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American Idol & the Law

Posted by Peter Lattman



Two quick observations about last night's "AI." First, we think that Sanjaya, with his brutal take on Bonnie Raitt and that ridiculous schmata on his head, has finally met his Waterloo. Second, Jordin Sparks gave us goose bumps. As Simon said, with that performance the 17-year-old has put herself in serious contention to be the next American Idol.

Hollywood Reporter, Esq., profiles Howard Siegel (pictured, left), the New York lawyer who represents the 24 AI finalists in their negotiations with 19 Entertainment, the producer of the show that NBC honcho Jeff Zucker called "the most impactful show in the history of television."

Of course, the Pryor Cashman entertainment attorney doesn't have a ton of leverage negotiating on behalf of singers plucked from obscurity. 19 Entertainment has management and merchandising rights and also has an option to sign the contestants to Sony BMG recording contracts, though Sony doesn't always pick up the option. But Siegel tells Esq. that his efforts do make a difference.

Siegel's work on the show began with his representation of Justin Guarini, the runner-up to Kelly Clarkson in the first AI. Siegel's representation of Guarini convinced the producers that it made sense to give all the finalists representation before handing them contracts.

He still represents some contestants after they leave AI, including AI2 winner Ruben Studdard. "You have these young, relatively inexperienced individuals who are thrust with suddenness into the public eye at an incredible level," he tells Esq., "and it is absolutely the best reward I can experience as a lawyer to watch them adapt to new status and help them deal with pressures associated with the development."