

TV Tuesday

The beat goes on

Life after 'Idol' sounds sweet

By MICHAEL GLITZ

IS there life after "American Idol"?

You bet — and you don't even have to be one of the show's winners to win big in the music biz. Some of the show's runners-up are faring almost as well in their performing careers as the show's high-profile winners.

Just check out Kimberly Locke, who came in third in season two. She'll be back on Wednesday night's "AI" (8:30 on Fox/Ch. 5) to perform her first single, "8th World Wonder."

Of course, the three best-known "Idol" alumni — winners Kelly Clarkson (season one), Ruben Studdard (season two) and Clay Aiken (season two's first runner-up) — continue to dominate the charts.

Even contestants who were forced out of "AI" look like a sure thing to youth-hungry producers.

Clarkson and Aiken, who are touring together this spring, have seen their albums go double platinum. Studdard, who is scheduled to perform at the Beacon Theater April 14, also has a platinum debut album.

And that's just the tip of the iceberg. Today, "AI" first-season alumnus R.J. Helton is releasing his first album, "Real Life," on the Christian music label Gospocentric.

Military man Josh Gracin, whose country-flavored vocals earned him a fourth-place finish in "AI's" second season, has a fast-rising single on the country charts called "I Want To Live." It's already at No. 45 after a mere three weeks.

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Frenchie Davis, who had to leave the show during its first season after topless photos of her surfaced on the Internet, had a run on Broadway in "Rent," and is currently touring as the lead in the musical "Dreamgirls," which is expected to return to Broadway this year.

William Hung, this season's so-bad-he's-good contestant, just signed an inexplicable deal with Koch Records; his CD is due out April 6.

Bushy-haired Justin Guarini seems like the only graduate of "American Idol" who can't get a break. His debut album flopped and he has been dropped by his label.

And though Tameya Gray had a recurring role in the final season of the Fox series "Boston Public," she has also been dropped by her label — without releasing a single.

But most "American Idol" contestants have turned what should have been a mere 15 minutes of fame into real careers.

Even Jim Verraros, the singer from season one who signed one song for his deaf parents and endured a harsh tongue-lashing from Simon Cowell, is launching a gay-club tour in April and has a lead role in the indie film "Eating Out," which debuts at the London Gay and Lesbian Film Festival April 1.

Verraros says it's a relief to "just be able to step out of that 'American Idol' bubble and perform the way I want to."

Verraros hopes to sign a record deal by the end of the summer for dance-pop music he's already recorded and posted on his Web site.

A special two-hour edition of "American Idol" airs tonight at 8 on Fox/Ch. 5.

What are they doing now?

Clay Aiken Season 2 runner-up

- Double-platinum album
- 2003 Billboard Music Award for Best-Selling Single of the Year



Josh Gracin Season 2 finalist

Single "I Want To Live" at No. 45 on country charts after three weeks



Kelly Clarkson Season 1 winner

- Double-platinum album
- Grammy nomination



Kimberly Locke Season 2 finalist

First single, "8th World Wonder" at No. 78 on Billboard charts

Ruben Studdard Season 2 winner

- Platinum album
- Grammy nomination
- Will appear on "Sesame Street" in April

