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Michael Giltz

Freelance writer and raconteur

Posted: April 7, 2010 12:37 AM



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Idol Season 9: Top 9 -- Casey James Back In The Hunt To Win

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Because David Letterman was sick, Didi Benami appeared on his show Tuesday. Again, they insisted on emphasizing she'd been kicked off the show and running *Idol* down. (Why have the contestants on the show if you hate it?) Didi was polite and sang Kara DioGuardi's "Terrified" to tentative if decent effect.

Then the Top 9 contestants on *American Idol* were given the keys to the greatest catalog in pop history: the tunes of Lennon and McCartney. The results were

so-so, but Katie Stevens received more praise than ever from the judges (enjoy it while it lasts) while Casey James put himself back in the hunt for the finale.

Really, there's no excuse for not shining tonight (unless it was Crystal's cold). No matter what genre you love, the Beatles have a classic tune you can shine on. Country, rock, folk, funk, punk, pop, ballads, rockers, blues, gospel -- they've got it all. It's a shame the night wasn't filled with better performances.

AARON KELLY -- Sang "The Long and Winding Road," one of six Paul songs (John nabbed three). It's also one of three in the Paul vein of weighty anthemic ballads -- and all three get performed tonight. I am nutters about the Beatles but "The Long And Winding Road," "Let It Be" and "Hey Jude" are not songs I would recommend people tackle. All three have been covered many, many times by great artists...but rarely memorably. "Road," for example, is a very meandering tune and quite difficult to sing and I've never heard more than a passable cover. Aaron's youth is catching up with him. Here again he seemed a bit lost, though his raspy voice came through nicely. And a big, fan-pleasing note at the end should save him. Better than last week, but he's lost his groove. Mostly likely, he just needs to grow and mature and perform for five or ten years to get some seasoning and see what he might become.

KATIE STEVENS -- Sang -- yikes -- "Let It Be." Obviously not concerned with comparisons to Kris Allen (or Aretha Franklin's seminal take), she was immediately more focused and confident. Katie always gravitates to mature, older tunes so obviously this works for her and she clearly knows the tune inside

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and out, not to mention understanding the lyrics. It wasn't great but it was good and as good as she can do (at this age). This will be her peak. I understood Simon's comment about it being sort of country: it might have been an arrangement Trisha Yearwood would do.

ANDREW GARCIA -- Sang an anonymous version of "Can't Buy Me Love." (My favorite is a jazzy version by John Pizzarelli, which I do a killer performance of in the shower). He strummed his acoustic guitar so sparingly (and it was miked so low) that it looked like a prop. And his vocals were buried by the band. And his hair keeps getting taller every week. Flopping is not nearly as dangerous as being forgettable and Andrew was forgettable.

MICHAEL LYNCH -- Sang "Eleanor Rigby," not in the style of Ray Charles (my favorite cover) or at least not exactly. It was ok and got better towards the end. Simon nailed it: it was musical theater-like. Randy said that was fine and referenced the TV show *Glee*. Kara insisted it could be played on the radio. (Maybe satellite radio, with hundreds of channels. Most radio today wouldn't even play the original if it were a new single.) A busy arrangement with a flashy vocal but hard to ever get a handle on emotionally.

CRYSTAL BOWERSOX -- Sang "Come Together," the first John song of the night. (Aerosmith has the best cover, though I am intrigued to hear the covers by Diana Ross solo and the Supremes on their own. Trippy!) I think she lost the lyrics for a moment in the middle (that's when she turned away), something none of the judges commented on. (Of course, the lyrics are Lewis Carroll-ian nonsense anyway.) And she has a cold. And the didgeridoo was actually distracting (if fun). But then she hit her groove and started to wail and it was fine. Kara finally mentioned Bonnie Raitt (isn't that the first time on-air they've made this obvious comparison?). Solid but not as good as I expect from her. (By the way, on the original recording, the song starts with a crazily catchy "ssshhhhummmppppp" and to this day I have absolutely no idea how they got that sound. Can any Beatle fanatics enlighten me?)

TIM URBAN -- Sang "All My Loving," a tricky early tune with a chorus that sort of rambles down into a lower register and can be hard to sing effectively. (Out of a weak batch of covers, I'd pick the rather obscure but lovely Sara Mann version done for the great TV show *American Dreams* -- one of the girls could have killed with her slow, acoustic arrangement. Gosh I loved that show.) But Tim used a good spare arrangement (I wish he'd left the band out even more than he did) and mixed it up on the chorus so he could go higher and not get bogged down in that draggy section. Easily his best performance since "Hallelujah" and a clear home run for him. Like Katie, this is as good as it gets for him. Very Jason Mraz. Ellen and Simon agree with me. It's not just good for him, it's better than most of the other performances tonight -- not that he's suddenly a good singer. I find it extremely difficult to believe he didn't consciously wear his hair to echo the Beatles but what possible reason could he have for admitting cluelessness?

CASEY JAMES -- Early on it seemed like Casey and Crystal would be in the finale but after a few weeks of anonymous delivery the final four seemed the end of the road for him. Not any more. His performance of "Jealous Guy" (which The Strokes should do in a speeded-up, punk tempo) was excellent, by far the best of the night and the best by him so far. He had a ton of vibrato at first, but soon settled in and really delivered. As an artist, he seems a pretty lightweight spin on Stevie Ray Vaughan, but he could have what it takes to win the show. By the way, who knew they could do solo stuff?

SIOBHAN MAGNUS -- Sang "Across The Universe." Ellen namechecked a Rufus Wainwright cover as her favorite (I assume she means the one on the soundtrack to *I Am Sam*.) But my favorite is a live version with Rufus and Moby and Sean Lennon for a tribute concert. It's acoustic and lovely and just gorgeous. I'm simply not a fan of Siobhan as a singer (she always sounds like she has a stuffy nose to me) but many people smarter than me (like producer Steve Lillywhite) think she's special. Happily, she didn't wail away tonight, instead delivering a softer, quieter performance. That's all to the good, but it exposed her weaknesses as a singer even more as far as I'm concerned. She's a cool wacky person (though I do think, as others have said, she looks much cooler backstage with her dorky glasses than when she gets into "costume"). Bizarrely, a man kept shouting out during the show and instead of having security quietly take him out during a commercial if he refused to behave, they put him on camera and then invited him onstage.

LEE DEWYZE -- So is the new confident Lee a permanent fixture or will he settle back into timidity and confusion? The answer is...we don't know yet. Lee was certainly confident in his choice of how to present "Hey Jude." (Wilson Pickett does a rousing, soulful take that manages to deflate the song's inherent "bigness" and sidestep all the pomposity.) Lee brought in a bagpipe player for the finale Note to Lee; one bagpipe player is just silly; four or eight bagpipe players would have been cool. More interestingly, he recognized the heart of "Hey Jude" is the sing-along at the end and actually devoted much of his

Fall

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Kendra Wants Another

performance to the "na-na-na-na" section and kept urging the audience to sing along. I've often wondered why the contestants don't try to play to the audience more often like that, but maybe it's because Lee tried it and either they didn't bite or we couldn't hear them. (They certainly applauded at the end.) It was nutty and silly and not terribly good but in a crazy way it was pretty gutsy. Maybe he is more confident. But next week he needs to deliver, not just try.

Oh, the bottom three. So many possibilities. I actually think Tim and Katie will stay out of the bottom three for a change. I think the bottom three will be Aaron Kelly and Andrew Garcia and Siobhan Magnus. Is that possible? Tim's been in the bottom three every week and Katie's been in it the last two. They clearly have a weak fan base. Still, I say it'll be Aaron and Andrew and Siobhan, with Andrew and Aaron in the bottom two and Andrew going home. The judges would use their save for Aaron or Siobhan, but not Andrew. What do you think?

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JohnKevari 04:41 PM on 4/07/2010

2 Fans

First things first;

KATIE STEVENS WILL BE GOING HOME TONIGHT.

It's done, over. Underline it with a red marker, call home the authorities..... She's like John Forsyth! She is history!!!!

Also, after last night I'd say Casey will be the ultimate winner.

Another thing..... Will the Judges stop talking about the "albums" that the contestants will surely record once the show is over.

THIS IS NOT 1970!

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voyage2k 06:19 PM on 4/07/2010

14 Fans

Why did you have to play the Forsythe card? The man is dead and has nothing to do with American Idol. Leave him be! :P

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JohnKevari 07:19 PM on 4/07/2010

2 Fans

I played the Forsyth card because I wanted to pay tribute to a great man.

Besides, it's a cheap laugh.

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Charity 09:20 PM on 4/07/2010

43 Fans

First, is your caps lock stuck? Second, Katie isn't going home tonight. hahahahahaha

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER

Michael Giltz 11:38 PM on 4/07/2010

59 Fans



While you're right that "album" was originally short for record album, I believe it has come to refer to the body of music, and not the format. I own Stevie Wonder's album "Talking Book." I've purchased that album on LP and cassette and several times on CD and could purchase it as an MP3. I could also listen to that album on streaming audio without downloading or owning it at all. Whatever the format, those are different ways of listening to the album he created. EP used to refer to literally an LP with just four or so songs on it -- now it just refers to a briefer work of art, more than a single but less than an album. With so many artists releasing singles and EPs and then another single and then maybe an album, it gets confusing. But I don't think digital downloads mean the end of albums as works of art, whatever the format. It's still a cohesive work of art that's meant to be heard in order from beginning to end -- and heck, the concept album predated LPs anyway, since Frank Sinatra was doing it on 78s. And man, I need to get Cheap Trick's Live at Budokan!

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Charity 03:15 PM on 4/07/2010

43 Fans

Idol manages to destroy the Lennon-McCartney catalog each season. Sony, please, stop allowing this to happen.

That being said, while I thought Crystal did a nice, personal rendition of "Come Together," how soon we forget that Carly Smithson did a stand-out version during her time on Idol. Now *that* was how to tackle that nonsensical song...tats and all.

I think you're underestimating Katie, btw. Last night was a great performance, probably the best and most controlled of the night (her other performances, however, have been less than what we expected to hear from her since the auditions). It proved that when she does what she wants to do with conviction, even for her 17 years, she does it well. I think she's been flummoxed with too much input, and she's been listening to everyone except herself. I don't think she's an "Idol winner," but she does have a good voice when allowed to let it be....so to speak.

As for Casey...oh come on. It was okay, great song choice for him, but nothing vocally special. Just because he managed to get one fairly right for a change doesn't mean he will suddenly win this competition.

Bagpipes for Lee? Why not an entire chorus of kazoo players? What? Too gimmicky?

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER**Michael Giltz** 11:40 PM on 4/07/2010

59 Fans



When I said that was the best katie could do, I did mean at her age. She's only 17, has a good voice and who knows what might develop in years to come. If every song can be as personal and meaningful to her as "Let It Be," and she could deliver, she'd go far some day.

[Permalink](#) | [Share it](#)**anonimost** 03:04 PM on 4/07/2010

6 Fans

My friend lives on Andrew Garcia's block and said they were power dialing last night. Interesting... we'll see if it pans out for him. He and Aaron were the weakest for me.

[Permalink](#) | [Share it](#)**HUFFPOST BLOGGER****Michael Giltz** 11:41 PM on 4/07/2010

59 Fans



I would HOPE friends of the contestants were speed-dialing last night! At this stage, I think family and friends aren't enough. You have to win over the millions of people watching you who don't know any of the contestants. On the other hand, I think being from a smaller state can be a big help, since a small state can get much more excited for a finalist than, say, California or New York, which really wouldn't care.

[Permalink](#) | [Share it](#)**filmex** 03:01 PM on 4/07/2010

43 Fans

Would love to have heard:

Lee -- "She Came In Through The Bathroom Window" or "Help!"

Big Mike -- "Oh, Darling" or "We Can Work It Out"

Aaron -- "I Will" or "Here, There and Everywhere"

Siobhan -- "In My Life" or "Helter Skelter"

Crystal -- "She's Leaving Home" or "Sexy Sadie"

Andrew -- "I've Just Seen A Face" or "You Can't Do That"

Casey -- "I Feel Fine" or "I Don't Want To Spoil The Party"

Katie -- "I'm Happy Just To Dance With You" or "You Never Give Me Your Money"

[Permalink](#) | [Share it](#)**HUFFPOST BLOGGER****Michael Giltz** 11:43 PM on 4/07/2010

59 Fans



Nothing for Tim? You just don't care? Otherwise, some really good ideas. Lee doing "Bathroom Window" would have been awesome and much better than the stolid "Hey Jude." He'd be smart to do it any time down the road, frankly.

[Permalink](#) | [Share it](#)**anonimost** 02:56 PM on 4/07/2010

6 Fans

Casey was fantastic. It is so nice to hear a less familiar song by the Beatles (Lennon). I am so over hearing the same old song on Idol. For me Casey was the stand-out, solidifying in my mind that he deserves to be in the top three: Crystal, Lee and Casey.

Although many criticize this season as lackluster it has been the most individualistic ever. I'm surprised that very individuality could ever be considered lackluster.

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MarshaMarshaMarsha 02:47 PM on 4/07/2010

22 Fans

Casey & Lee. That's it.

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stratdude 02:29 PM on 4/07/2010

30 Fans

Casey had the best performance of the night. Crystal is still my favorite Idol of all time. I'm still waiting for someone to tell Big Obnoxious to keep his hands to himself. I'm still on the Siobhan train, but she's had a couple of rough weeks. The rest can go home right after Big Obnoxious (he won't, but one can hope.)

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AmandaRuth 02:09 PM on 4/07/2010

33 Fans

Casey went up about 1,000,000 points in my book. That was a great song choice, not so well known that he could do just about anything, and beautiful lyrics that can be filled with emotion. Just really an excellent choice, even my husband came in from the other room to comment positively.

I agree Katie would be perfect for Glee. I kept thinking, as the commercials for Glee auditions were being shown over and over, the answer was just under there nose, right there on AI.

Simon needs to broaden what he considers current and modern. As the mother of high-schoolers, I can attest to how popular the glee stuff is. Kids these days have such a range of musical influences to choose from, which is pretty cool. Across the Universe was a big deal to my daughter and her friends, which basically is the same kind of stuff as Glee. There is more to music than the overproduced pop junk that appeals to 13 year olds. Adult Alternative is even considered a genre, thank the lord, because that is music being made for me. :)

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER

Michael Giltz 11:45 PM on 4/07/2010

59 Fans



I practically live at Adult Alternative :) Thanks for commenting and you're certainly right about Glee, High School Musical et al being current with kids.

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CAMBEL 01:43 PM on 4/07/2010

326 Fans



I just hate to say it, but honestly we could just scan forward over Ellen's commentary and not leave anything out. It was pointed out at the beginning of the show last night by somebody I was watching with "Look, Ellen will mirror Randy on each call." That was pretty accurate. Ellen, get out while the gettins good, people love you on the talk show, but here, you're just irrelevant.

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femmyror 01:22 PM on 4/07/2010

33 Fans

Casey was phenomenal. He really raised his game, finally! I knew he had it in him. Fantastic song choice too. LOVED it. He'll be in the finale with Crystal.

I would love it if Katie went home, she bugs something fierce... Ugh. But I think it might be Aaron.

Or Andrew. Out of ALL the songs to choose from, Aaron picks that snoozer. Why? He kind of deserves to go home for that alone... And Andrew: parts of his performance had a slight rockabilly vibe to it, which I liked, but then bandzilla kept happening. He should have pushed it further into that rockabilly direction, it would have worked much better, been much cooler. Like a rocked up Stray Cats kind of thing, am I right? But his musical instincts/taste seem to be somewhat lacking.

The absolute worst vocal of the night, though, was Lee. Listening back to that... woah! That was some uuuugly singing. Out of tune, and the raspiness sounded like shite. But he gets a lot of praise from the judges, and it was sort of entertaining – in a craptastic way – so he won't even see the bottom 3.

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER

Michael Giltz 01:30 PM on 4/07/2010
59 Fans



A rockabilly, Stray Cats vibe would have been cool, indeed. Thanks for commenting.

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filmex 12:36 PM on 4/07/2010

43 Fans

Mr. Giltz is kicked off this column for daring to use the B word (Beatles) when "Idol's" licensing agreement obviously prohibits mentioning that word, as Harrison-Starr songs are not part of the package. :-) But, he's brought back again for rightfully noting the three McCartney songs that should be banned from covers for a decade.

Nothing that was done on this show matched the unexpected creativity that Lilly Scott managed with her rendition of "Fixing A Hole" in the first week. Last night was a snoozfest.

Never thought I'd praise Tim, but his "All My Loving" was the one moment that captured the infectious youthfulness of The Beatles (oops, now kick me off).

Crystal nailed "Come Together", a Lennon tune not often nailed. Casey should have had the performance of the evening but missed substantially, regardless of the judges overpraising.

With his Jeff Beck guitar licks, he should have stuck to one of the loveliest melancholy melodies ever written, a la Bryan Ferry, instead of changing the melody to "make it his own." Make it your own, Casey, just don't dare to call it "Jealous Guy".

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER

Michael Giltz 01:32 PM on 4/07/2010
59 Fans



Did I say "Beatles?" Whoops. My bad. What is the deal with that? No "Here Comes The Sun?" And of course it only blocks out George since I don't believe Ringo had a songwriting credit on Beatles albums -- though if I'm wrong, someone will correct me quickly. Certainly most of his songs were written for him by Lennon/McCartney (c) 2010.

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filmex 02:35 PM on 4/07/2010

43 Fans

I think the agreement with Sony Publishing only allows Lennon-McCartney tunes as opposed to all the lads. Harrison's songs are more popular now than they were when he put them out, so that's a shame. And while Ringo DID write "Don't Pass Me By" and "Octopus' Garden", there's no reason to think they would be song choices when there were so many others to choose from.

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CAMBEL 01:45 PM on 4/07/2010

326 Fans



I would have LOVED it if somebody had taken on George Harrison's "Something" by George Harrison, or even "My Sweet Lord" if they could have gotten the backing choir. Lennon and McCartney have incredible songs, but Harrison had a few good ones, why not open up the entire catalogue?

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER

Michael Giltz 11:48 PM on 4/07/2010
59 Fans



Of course, they also would have had to clear that with the writers of "He's So Fine." :) Heck, "My Sweet Lord" was so catchy I was kind of afraid as a little kid that it would turn me into a Hare Krishna. Seriously!

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cherieamour 12:08 PM on 4/07/2010

80 Fans

I happened to like Big Mike's rendition of 'Eleanor Rigby' simply BECAUSE it had a theatrical feel. To me, it had a rise and a climax and it was enjoyable.

I did not like Bowersox's 'Come Together' because she's settled into her schtick.

Why is it that Bowersox and the others have such an allowance to go 'soulful' but when Big Mike tried to do the same thing, it's questionable?

Beatles Night sucked, imo.

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spiderbucket 11:14 AM on 4/08/2010

52 Fans

EVERY night on AI sucks. But this one was sacrilegious.

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HUFFPOST SUPER USER

Linda Casey 12:06 PM on 4/07/2010
30 Fans



My final four are Crystal, Siobhan, Casey and Lee (not particularly in any order). I like Mike, but think he's a gonner once we get down to the half-way mark unless he picks things up a bit. I agree about Aaron and Andrew in the bottom two but not sure that Tim won't round out the bottom three, even with the praise, which I took as a backhanded compliment, probably forced by the exec. producers after all the Tim bashing that has gone on since the top 12 began. I mean what was with Randy saying "judging Tim on Tim performances?" That isn't how this show works and the fact that they had been picking on him for smiling so much? Heck I'd smile too if I were still on the show and made the tour no matter what they said.

I think a guy goes home tonite. There are only 3 girls left and all three put up good enough performances to keep them at least one more week.

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER

Michael Giltz 01:33 PM on 4/07/2010
59 Fans



You could be right about three girls being safer than the six guys. These gender imbalances tend to straighten themselves out, though I still think Crystal will be alone among gals in the final four.

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HUFFPOST SUPER USER

Linda Casey 03:54 PM on 4/07/2010
30 Fans



I've been watching Idol since season two and was stunned in season three when the final four were ALL girls. But for the most part, the gender imbalance isn't so obvious. I would like to see a guy/girl finale, but not sure how that will shake out now. Guess it all depends on the next two weeks when we get down to the final six. I've been wrong more than right when picking the winner, but usually do well picking the final two.

Two years ago, after the first week's performances (which, btw, were Lennon/McCartney songs), I pegged David Cook to make the finals. He really made everyone take notice that he was in it to win it and for me he never looked back from that first performance.

I think David's version of Eleanor Rigby was by far way better than Mike's performance last night. He played to his strong suit, whereas Mike didn't.

Only time will tell.

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transparent 05:12 PM on 4/07/2010

21 Fans

Absolutely right about the final four. Then it will all depend on who of the four goes home first and where their voters go.

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MiraMcB 09:51 AM on 4/07/2010

164 Fans



Agree on Casey James being the performance of the night. Disagree with your suggestion his previous performances were "anonymous". I think he has delivered good, solid performances consistently throughout. Thought that was a brill song choice and a brill delivery.

Agree on Siobhan. She seemed to peak with "Think". I've been waiting to see other stirring performances each week, but mainly getting "the scream", which I'm happy she dispensed with for last night. No question, she has a good voice. However, as you say, that song choice last night revealed the flaws. Was waiting for it to be over after the first few lines made it obvious it was going nowhere. The "cool wacky stuff" seems a little contrived. Adam Lambert wannabe? Getting worn out on her.

Agree on the rest of them. Was really expecting a much more exciting set of performances, given the available material, but, oh well. Enjoyed seeing the didge guy just because he was very cool. Had nothing to do whatever with Crystal's arrangement in any meaningful way that I could see. Yeah, Distracting. Her song choice and performance were just ok. Same with the bagpipe player, to a lesser extent. Kind of fun, but definitely both were WTH moments? LOL!

Still feeling this is a very lacklustre season.

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Buffy57 08:35 AM on 4/07/2010

1 Fans

Siobhan shoulda done "I am the Walrus"; turned it out ala Lambert. Instead she seems to be melting down, emotionally.

Casey James ruled the night with Lennon's lesser known, "Jealous Guy".

Never thought it'd be a boy this season 'til last night.

Mamasox still rox, and I defend Katie as Glee-worthy.

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Michael Giltz 01:35 PM on 4/07/2010

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Katie is absolutely Glee-worthy and "I Am The Walrus" would have been kind of awesome for Siobhan -- if you're gonna let your freak flag fly, that's the song to do it.

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