



MAGAZINE CONFIDENTIAL

By MIKE COHEN

A live dispatch from Los Angeles and the set of American Idol

LOS ANGELES -The 13th season of American Idol is history. While in Los Angeles last week I had the good fortune of seeing a live presentation of the show and meeting the final three contestants: seventeen year old Jena Irene from Farmington Hills, Michigan; rocker Caleb Johnson, 23, from Asheville, North Carolina; and Alex Preston, 20, from Mont Vernon, New Hampshire. Johnson was crowned the winner.

It has already been announced that the show will return again next season on Fox and CTV Two.

Readers of my column will recall what a big fan I was of Canadian Idol, broadcast for six seasons on CTV. In 2008, CTV announced that the popular singing competition had been "suspended." It has never returned to the airwaves

American Idol was the number two program on CTV Two this year in terms of total viewers, behind only Dancing with the Stars.

Ryan Seacrest, whose syndicated radio show is broadcast weekdays on Virgin Radio in Montreal, is the show's dashing host. Taping takes place at CBS Television City in a studio which is much smaller than you would think. Most of the crowd is standing, including the pit by the stage occupied exclusively by a youth component who get to enjoy the perks of having "selfies" taken with judges Jennifer Lopez, Keith Urban, Harry Connick Jr. and Seacrest.

There is a throng of media who follow the series live each week. They do so from a special air conditioned media tent. I was fortunate to see the action from a seat, accompanied by Freemantle Media executive director of communications Kristina Kirk. I was on hand for the landmark 500th episode, so when the cameras stopped a big cake was rolled out. Seacrest and show mentor Randy Jackson, a former judge, were recognized for being in every one of those episodes. Even Idol creator Simon Fuller was on hand for the ceremony.

Yes, J. Lo is as breathtakingly beautiful in person as she looks on TV. During commercial breaks Connick Jr. and Urban really work the crowd, posing for endless selfies and signing autographs. J. Lo too. There is also a lot of makeup retouching. Meanwhile a huge backstage crew makes significant changes to the set for each performer.

I like reality TV for the way they transform your average everyday person into a household name. This year's Idol crop was a good one and America chose well with its top three.

After the show I went to the media tent where a group of American jour-

nalists camped out in specific spots and waited for the Idols to become available. I was given a spot to wait at and sure enough along came Caleb, Jena and Alex one by one. Caleb was on doctor's orders not to talk too much as he was recovering from a bruised vocal cord. He nonetheless shared a few words. "This experience has been absolutely amazing," he said. "It is so incredible and humbling to do what I love. Losing my voice was a real challenge. I had to work hard to get ready for this show."

Alex told me how this entire experience has been so crazy. "It still feels like a dream," he said. "I still feel like the kid who came in for the audition. I am really excited about starting the real music grind, start writing new songs. I did not realize how much my life changed until I went back for my hometown visit."

Adorable Jena is also overwhelmed with the experience. "I did not think I would get this far," she admitted. "Initially I just tried out just to try out. It has been a life transformation experience I could not imagine it any better. I am so grateful that people like my style and I am excited for our tour. I cannot wait to produce my own album and see how that sounds."

Some Idol winners and finalists have gone on to careers of superstardom. This includes Kelly Clarkson, Carrie Underwood, Jordin Sparks, Jennifer Hudson, Adam Lambert, Chris Daughtry and Phillip Phillips.

As for Seacrest, he enjoys a thriving broadcasting career and multiple ventures in media. While hosting and producing multiple television and radio programs, as well as building Ryan Seacrest Productions (RSP) into a viable entity that creates content for all media platforms and myriad brand ventures, he is redefining what it means to be an entrepreneur in Hollywood. He was recently honored with an Emmy Award nomination for Outstanding Host for a Reality or Reality-Competition Program for his work on Idol. He was added to the prestigious list of Emmy Awards hosts in 2007 and 2008.

Seacrest holds preeminent positions in the worlds of broadcast television, nationally syndicated radio, local radio and cable. Besides Idol, he hosts "American Top 40" and his own No. 1 nationally syndicated radio show for Clear Channel's 102.7 KIIS-FM. Additionally, Seacrest executive-produces and co-hosts "Dick Clark's New Year's Rockin' Eve with Ryan Seacrest."

RSP has quickly established itself as a full-fledged production entity with numerous pilots, series and specials



Mike meets Caleb Johnson

in production and development. Seacrest's latest project is a new reality show with famed British chef Jamie Oliver where Oliver will touch down in America's unhealthiest cities and give its residents good-food makeovers using local resources. The company's credits include "Denise Richards: It's Complicated" and "Keeping Up with the Kardashians." RSP and Bunim-Murray Productions recently debuted a new half-hour series, "Kourtney and Khloe in Miami."

CANADIAN IDOL

Do you remember the six winners of Canadian Idol? Ryan Malcolm, Kalan Porter, Melissa O'Neil, Eva Avila, Brian Melo and Theo Tams. Other top finishers who have gone on to strong careers are Jacob Hoggard, Carley Rae Jepson and Aaron Walpole, just to name a few.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW

With thanks to a recent Toronto Star article, here is a look at where some of the Canadian Idols are now. Malcolm, who was a Kingston waiter before he won, formed alt-rock group called Low Level Flight and recently opened a restaurant in Costa Rica. Runnerup Gary Beals from Nova Scotia has released two albums, but basically stayed local. Season Two winner Kalan Porter from Medicine Hat, AB, began another life as a freshman at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Business in September 2012.

Runnerup Theresa Sokyrka of Moosejaw, Saskatchewan is now five records into a respectable career that has seen her collaborate with the Cowboy Junkies' Michael Timmins and members of the extended New Pornographers family, release an album of traditional Ukrainian folk songs and comb the streets of Madrid for players to accompany her on this past June's Prairie Winds. Hoggard, the second runner-up, heads up the very successful rock band Hedley. Season Three's Melissa O'Neil has made a career for herself in musical theatre and now serves as part of the ensemble cast and understudy of Epinone and Fantine in the Broadway production of Les Miserables. Second runner-up Walpole has followed the same path and is also part of Les Mis, in the ensemble and the understudy for Jean Valjean. Season Four winner Eva Avila from Gatineau also took to modelling and continues to tour, with a new album set to come out soon. Season Five winner Brian Melo of Hamilton's website has not been updated with any significant news since 2012, so that about tells his story. First runner-up Jaydee Bixby from Alberta released his third album last summer. Jepsen, the second runner-up, exploded on to the global scene with her hit Call Me Maybe and recently played Cinderella on Broadway. Theo Tams from Alberta won the final season and has formed a country-ish duo called Beyond the Mountain with Carly Jean Campbell

of Vancouver. So there you have it. Will Bellmedia ever bring Canadian Idol back, perhaps parking it on Bravo! If not, here is one suggestion – how about a Canadian Idol reunion, complete with judges Zack Werner, Jake Gold, Farley Flex and Sass Jordan. I believe it would be ratings success!



Melissa O'Neil

FORMER MONTREALER IN LA

For Montreal native Roz Wolfe, California truly is home. The senior officer responsible for foreign policy and diplomacy service has been working at the Canadian Consulate General in Los Angeles for 31 years now. She had arrived here four years earlier with her husband Michael, teaching for two years at Pepperdine University and then devoted another two years as a legislative analyst for city council and then Mayor Tom Bradley.

I caught up with Wolfe at the recent Intel ISEF (International Science and Engineering Fair) at the Los Angeles Convention Centre where she was guiding recently appointed Consul General James Villeneuve to the kiosks of Canadian finalists.

The Canadian Consulate General has a staff of over 60 people. Its territory covers Southern California, Nevada and Arizona. Physically located on South Hope Street, not far from the popular Sheraton Downtown Los Angeles, the office's primary mandate is trade. However, a lot of energy is extended towards processing visa and immigration fees, visitor visas, work and study permits.

"We are the second largest of all Canadian Consulates in the world next to the one in Mexico," said Wolfe.

Villeneuve represents the 10th Consul General Wolfe has served under. Not only did she work closely with former Canadian Prime Minister



Carley Rae Jepsen

Kim Campbell in this same role for four years, Wolfe also played match-maker. She introduced Campbell to Montreal-born musician Hershey Felder. They soon became a couple and were married.

Wolfe has never forgotten her roots, or the fact she is the daughter of Holocaust survivors. "My parents lost their entire family in the Holocaust," says. "I bring that to the office with me every day. "My father was hidden by a Polish Catholic family for 18 months. They saved his life. In fact, there was such a bond that he and his brothers saved up enough money to move them all to Montreal. They all live here now and became part of our extended family. It really is a special story."

Wolfe has managed to connect her Judaism to her day-to-day duties. The much acclaimed Museum of Tolerance, a facility created by the Simon Wiesenthal Centre, represents a regular stop for dignitaries. She has used that venue for Canadian film screenings by Jewish personalities.



Zack Werner

GOVERNOR GENERAL IN CALIFORNIA

Wolfe spends a lot of time working on social media for the Consulate these days. One of the recent highlights was a West Coast visit by the Governor General of Canada and former McGill University Principal David Johnston – a first by anyone in that position. During his visits to Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco and Seattle, he engaged with government representatives, business leaders, innovators, academic influencers and researchers to share knowledge and expertise on the themes of innovation and trade, education, and philanthropy. Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird, who goes back some 30 years with Villeneuve, was here last winter.

VILLENEUVE IN LA

Prior to his appointment last February, Villeneuve worked for Anheuser Busch InBev, the world's largest brewing company and the parent company of Labatt Breweries, for more than 27 years. He started with Labatt in Toronto in sales and marketing and was later transferred to Vancouver, where he was regional director of government affairs for Western Canada. In 1995, he returned



Ryan Seacrest, Randy Johnson, Jennifer Lopez, Harry Connick Jr. and Keith Urban with the 500th episode cake.

to Toronto to manage Labatt's rebranding initiative and to run the company's corporate and sports properties. He later became director of corporate affairs and then vice-president of corporate affairs for Canada. From 2007 to 2009, he worked in Brussels to lead InBev's global corporate affairs practice. After InBev purchased Anheuser Busch in 2009, he moved to St. Louis to lead the company's North American corporate affairs department.

"James has really hit the ground running," says Wolfe, who ironically grew up on a street in Montreal's old Jewish Plateau neighbourhood called Villeneuve. "He is a wonderful person to work with. The moment I told him about the Intel ISEF, he wanted to attend and meet some of the kids. These kinds of things are very important to him."

INTEL ISEF AND THE SUSTAINABLE CUBE

The Intel ISEF attracted over 1,700 participants from 70 countries. This included 18 Canadians, three of whom were from Montreal.

Laval's very own Wilfred Mason, decked out in a sharp suit and tie, got to present his extraordinary project to Villeneuve.

Mason, a Grade 10 student from Laval's Laurier Senior High School, created a project called the Sustainable Cube. Mason explained how the purpose is to create a completely self-sustainable toilet that does not need water or external electrical sources to operate. The toilet will have the capacity of recycling wastes into fuel, electrical energy and thermal energy.

Mason went on to note that the design will ensure the initial separation of the urine from the fecal matter. It will also be completely ergonomic, will have a super hydrophobic coating and will completely change the waste into usable energy. The system will need minimal photo-voltaic energy.

"In order to achieve my goal, I started by focusing on the toilet shape in relation with a targeted set of func-

tions like separating the two constituents of human excrement, developing a super-hydrophobic spray to replace the traditional flushing system and recycling the wastes towards renewable energy creation," Mason stated. "The effectiveness of the system was assessed based on the simulation of its use by substituting water for urine and clay for fecal matter. At a larger scale, we have to evaluate safety, specifically the possible flammability of one of the products and the constraints to its integration in a third world environment."



Roz Wolfe meets Laval's Wilfred Mason at the Intel ISEF

Among the official chaperones for the Canadian delegation was Heather McPherson, a popular chemistry teacher at Laval Liberty High School. She served as chief judge at the Hydro-Québec Montreal Regional Science and Technology Fair in March at John Abbott College where Mason finished among the top three finishers.

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