

'American Idol' Contestant Kristen O'Connor: My Boyfriend "Never Held Me Back from Pursuing My Dream"



Interview by [Whitney Johnson](#). Written by Liz Kim.

This week, *American Idol* decided to let the audience get a better sense of the thirteen finalists by giving the singers free rein in terms of song choice. Kristen O'Connor, a 24-year old nurse tech, chose Kelly Clarkson's "Beautiful Disaster." On Wednesday night's show, she explained, "This song is typically about a boy, but I interpreted this song to be about me." Judges Jennifer Lopez, Keith Urban, and Harry Connick Jr. gave generally positive – but slightly underwhelmed – feedback.

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O'Connor, along with M.K. Nobilette and Malaya Watson, was in the bottom three, and she admits that, while she was disappointed to be eliminated, she wasn't shocked. Competing against highly talented singers requires that each and every performance be the best that it can be. "It's unpredictable at this point – who America loves will change from week to week. It was important for me to go out with my head held high and on a good note. I wanted to leave in a way that I could be proud of."

Although she may not have gotten rave reviews for her last performance, O'Connor remains upbeat and confident. "One of my strengths, I think, is that I have a really strong voice. Chris Daughtry said my voice was his favorite, and Randy Jackson said I gave him chills. I've gotten a lot of really awesome compliments."

It's this confidence that has driven the Florida native to sing ever since she was a child. "My experiences growing up definitely prepared me for the competition. I learned everything I know about music from singing in church. I was a music major during my first year of college too."

She's also lucky enough to have unwavering love from her family, friends, and longtime boyfriend Renny Whidden. Speaking about Whidden, she thanked him for supporting her throughout her journey. "He never held me back from pursuing my dreams. He is so understanding and gets how important this is to me." She credits trust with being the major quality that helps them maintain a long distance relationship.

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She may not have won the competition, but O'Connor is leaving *American Idol* with new friends. "Before the show even started, Malaya and I were talking, and we thought it would be the two of us in the bottom. We both struggled with the song choices

we made. We were just kind of holding on to each other, saying, 'No matter what happens, we're going to stay friends'."

The aspiring singer has no plans to give up her dreams of having a career in music – but she does have a practical backup plan for her future. She recently graduated from the University of Central Florida with a degree in nursing. "I'm very self-sufficient and have worked very hard for everything I have. I knew that I had to get a degree in something that would give me security," she shared.

She also said that one of the perks of nursing, besides helping others, is that it gives her enough time to keep singing. As for what sort of album she hopes to make, "I see myself as an R&B/pop/soulful singer. I love sultry music."

You can follow O'Connor on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram. American Idol is on Wednesdays and Thursdays at 8/7 c on FOX.