

ENTERTAINMENT

"Idol" strikes a chord with viewers

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"American Idol", FOX's hit reality television show, has yielded great pop music stars such as Carrie Underwood, Jordin Sparks, Daughtry, and Kelly Clarkson. Now in its seventh season, judges Paula Abdul, Simon Cowell, and Randy Jackson have chosen the Top 24 and turned the competition over to America.

"Idol" is back again, occupying as much air time as ever. Until six guys and six girls are eliminated, the program is on three days a week, with the guys performing on Tuesday, the girls on Wednesday and the elimination show on Thursday. When it comes down to the final 12 contestants, it will air on Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

Perhaps the reason viewers continue to return season after season is the entertainment factor derived from the judges. Sharp-tongued, hypercritical Simon Cowell rarely gives positive feedback to the contestants and is constantly fighting with someone, most often fellow judge Paula Abdul or host Ryan Seacrest. While Cowell's disagreements with Abdul are generally light-hearted and amiable (with a few heated exceptions), Cowell and Seacrest's dislike for one another is poorly masked as a humorous relationship

through their biting bantering.

Abdul, a former pop star, entertains with erratic behavior that has spurred rumors of drug and alcohol abuse. She also tends to swoon over male contestants, a fact of which viewers may be more aware since a former "American Idol" hopeful claimed to have had a romantic relationship with her, as reported by ABC's "Primetime Live". Abdul denied these allegations.

Judge Randy Jackson provides a harmonious balance between upbeat, positive Abdul and belittling, cynical Cowell. Jackson responds to contestants' performances in a straightforward

manner; he either liked it or he didn't, "dawg". While being honest, Jackson also demonstrates much more tact and finesse than Cowell.

The judges are only half the show, however. The talent is the entire base of "American Idol". All contestants prove incredibly ambitious in their quest to become a pop star. Many have unbelievable background stories and all have incredible talent (once the show is past the initial auditions. Remember William Hung?).

"American Idol" holds open auditions in approximately seven cities across the United States each year. Initially, the auditions are entertaining and hilarious.

They quickly lose their humor as squeaky, high-pitched voices and screaming contestants earn the few minutes of fame they are clearly seeking. It is then that the talented singers appeal to the audience who has a desperate need for true talent and Tylenol.

If the hopefuls are talented enough to please at least two of the judges, they are granted a "golden ticket" which admits them to Hollywood Week. During Hollywood Week, contestants perform multiple times for judges. Until this current season, they performed with a group. This season, contestants were permitted to perform with their instruments, which opened an entirely new field of criticism from the judges. Eliminations were held throughout the week, sending many hopefuls home in an efficient manner.

At the conclusion of Hollywood Week, 24 contestants, 12 guys and 12 girls are chosen by the judges to move onto the finals. They then perform live every week, choosing songs to fit themes meant to show contestants' versatility, like '60s, '70s, country, Motown and disco music. They often have a guest judge or mentor who works with the contestants all week, and the week's theme is sometimes based on the guest. Past guests include Jennifer Lopez, Olivia Newton-John, Gwen Stefani, Barry Manilow, and Elton John.

After the performances, and after the judges weigh in, viewers may

call in or text to vote for their favorites. The voting results are then revealed on a results show the next night, which FOX frequently drags out for an entire hour. During the results show, Ryan Seacrest recaps the night before, the idols perform together, and often the guest judge or mentor will sing as well. During the last two minutes of the results show, Seacrest sends one contestant home each week, an event which often proves highly emotional.

The show's season finale occurs live at the Kodak Theater in Los Angeles, where there will only be two contestants. While the winner is determined by America's votes, those who have lost have oftentimes become just as famous as or even more successful than the "Idol" winner.

"American Idol" has changed the music industry. Many popular artists heard on today's radio have "American Idol" to thank for their big break. Perhaps these artists are so successful because their listeners feel as though they have played a part in their success, either by voting or just observing their talent on the show.

For all of "American Idol's" faults (including lengthy episodes, its heightened melodrama and predictability) it is a popular and successful reality television series that has inspired many copy-cats, movies, and spoofs. Like it or not, "Idol" is here to stay.



(From left to right) American Idol judges Randy Jackson, Simon Cowell, and Paula Abdul. The record-breaking show is well into its seventh season.



Allison and Catherine Pierce, the Alabama born-and-bred sisters who make up the folk-pop duo The Pierces, were finally awarded complete artistic control on their latest album, "Thirteen Tales of Love and Revenge," and the result is both interesting and startling. The sisters blend sounds taken from pop, folk, country and hip-hop to create music which is delightfully macabre and refreshingly original. The Pierces would scare the crap out of Aly and AJ.

The unofficial title track of the disc would have to be the very opening of the album, "Secret," a song which plays with the anxieties of trust in relationships. The duo adopt a more traditional sound on a handful of tracks, which seem as if they could be played on a top 40 radio station; this is not to say, however, that they are prone to selling out. The lyrics of "Sticks and Stones" — a polished, addictive pop anthem about sexual attraction — show that the Pierces are as crazy and creepy as ever, despite the traditional background music:

"Sticks and stones will break your bones/ And leave them lying in the mud/ But you'll be scared when we're alone/ Like I might suck your blood/ And I could tell you a witch's spell/ But it just might blow your top/ And you start to run just as I'm having fun/ It's awfully hard to stop."

Equally strange (but fun) is "Lights on," a provocative reversal of gender roles. The chorus is especially interesting: "Make love with the lights on baby/ Tell me what you see/ Clear the bed to lie on darlin'/ Make a mess of me/ Here's my dress to try on baby/ Let me be your man/ I will call you pretty' darlin'/ Tell me what I am".

The second selection for this issue is "The world's biggest selling album of all time," Michael Jackson's "Thriller." Before all of the controversy and before "pop music" was considered a branded insult, The King of Pop had millions all over the world dancing to his records, and for good reason — "Thriller" is just as frenetic and fun as it was over a quarter-century ago.

All of the hits are back, including the famous late night anthem, "Beat it"; any who are unsure about this CD will have their trepidation instantly quelled when the first verse explodes on the track: "They told him don't you ever come around here/ Don't wanna see your face, you/ better disappear/ The fire's in their eyes and their words are really clear/ So beat it, just beat it".

The 25th anniversary collection is almost worth its price for the title track alone. It is truly a shame that the closest young people have come to this legendary song is in poorly-conceived Super Bowl ads; many have no idea of the scope of "Thriller." Thankfully, in addition to a reproduction of the original album, there is a DVD that contains the original short film of "Thriller" (along with the short films to "Beat it" and "Billie Jean"), which was a precursor to music video super-culture.

In addition to the DVD and original album there is also a collection of remixes featuring will.i.am, Akon, Fergie and Kanye West. Overall, these tracks show what made Michael Jackson so great. When hearing Fergie hold on for dear life on her collaboration with M.J. on "Beat it 2008," one comes to the sad realization that there has not been an artist since who performed with even half of the attitude and flair as the King of Pop once did. "Artists" from the "American Idol" generation of music — Justin Timberlake, Fergie, Rihanna and Chris Brown, among others — could learn a thing or two from Michael Jackson; it seems that every artist out now cranks out as many songs that sound like last week's hit just to make a few bucks. Let the throne stay cold — no one will ever compete with the frayed-at-the-edges, fiery attitude of "Thriller."

Geek Corner: Take Two merges; Movies set for "take two"

By **MATTHEW MAHONEY**
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Electronic Arts set for take over

A long time ago (last week) in a galaxy far, far away (California) the business mogul of Electronics Arts poised themselves for a buyout of rival Take Two. EA already has a sour impression amongst many of the hardcore gaming crowd because of the proprietary rights they hold on certain Intellectual Properties, like their deal with the NFL and the Madden series.

EA has put an offer on the table to buy out shares of Take Two for \$26 a share, while market value is currently at \$17. A very lucrative offer, but Take Two has declined, waiting to see what impact the

release of upcoming Grand Theft Auto IV will have on share prices. EA has made it clear this deal will last only for now, and not carry over to a post-GTAIV launch period.

What this means to geeks and gamers in this hemisphere is EA will be one of only two major video game publishers at this point. Some of the hottest titles over the 2007 fall gaming season came from developers that fell under the Take Two flagship, most notably Mass Effect and Bioshock.

This could lead to problems with ingenuity in software development, but that's only speculation. No official word has been made on whether or not EA would take away any studios' ability to operate autonomously. No word ever looks to appear either since Take Two is

insisting that nothing will happen until after the release of GTAIV.

Skyнет is on the verge of takeover. All right, readers, I've told you once before and now I'll tell you again: Beware the Robot invasion!

At the Game Developers Conference, Emotiv has developed a product called the Epoch that will allow you to saw logs, push toys around and otherwise play very simple games... with your mind! No movement of the hands required, this device reads your brainwaves and plays those actions out on a PC.

This device has huge possibilities in the medical field. Amputees and other disabled persons could now use a computer just as well, if not better, than any other person.

While the full potential is years, maybe a decade away, the start is

finally here. For \$300 in December, you too can plug your brain into a world of digital playtime. And then calmly wait as each device slowly becomes self-aware and turn your brain into a massive pile of goo.

Nostalgia sells, as do sequels
Who can forget the summer movie season of sequels: "Spiderman 3," "Bourne Ultimatum," "Shrek 3," "Pirates of the Caribbean 3" and "Rush Hour 3." How drab! How boring! Yet how successful they were at the box office! We can't help but go see them in all of their Jazz tap dancing glory.

What's next in the line up? Well, of course we all know of "The Dark Knight." (But this one I do believe warrants a definite theater visit. Let alone it's guaranteed a good movie, but it is the late Heath Ledger's final performance.) Also in the

works are "Terminator 4," another Bourne movie, "Transporter 3" and a "Sin City" sequel.

I like these properties, I really do, but it gets to a point where these things need to start getting really good if they want to take my \$20 for a night out with the wife. Of course, this could be a throw back to the old days when serial films at the theater were a mainstay, right alongside newsreels instead of previews. It could actually be a good thing, but in my opinion it would require a lower ticket price or an amazingly awesome project.

What do you think readers? Sequels get the yea or nay? I think it depends on when the storyteller truly feels the story is told and done, but studios go under the impression of when the money runs dry.

Game critics find online fanbase

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It seems that for every good videogame there are ten bad ones. Some games are so notoriously awful, that just uttering their names will bring understanding nods from most gamers and cringes from those unfortunate enough to have played them. Games like "Superman 64", "Total Recall" and "E.T." live in infamy in the gaming community; the idea of willingly playing these train wrecks is masochistic. Despite this, there are people out there who have made a hobby out of playing these games and ripping them to shreds for our enjoyment; in some cases, doing this has made them famous.

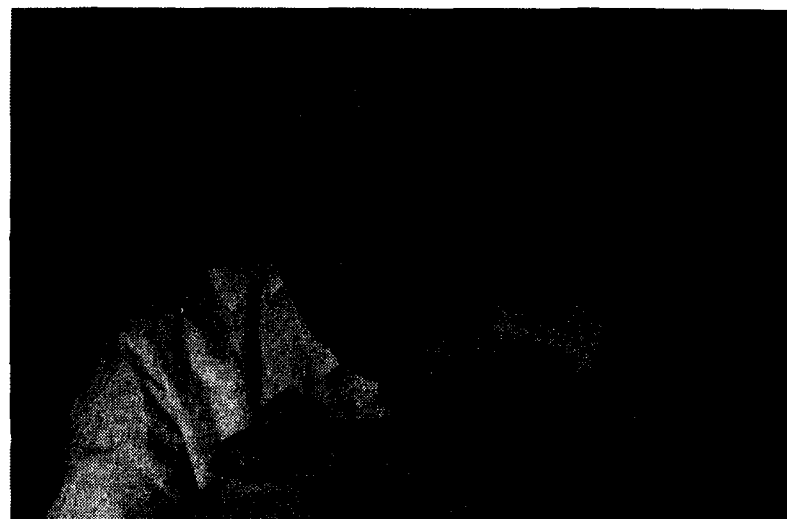
THE ANGRY VIDEO GAME NERD

The Angry Video Game Nerd is the creation of New Jersey film maker James Rolfe who portrays the character in his internet series. Rolfe created the character in 2004 as a joke to show to friends but eventually released his videos to the internet after seeing the positive reactions they got. "The Nerd" is a foul mouthed, beer drinking, pocket protector wearing gamer

who bitterly plays the worst games he can find only to rip them apart in an obscenity filled rage. Rolfe rags on games from many different consoles in his videos but his personal favorite is the Nintendo Entertainment System. Most of the games he attacks are based on movie and television licenses as they are usually the worst games on the market.

What sets Rolfe apart from most other internet ranters is the fact that he is not just some bitter internet troll who has nothing better to do than complain; he is an entertainer. He always sets up his videos to have as much dry humor as possible and goes to great lengths to create a quality product; the lighting, camerawork, and sound are always a step above the rest. Despite the over the top profanity in each episode, Rolfe is very well spoken and insightful in his rants. He always appears to know what he's talking about and never simply attacks a game; he dissects it for maximum comedic value.

In some cases, the episodes of Angry Video Game Nerd are given a story in between the vulgarity. The Nerd has struggled with the Powerglove, survived Freddy Krueger, and beaten up Bugs Bunny all while playing the awful games



James Rolfe as "The Angry Video Game Nerd." Rolfe reviews, in his opinion, some of the worst games of all time on his internet video series.

based on them. Rolfe recently stopped including these segments in the episodes at the request of his fans. Despite that, he still takes advantage of every opportunity to add humor to an episode such as duct taping a virtual boy to his head because he can't find a comfortable place to play it.

The character of The Nerd has transformed Rolfe into an internet celebrity. He has been invited to large trade shows such as the Electronic Entertainment Expo and has been able to profit well from the sale of DVDs, shirts and other merchandise through his website.

The truest sign of fame, though, is imitators and Rolfe has several; a youtube search will reveal quite a few of them. Sadly, none of them have the likeability or quality that the Angry Video Game Nerd has. **BROKEN PIXELS**

Broken Pixels is a show hosted on gamevideos.com and stars three editors of Electronic Gaming Monthly: Crispin Boyer, Shane Bettenhausen and Seanbaby. Each episode is made up of the three of them playing the worst games they can find and mocking them relentlessly; the show has a very fraternity guy feel to it. Broken

Pixels is an extension of Seanbaby's own magazine column The Rest of the Crap where he plays the most obviously bad games that come out every month; if it has "That's So Raven" anywhere in the title he has played it. The games they mock range from well known train wrecks like "Superman 64" to obscure games and imports such as "Queen of Queens", a Japanese female wrestling game in which only two of the nine contestants look like actual women. The trio is relentless and wastes no opportunity to make jokes at the game's expense; where the Angry Video Game Nerd is insightful, the Broken Pixels crew is merciless.

The format of the show is simple; the image of the three hosts is superimposed over the game screen to look like a reflection. Watching their physical reactions is just as funny as hearing their jabs at the game and is quite similar to the style of "Mystery Science Theatre 3000". The games that they "review" come from every generation of gaming, from the Atari 2600 up to the newest generation of consoles. The amount of profanity is significantly less than James Rolfe's creation but the jokes are much dirtier and oftentimes the camera crew can be heard laughing in the background.