



A Dose of Reality: American Idol 7: The New American Idol is Crowned

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Wow -- what a ride! When this season started, it was pretty easy to see that a guy named David was going to win this competition, but most of us had a different David in mind. I had David Archuleta firmly in place at the top of my initial power rankings, and I really thought that the next strongest David would be a Hernandez -- not a Cook.

How quickly things changed. By the time we reached the Top 10, David Cook was nipping at David Archuleta's heels, and those two dominated the top of the Idol landscape until tonight, when one of them was crowned the new ruler of the *American Idol* throne.

I've often been critical of this show -- and I'm still a bit miffed by how much overt marketing is taking place during tonight's finale -- but this really was a satisfying season of *American Idol*, complete with a very solid results finale. It might not have been the "most talented cast" in series history, but it was very deep -- and next season's group will have some very big shoes to fill.

But before we get to that group, we have some business to attend to.

Ryan opens with typically excessive dramatics -- "What happens when a nation is gripped by the closest competition it has ever seen?" Yeah, we're still telling people how incredible the show is instead of giving them an incredible show and letting them figure it out for themselves.

The Nokia Theatre looks jammed to the gills, and everyone is there to see a guy named David win the title of American Idol. Last night was apparently a great night for AT&T -- more than 97 million votes were cast, breaking the previous show record by more than 23 million votes. So much for "the closest competition" this country has ever seen -- one of the Davids raked in 56 percent of the vote. That gibes completely with the prediction site DialIdol, which tabulated 56 percent of votes and 63 percent of its total phone calls made (including busy signals) for David Cook. Those figures pointed to a very comfortable win for the rocker -- a result which I predicted in [last night's review](#).

After introducing the judges, Ryan shifts to Kansas City, Mo., where former Idol Mikalah Gordon is live with David Cook's fans. Then we're off to Salt Lake City, Utah, where another former Idol, Matt Rogers, is being mobbed by David Archuleta's fans. Both crowds are very rowdy, and one of those sites is going to be filled with thousands of incredibly bummed fans when this show's over.

Finally, the *American Idol* Top 12 takes the stage (along with the cast of *So You Think You Can Dance* in a pedestrian performance of [The Impressions'](#) "People Get Ready." I guess it was too much to hope for a results show without a crappy group number.

After the first break, we get our first duet of the night -- both Davids sharing time on [Chad Kroeger's](#) "Hero." David Cook sounds very natural in this number; David Archuleta is far too pop for the gritty vocals. It works, but I'm already looking for the final tally...

We've already had our first bad group number, so why not our first shameless plug? Guru Pitka (or [Mike Myers](#), starring as Guru Pitka in "The Love Doctor") is introduced as the spiritual adviser to the Idols. I already hate this piece. I feel like this minute preview of the movie probably showed most of the film's funniest moments. The Pitka/Myers meeting with both Cook and Archuleta was actually a lot more entertaining than the trailer. Myers' cracks on both guys were pretty humorous -- to David Cook, "The last time I saw stubble like that I was at a "Melrose Place" party listening to [Alice in Chains](#) on my Discman"; to David Archuleta, "Soon you'll have huge success. Also soon, you'll have hair in weird and wonderful places."

Keeping the farce alive, Myers appears live on stage. At least he admits that he's shamelessly plugging his movie.

The next break passes, and Ryan introduces Jason Castro, singing [Jeff Buckley's](#) "Hallelujah." Compared to the first time we heard him do this, it should have been called, "Halle-EW-jah." His vocals and breathing were pretty shaky, and he started to rush ahead of his string accompaniment. (Maybe that's why he's the only one in the Top 5 not to get a duet with a major artist...)

Thankfully, we get a nice break -- the Ford Music Video? This one's actually not so bad. Set to [Sam Cooke's](#) "Let the Good Times Roll," this video is a compilation of outtakes and fun moments from all the season's Ford videos. After the video, Ryan joins the Davids onstage and reminds them of when they drove a Ford Escape hybrid -- and then gives them both keys to Ford Escape hybrids. Good thing Ryan first checked to make sure David A. had his driver's license.

Then it's time for another group number -- the Top 6 ladies join in a group performance of [Donna Summer's](#) greatest hits. What a joy it is to hear Amanda Overmyer trying her hand at disco. Not! Then we find out why we have a Donna Summer medley -- Donna appears onstage to sing her latest single. I knew there had to be a marketing tie-in somewhere... Never forget that this show isn't about the Idols -- it's about how much money the producers can make by hawking as much stuff as possible. Maybe next season we can get sponsorships for the Idols. "Next up is Carly Smithson, sponsored by Lucky Charms!" Fortunately, the number closes with a nice duet between Donna and Syesha, who is positively radiant in the spotlight.

When the show returns from the next break, Idol does something pretty cool -- it pairs up its two most shocking eliminations of the season by matching Carly Smithson and Michael Johns in a duet of the Joe Cocker version of "The Letter." This number proves why these two should have stayed around a lot longer -- up to this point in the show, this is the moment of the night. Carly and Michael are knockout performers, and they sizzle on stage together. Had they been in the Top 5 with Syesha and the Davids, it would have been the most amazing quintet in the series' history.

[Jimmy Kimmel](#) then takes the stage to recap the season -- or rather to roast Ryan and the judges. (He also got in a nice jab at Sanjaya for good measure.) Perhaps his best quip: "Paula sees the positive in performances no one else sees. In fact, if you watched a few weeks ago, you know sometimes, she sees actual performances that no one else sees." The segment is nicely wrapped by a montage of Simonisms set to "Pop Goes the Weasel."

The Top 6 guys next take the stage to a medley of [Bryan Adams](#) hits, led off by "Summer of '69." After the Davids lead the group in "Heaven," Bryan himself appears onstage -- of course, singing his latest single. There was no way we were escaping this number without a shameless plug.

Once we get past the last break of the hour, Jordin Sparks welcomes us -- with another plug. This one is for Disney's "American Idol Experience," which opens at Disney's Hollywood Studios in January.

At long last, we get another fun moment when David Cook teams up with [ZZ Top](#) for "Sharp Dressed Man." Rather than worrying about great vocals, it's nice to just enjoy a very cool jam session between a great young rocker and one of the best rock bands of all time. (And as a native Texan, ZZ Top is one of my personal favorites.) The production crew seems befuddled by a genuine rock act -- during the guitar solo, the camera remains on David Cook, despite the fact that Gibbons has the lead. In spite of the amateurish direction, this is an extremely cool collaboration. The crowd back in Kansas City seems to agree. Mikalah has a brief talk with David's elementary school music teacher, Mrs. Gentry, to whom he presented flowers in a surprise visit on his trip home.

Unlike David's number, the next one isn't quite as fun. Brooke White is back with [Graham Nash](#) for a duet on "Teach Your Children Well." It seems fitting for Brooke -- her musical style is perpetually stuck in the 1960s. She's nice enough, but this genre will never sell the numbers of CDs that it will take to keep her signed to a major recording label. She'll either become an independent recording artist or she'll end up leaving the business.

Another bit of fun follows during the next commercial break -- David Cook's appearance in a takeoff of "Risky Business" in an ad for "Guitar Hero." Yeah, this guy's completely marketable...

If there's any doubt about the numbers of teens watching this show, they're put to rest after the commercials when [The Jonas Brothers](#) take the stage to perform "S.O.S." Say what you will about these guys. They might not be the best vocalists, but they're great performers who take over an audience. They opened for Hannah Montana/Miley Cyrus last year, but you can count on them on being headliners next time.

After some good music, Ryan introduces "the worst of the worst" of this season's auditions. My personal favorite was James Lewis, whose version of "Let My People Go" is perhaps the most horrid audition moment in the series' history. I completely identify with Randy and Paula's hysterics during his audition -- and I wonder how the heck

Paula and Randy. Enough of the foolishness -- where are my results?!

Thank God for the next commercial break, after which [OneRepublic](#) performs its hit single, "Apologize." During the song, they're joined by David Archuleta, who sounds very good in this number. It's clear that he's a superior vocalist to Ryan Tedder, OneRepublic's lead vocalist, though Ryan likely keeps his eyes open more often. It's not bad -- but it's also not "Sharp Dressed Man." The folks back in Salt Lake City probably prefer "Apologize" now, and Matt interviews David's grandparents, who both joke that David's musical talent come from their respective sides of the family.

If David wins, he'll have a tall order to match the success of the reigning American Idol, Jordin Sparks, who takes the stage next. Her first three singles all cracked the Top 20, and "No Air" reached No. 3 on the charts. Tonight she sings "One Step at a Time," and it's good to see that her voice has healed nicely. "One Step" is almost certainly bound for the the Top 10 when it's released next month.

Another break passes, and Ryan introduces a segment supposedly about [Gladys Knight's](#) auditions for the Pips in 1972. It's actually another taste of digital magic integrating vintage footage of Gladys with new footage of the wannabe Pips -- [Ben Stiller](#), [Jack Black](#) and [Robert Downey Jr.](#) It's a fun concept ... that ceases to be fun after the first minute. As least digital Gladys wasn't trying to sell us something...

This week, Nigel Lythgoe promised that the biggest star in the world would be on the show -- and he delivers when [Carrie Underwood](#) appears to sing "Last Name." Yeah, she's hot, and she's exceeded every expectation I ever had for her. Truthfully, I didn't think she'd ever make it this big. Gotta give Simon credit for his claim that she'd be the biggest selling Idol of all time. Her latest CD has been out for almost seven months, and it's already been certified double-platinum.

During the ensuing commercial break, it's David Archuleta's turn to "unleash his inner rock star" in a "Guitar Hero" ad. He's a bit less convincing than big David in the role, but it's nice to see him having fun and being less serious.

With the results just around the corner, the Top 12 unite for one last group number of [George Michael](#) hits. The girls take on "Faith," while the guys tackle "Father Figure" and are joined on that by the ladies. One good thing about this number -- we won't have to hear Amanda in a solo again. The Davids take the lead on "Freedom" -- but it's Chikezie's vocals that are the most impressive to me. I really hope someone gives this guy a break with a recording deal.

Then George Michael himself takes the stage, and guess what -- his greatest hits compilation "Twenty-Five" was just released last month in the U.S, and his first tour in this country in 17 years starts next month. Think that had anything to do with appearance? At least he's not singing a new single, but instead has chosen "Praying for Time" for this moment in the Idol spotlight. It's not bad, but it's also not up to the Prince standard set two years ago. Of course, are any of us thinking about George -- the results are finally up next!

When Ryan returns from the break, both Davids are centerstage. After a flurry of cliches from Randy ("You dudes brought it down to the wire...") and some very strange thoughts from Paula ("Sometimes we think it's all about winning, but it's the things sometimes that we lose that reminds us how truly special we are as people" -- huh?), Simon has a surprising revelation. He rewatched the show when he got home and decided the finale wasn't as one-sided as he initially said it was. He admitted that his comments to David Cook verged on "disrespectful" and said that he really didn't care who won tonight since both guys were "terrific."

The results are brought onstage and placed in Ryan's hand by a representative of AI's accounting firm. With the envelope open, Ryan reveals that the winner -- by 12 million votes -- is ... David Cook! Immediately, DC turns to DA and applauds the young singer, and then is overcome by the emotions of the moment. After hugs onstage from his mother and brother, it's time for David's coronation song, "Time of My Life," declared the winner of *American Songwriter*. Yes, this is the one that I gave two out of 10 -- the one that includes the phrase "magic rainbow." I hated this song in its demo form, and I'm still not a big fan, but it's impossible not to be drawn in as David, with tear-filled eyes and surrounded by the other Idols, sings "This is the time, this is the time of my life." In a very classy move, David motions for little David to join him on the mini-stage behind the judges. It's pretty impressive that he's willing to share his coronation moment with his runner-up.

Yes, I'm looking forward to the tour...

Thanks to all of you for sharing this season with me. It's been a long journey, and regardless of the outcome, I've enjoyed your comments throughout the past several months. I'll be back with you next season (and will likely still try to be a thorn in the Idol producers' side) as we start the search for a new American Idol. For the last time this season, please [send us a message](#) and tell us what you think about this season's conclusion, and let us know if

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