

'American Idol' Contestant Ben Briley Sings to Better His Family's Future



By Liz Kim

Ben Briley quickly became a fan favorite on *American Idol* this season during rush week when the judges couldn't decide between him and Neco Starr to advance to the top 13. They put the decision in America's hands, and Briley was voted to move forward. From his southern drawl to his love for everything Tennessee, he might seem like the token country singer, but one look at the 24-year-old's YouTube channel, and you'll quickly learn that he enjoys music ranging from John Mayer to James Taylor.

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The contestant admitted that he never even intended on auditioning for the show. "The entire reason I tried out was so I could be a supportive father and husband," he shared. "Being on the show and being married is definitely tough. I don't know too many newlyweds that have spent their first year of marriage like this." The bright side of getting eliminated before the top 10, though, is that he won't have to go on the *American Idol* summer tour, which would keep him away from his wife Courtney even longer.

Before each performance on Wednesday, the contestants all did impressions of each other and almost every impression of Briley was about his two loves: Tennessee and Courtney. With a wife as supportive as she is, it isn't surprising that he loves out loud. "The only week she wasn't in Los Angeles was last week, but she's been here every other week supporting me and making sure I stay focused," he said. "She would tell me that she doesn't want to distract me and wants to make sure I get votes. She's definitely my biggest fan and my biggest supporter."

This week, he sang Elton John's "Bennie and the Jets," a song that he picked "to show my diversity and to show that I can do something else beside country music. I also wanted to break out the piano and show that I could play because I hadn't done that yet. It wasn't a permanent change to who I am as an artist; it was more about showing something different."

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The judges, however, were confused and felt he lacked a connection to it. While Briley didn't like what they had to say after his performance, he tried not to take it personally. "Their words did sting," he admitted. "For one contestant, they'll say, 'You're consistent, but you need to change it up.' To another person, they'll say, 'You need to stay in your lane and not venture out,' but when someone finally does take

a risk and a step forward and tries to be different, it gets shot down on national television.”

Briley is looking forward to returning home to his friends and family, eating some Tennessee pizza, and continuing to work on music career. “This is the definitely not the last you’ll see of me, and nobody works harder than me. I’m not in it for the money or the fame. I’m in it to be a good father and provide for my family.”

You can keep up with Ben on his www.facebook.com/ben.briley and on Twitter @BenBriley. American Idol is on Wednesdays and Thursdays on FOX.