

## ● REALLY BIG SHOW

# American Idol 2

## They're baaaack!



Simon Cowell (center, with Randy and Paula) gets his wish in the new edition of "American Idol" — two whole nights of really bad auditions.

By MICHAEL GILTZ

**S**O "A Moment Like This" comes once in a lifetime. But a moment like "American Idol" comes several times a season, especially when it's a smash hit like the original.

Kelly Clarkson's debut single — one of the biggest hits of 2002 — is still on the charts after four months and already "American Idol 2" is ready to show "Star Search" how it's done.

Simon, Paula and Randy are back as the three wise men or the three stooges, depending on your opinion of the judges. Ryan Seacrest hosts solo while Brian Dunkleman is off pursuing other interests, as they say. (Sitting at home feeling bitter, one imagines.) And former contestant Kristin Holt serves as backstage interviewer. (We still say Paula Abdul should have been named host and one-time beau Ryan sent backstage.)

Right off the bat, the best part of season one is expanded when the show offers two extra long nights of hilariously bad auditions. Either contestants didn't read the fine print of their audition contracts

(where they're told they might be humiliated and mocked on national TV) or they just didn't care.

Hopefully the producers weeded out the schmucks just looking for airtime.

But for the fans that bought Kelly's single, attended the somewhat successful concert tour, bought the quickie paperback, and can't wait for the CDs from Kelly and Justin to arrive, the highlight will be Tuesday's half hour update on where the finalists are today. And the producers certainly have a lot of ground to cover if they choose.

Kelly is involved in a lawsuit filed by industry heavyweight Gerry Goffin (co-writer with Carole King) and others saying she was under contract to them. Apparently, Clarkson had been recording demos for them. The show's producers insist she was still eligible for the contest.

Meanwhile, Kelly's debut solo album has been wisely delayed till spring — the original release schedule was so quick it was a guaranteed recipe for schlock. Indeed, Simon Cowell does have a great track record finding and cultivating com-

mercial talent, but the closest he's gotten to critical respect is the Spice Girls. Maybe he's learning.

And if Kelly's album is delayed, everyone else has to wait as well. (No one can release any music until her CD is out.) So Justin is waiting to pounce as well.

Both he and Kelly are tentatively set to star in a quickie feature for 20th Century Fox that will reportedly portray them as music-industry hopefuls falling in love. (Better get that one out by summer, fellas.) And Jim Verraros — the whipping boy for Simon whose parents are deaf — came out in an exclusive interview with "The Advocate."

So it's been a busy few months for the finalists. And while it would have been better for "American Idol 2" to wait until summer — why make those teenage girls choose between it and the wonderful "Gilmore Girls"? — we have to admit it still looks like the most fun in primetime.

Now, Simon, work on those insults.

**AMERICAN IDOL 2**  
 Tuesday, 8 p.m.,  
 and Wednesday, 8:30 p.m.  
 FOX