 PM on 5/05/2010

311 Fans



The thing that surprised me was that Connick was by far the best mentor, in the way he actually got in there and schooled them rather than say Miley Cyrus going "uhhhh, you should smile more". But it just goes to show in many ways how raw these idols still are.

The one thing I didn't like, I thought they over praised Mike and Lee, and under praised Crystal. Not that I loved Crystal, but their main criticism seemed to be that she didn't hit some big Sioban moment at the end. I'm getting the idea that if Fantasia sang "Summertime" this season they would have blasted her for singing a slow song.

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Michael Giltz 12:35 AM on 5/06/2010
59 Fans



Ha! That's a reminder that Siobhan killed with a standard but none of these guys did. Perhaps one more example that most people are right for finding this season underwhelming, though I still think Crystal might be special.

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JohnKevari 05:35 PM on 5/05/2010

2 Fans

I agree. Casey might be going home tonight..... Casey and Mike will be in the bootom 2 with Crystal joining them to make the bottom 3.

The big story tonight will be how does Crystal react to being in the bottom 3 if that happens.

Let's be honest.... She's a meltdown ready to happen.

I personally hope Mike goes home..... Somethng very annoying about a fat guy who doesn't seem to know he's fat..... And he is fat..... That hat he had on made him look buffoonish.

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Michael Giltz 12:36 AM on 5/06/2010
59 Fans



I think Crystal would have loved to be in the bottom three in a way to humble her and get fans rallied and not taking it for granted.

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SouthJerseySteve 05:07 PM on 5/05/2010

43 Fans

Those kids were probably saying "Frank who?" Anyway, I'm like Simon -- I'm outta here. The show is boring (so is DWTS) and predictable. There is no Adam Lambert "glamor".

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HUFFPOST SUPER USER

Lucky123 04:51 PM on 5/05/2010

749 Fans



My wife and daughter are regular "Idol" watchers. I never watched it until last night, and only because I am a huge Sinatra fan. Right off the bat, let me say I thought Crystal was far and away the best. "Summer Wind" is a beautiful song ~ a wistful story of a romance the singer yearns to relive ~ and she did the song justice. The rest of them, however, made some odd choices, notably, in the songs they decided to sing. I totally disagreed that Michael was good. It sounded like he was swallowing the ends of words, and I didn't believe him once. Other than Crystal, they all looked like they were in a bar singing karaoke.

Now, I thought it would have been very funny for Aaron to goof with the judges and audience with a fake start. Stand center stage, a single spotlight on him, and sing:

"When I was seventeen,
it was a very good year."

Then bust into, "You Make Me Feel So Young".

But, that's just me.

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Michael Giltz 12:37 AM on 5/06/2010

59 Fans



Funnily enough, he sang that very line in the results show and it still made me laugh. Good call.

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kaib57 04:39 PM on 5/05/2010

26 Fans

I think it's ironic that the judges are always telling the contestants that they need to be relevant and marketable, but then they have them sing Sinatra! Whoever made this decision for the show, it was a huge mistake, especially this far into the competition.

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Michael Giltz 12:38 AM on 5/06/2010

59 Fans



True, though of course you can sing a classic and make it seem modern and relevant too. But in general I think it shows not that they shouldn't sing standards but that the only thing the singers should strive for is not being "relevant" but good.

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