

'American Idol' Contestant Jessica Meuse Says Show Affected Her Relationship



by Liz Kim

Jessica Meuse, 23, stood out on this season of *American Idol* – and not just because of her trademark pink hair. The singer from Slapout, Alabama, personified cool-rocker-chick, and her honest and easygoing attitude made her a favorite to both fans and judges. Many competitors get pigeonholed into a single genre, but she admits to being influenced by every genre of music. Her singing style is a mix of gritty rock with metal and country notes.

The singer said her ultimate goal was to stay true to herself and bare her soul to the audience – especially when she sang her original song “Blue-Eyed Lie” this week. “I lived it; that happened to me, word for word. It’s like taking my diary and reading it on national television.”

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In 2011, she self-released an album called “What’s So Hard About Bein’ a Man.” All of the songs were influenced by her own life experiences, and most of them focus on dark and serious subjects. Meuse has said this is because she wants her music to give hope to others in similar situations. “Writing my own songs about heartbreak and tough situations teaches me how to let go and just not worry about things you can’t control anymore.”

The contestant's vocals were praised each week, but the judges repeatedly criticized her on her lack of stage presence and connection with the audience. Keith Urban even said she didn't have enough "release." Fans complained that she was picked on more than the other singers, but she chalks it up to part of the experience. "At times, I felt picked on, but it's part of the game. I know I have bigger things ahead of me, and I'm going to make them happen," she shares.

She does wish she could have sang more original material though. "I didn't let not singing originals frustrate me because I do know a lot of cover songs from singing three to four hour gigs at home, but I really would've liked to do originals – at least one a week just because that's who I am as an artist."

Meuse also agrees that stage presence was most difficult for her – but she did improve during her time on stage. "I believe that I have shown emotion, and I'm growing as an artist," she explains. "There's always stuff to work on, but I think I've grown a lot on the show. It's definitely different from singing in a bar where you're kind of just in the corner and only the bartender is looking at you."

It's no surprise that the scrutiny can be unnerving. "You're on national television, and everyone is looking at how your eye twitches. So it's definitely something you have to get used to," she says. "But I feel like I came into my own, and I figured myself out on the stage, so I'm very proud of that."

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When you're in an environment like *Idol*, it's stressful to say the least. And when you're also in a relationship, being apart for that long can create a rift. Unfortunately, that's what happened to Meuse and her boyfriend, Steven Atkins. Although he came to support her during a few of the live shows, ultimately, they went their separate ways. "Being on the show

did affect my relationship to the point where it didn't work anymore, and we've actually been apart for about a month now," she shares. "It's just not the right time, but he's a good guy. Sometimes, situations just bring out the worst in people."

But heartache and stress are nothing new for the talented musician, and she's determined to achieve all of her goals. "The limits that you have are only the ones you put on yourself. If you really want something, you just have to work for it. After all, I went from singing in a smoky bar with pneumonia to singing on national television."

This isn't the last you'll see of Jess! You can catch her on the American Idol summer tour. Until then, keep up with her on Twitter @JessMeuse.