

'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.

‘American Idol’ Contestant Emily Piriz Says, “I Couldn’t Ask for a Better Boyfriend”





By Liz Kim.

Emily Piriz may be done on the *American Idol* stage, but she believes this is only the beginning of her music career. The 18-year-old is no stranger to reality television, having auditioned for *The X-Factor*, *America's Got Talent*, and *The Voice* before finally making it through on *Idol*. She made the brave decision to sing Jennifer Lopez's "Let's Get Loud" this week, a song that she used "to sing along to, hairbrush in hand." Of her final performance, she says, "I don't regret doing it. That song is home to me."

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While Lopez and Keith Urban applauded her energy, Harry Connick Jr. felt her vocals were overpowered by the band and that she lost a little bit of control. Although harsh, she appreciates the criticism. "I like when people tell me what I need to work on. You don't improve if you only get positive feedback." The judges also told her to be confident and this piece of advice, the singer believes, is what will stay with her long after the show ends.

Piriz and her fans were moved by a surprise video message from her boyfriend Matthew Walesch of the 2nd Battalion, 9th Marines Fox Company. She admits she was a little shaken. "I had no idea they were going to show that video," she shares. "It was kind of hard to sing afterwards. It was hard to see him because I missed him and hadn't seen him in a long time. But I sucked it up and tried to use that emotion in my performance."

When asked about her relationship, the contestant thanked Walesch for always standing by her side. "Before *American Idol*, he would go to shows and open mics with me. And likewise, I supported him joining the Marines. He's been with me since day one, and I couldn't ask for a better boyfriend."

Their relationship may be long-distance, but she believes that love is possible even if you aren't physically near each other. Her advice for other couples in similar situations is "just trust each other and keep it free. Don't suffocate each other." She adds, "Matt and I have a great relationship because we love each other and trust each other and don't constantly keep up on the other person. We support each other. You just have to be happy with each other, no matter what you're doing."

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Moving forward, the performer plans on finishing high school and then moving to California to continue her music career. She already has plans for her first album too: "I definitely see a pop/rock kind of vibe; I want some funky songs on there that have a little edge to them. I also want to be behind the piano and do some softer songs."

For others hoping to make it the music industry, Piriz thinks that dedication is the key to pursuing your dreams. She's been auditioning since the age of 13 and dealt with years of

rejection. "Don't take no for an answer," she says. "I was told no a lot, but I never gave up, and look at me now! It's going to be hard at first, but you have to keep practicing and keep going and just believe in yourself."

Keep up with Piriz on www.facebook.com/emilypirizmusic. American Idol is on Wednesdays and Thursdays at 8/7 c on FOX.

'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.

For ‘American Idol’ Winner Candice Glover, Third Time’s A Charm





By [Whitney Baker](#)

[Johnson](#)

Soul singer Candice Glover has been a frontrunner since the start of season 12 of *American Idol*, so it wasn't surprising when she took home the crown on last night's finale. Glover, though, was sure to take things slow. "My goal was to make it to the top 20. If I got that far, I knew I'd have a fan base that would keep voting for me," she shares. "Then, I made it to the top ten, the top five, and finally the top two. That's when I knew I could win this whole thing."

Of course, the 23-year-old had judges Nicki Minaj and Mariah Carey in her corner from the beginning. "Nicki told me at my original audition that if I didn't make it to the finale, something was wrong with the competition. That really stuck with me. And Mariah asked for a mix-tape."

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Glover's journey wasn't always such smooth sailing though. This year was her third-time to audition; the best she'd done previously was end up in the top 60. So what did she do differently this time around? "I definitely increased my

musical knowledge – I listened to every genre of music,” she explains. “I was more confident too. I really focused on being myself and being different.”

“I was hurt and broken-hearted when I got cut. I kept saying that I wasn’t going to come back, but I always thought it may work next time,” the songstress adds. “I’m so glad I was right this year!”

When Ryan Seacrest announced her name, Glover immediately thought of her upcoming album, out on July 16th, and the *American Idol* summer tour, which begins on June 29th. She says that she “really connects” to the lyrics of her first single “I Am Beautiful” and even likes “the touch of pop.” In fact, she wants to keep that unexpectedness going when it comes to her entire album.

As for her career, she hopes to model it after the likes of Minaj, Carey and Jennifer Hudson, who she sang with on last night’s show. “I was so nervous to do a duet with Jennifer – I didn’t think I was good enough to be up there,” she shares of the experience. “She’s so phenomenal, and I look up to her.”

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Glover is walking away from the *Idol* stage with more than just a title; she made lifelong friends too, including runner-up Kree Harrison. They may have been competing for the coveted crown, but that doesn’t mean there’s any animosity between the two talents. “Kree’s amazing!” the winner exclaims. “While we were waiting for the results to be called, we were both saying, ‘You won!’ and ‘No, you won!’”

Given her unique path to the top, the commanding singer is in the perfect position to offer advice to future contestants and says, “Just pace yourself and take it one day at a time. Always be yourself.” It’s important that Glover keeps these words of wisdom in mind as she takes her own next steps as

well.

Be sure to catch Glover on the *American Idol* [tour](#) this summer! You can also follow her on [Twitter](#).

'American Idol' Runner-Up Kree Harrison Has "The World in Her Hands"



By Kerri Sheehan

After a long season of strained vocal cords and sad goodbyes, we finally have a new *American Idol*, Candice Glover. But she's not the only one headed for stardom: runner-up Kree Harrison has a bright future ahead of her as well. Viewers first became

acquainted with the songstress when she performed with three other country crooners during Hollywood week. During the *Idol* segment, “Kree Harrison Comes Home,” fans learned that the 22-year-old singer lost both parents, her mother to an accident at age 19 and her father to a plane crash at age 12. Many found it refreshing to see the stunning brunette return to her roots in Texas.

It makes sense, then, that judge Keith Urban is a fan of Harrison. His critiques on her performances weren't always positive; even so, she took the criticism with stride. “I respect the four judges so much, especially Keith because we're both country singers. Whenever he gave me feedback, I took it as constructive criticism. At the end of the day, you can't really grow if you're not listening and learning from your peers.”

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She believes that being on *Idol* helped her in other ways as well. “I always had a problem at the beginning of my career with letting the wall down and being able to connect emotionally,” she explains. “It's a hard thing to do, but I feel like through this process, it's really happened for me. I feel so good about it.”

Although she didn't win the competition, Harrison's excited for what comes next. “I think that we were all in it to win it, but at the end of the day, I still was able to create a following.” She's already released her first single too: “All Cried Out” is currently on iTunes. Plus, she'll be making her debut on the Grand Ole Opry stage on Tuesday, June 4th. As for the very near future, she says she is looking forward to some well-earned rest. “We've been working our butts off!”

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She's not really sure where she's going from here, but she's not worried. As she shares, "I feel like I have the world in my hands right now. As soon as I can, I'm going to start writing and collaborating with other singer-songwriters, and we'll see what happens. I will definitely let y'all know because I can't wait to share it."

As for her feelings about winner Glover, Harrison says that she could not be prouder of the soul singer. "Go get both of our singles!"

Be sure to catch Harrison on the American Idol [tour](#) this summer! You can also follow her on [Twitter](#).

Angie Miller's "Amazing Journey" on 'American Idol'





By [Kerri Sheehan](#)

The [American Idol](#) road ended last night for 19-year-old Massachusetts native Angie Miller. Known for winning over the judges during her first audition by performing an original song and playing the piano during many of the live shows, fans were surprised to see her go. She sobbed throughout her goodbye song “Never Gone,” originally sung by *Idol* alum Colton Dixon, as Mariah Carey encouraged her from the judges’ table.

Miller admits that she was surprised to be voted off this week, as she had high hopes of making it to next week’s finale. “Every Thursday night is shocking. It’s always an emotional and crazy night, but I did feel confident in my performances and everything. I honestly did. I was hoping and dreaming of being a part of that finale, and I really wanted it, so of course, it was disappointing.”

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However, there were no bitter feelings towards fellow contestants Kree Harrison and Candice Glover. “I love both of those girls, and they deserve to be there,” says the songstress. “Kree never thinks about herself – she’s so

selfless. And Candice is just the most fun person to be around.”

Staying positive, Miller is looking forward to performing in the finale show. “I’m not going anywhere; I’m still here. I’m going to start rehearsing and practicing for the finale this week. I don’t know 100 percent what’s going on yet, but I’m so excited to sing again.”

Overall, the songwriter says she’s very grateful for her *Idol* experience and believes it’s really jump started her career. “I learned so much, and I’ve grown so much in this competition. I definitely know so much more about who I am musically and as an artist.” She’s not sure what specific genre of music she wants to fall under, but she does know this: “I want to have music that has meaning and is real. I don’t want to have dance party music, but at the same time, I don’t want to put people to sleep. I definitely want to incorporate the soulful piano sound with a lot of edge.”

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As for the future, there are a lot of things Miller sees on her horizon. “There’s the tour, and then I hope to get signed and record an album. First, I want to pursue my music, and then eventually, I want to act. I just want to do so much; I’m excited! Even though it’s the end of *American Idol*, it’s just the start of this journey.”

You can see Angie Miller on the American Idol [tour](#) or follow her on [Twitter](#) for updates.

Amber Holcomb Bids a Sad Farewell to the 'American Idol' Stage



By Kerri Sheehan

[American Idol](#) viewers were disappointed to say goodbye to 19-year-old Texas native Amber Holcomb last night. After her elimination from the competition was announced, Holcomb broke down in tears as she belted out her last song "I Believe In You and Me," originally sung by Whitney Houston. "Before the performance, we watched the video of memorable clips, and that always gets to me every single week. It was just a lot. It was really overwhelming."

While her impromptu waterworks may lead some to think that the elimination blindsided the singer, Holcomb says otherwise. "They always say an Idol can feel it when it's

time, and I'm not going to lie; I honestly did feel like I was the next to go." However, she realizes that even though the competition has reached an end for her, it's not the end of the experience. She gets to join the other contestants for the tour this summer. "I was really sad, but at the same time, I told myself that I still get to go on tour. I'll see them all again, so I was happy. Tickets are on sale today, by the way!"

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Speaking of the connections she made during her time on *American Idol*, it seems the relationship between Holcomb and former cast-off Burnell Taylor is still brewing. Holcomb played it coy when asked about the New Orleans crooner, only saying, "We text a little bit, but we're just really excited to go on tour together and see each other then."

In addition to the tour, Holcomb has big plans for her future. The southern songstress believes that there is room in the industry for someone with her prowess, and she plans to keep the onstage persona she developed on the show, something that judge Nicki Minaj often praised. "My style, personally, it changes depending on my mood. I feel like, right now, there's nobody like me, so why fix something that isn't broken?"

The sky is the limit when it comes to her career. "I see myself in magazines, on every television channel, on Billboards, on the Grammys – all that good stuff." She also hopes to dabble in acting and thinks *Glee* is "really relatable right now" for her. When it comes to singing, Holcomb names Minaj, Lil Wayne, Rihanna and Frank Ocean as artists she hopes to collaborate with someday.

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As a shout-out to her fans, she exclaims, "I want to say thank

you to everyone who supported me. Expect great things from me!”

To keep up with Holcomb, you can follow her [Twitter](#) or catch her on the American Idol [tour](#) this summer.

‘American Idol’ Contestant Lazaro Arbos Says, “I’ve Always Been the Kind of Guy Who Wanted to Do Something Big With Myself”



By [Whitney Baker](#)

[Johnson](#)

Lazaro Arbos was a fan favorite on this season of *American Idol* from his first audition, capturing our hearts with his rendition of "Bridge Over Troubled Water." He struggles with stuttering when he speaks, but when he sings, it's not an issue. Ultimately, his talent carried him to a sixth-place finish, outlasting the other male contestants and leaving an all-female top five for the first time in the show's history.

During his time on the show, the Cuban-born singer says he got to meet a lot of amazing people who he'll be friends with for life. Plus, it helped improve both his confidence *and* his speech impediment. "It definitely gave me a stronger mindset," he explains. "My stuttering has subsided a bit, and I think it has a lot to do with me learning to control my nerves better."

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Arbos wasn't surprised that it was time to go, and he's excited for what the future holds. "I'm so far from sad. Winning the competition wasn't my main goal," he shares. "My goal was to become known and become a better performer, and I think I achieved that."

Still, saying goodbye is never easy. "The part that was the hardest was that I made such good friends with all of the remaining girls. So the thought that I wasn't going to be with them anymore on the show really got to me."

As for what comes next, Arbos says that he loves love songs and wants to record a pop album. Until the tour kicks off this summer, he's excited to return home to Naples, Florida. "The first thing I'll probably do is go to the park with my family. I miss them a lot," he says. "Plus, my old high school has a pep rally planned for me, so I'm looking forward to that."

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He has no plans to step out of the spotlight either: “I would love to be on *Glee* – that’s one of my goals after the tour. I’d love to be on *Modern Family* too.”

The contestant also shares that he’s hoping to sing with icon Cher on the *American Idol* finale. “I met her at the start of the show, and we’ve been talking back-and-forth since then. She follows me on Twitter, too.”

Despite some criticism from the judges and mentor Jimmy Iovine, Arbos has no regrets. “I believe that everything happens for a reason,” he says with optimism.

“My love for performing and for music motivated me to audition for the show,” he adds. “I’ve always been the kind of guy who wanted to do something big with myself.”

You can keep up with Arbos on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#). You can also catch him on this summer’s *American Idol* tour.

Burnell Taylor of ‘American Idol’: I “Really Like” Amber Holcomb





By [Whitney Baker](#)

[Johnson](#)

American Idol viewers were surprised to see New Orleans native Burnell Taylor sent home last night. Even mentor Jimmy Iovine predicted that he would be the last guy standing, saying at the start of the elimination show that Lazaro Arbos should be voted off. Taylor, though, says he “had a feeling it was going to be me this week. I was prepared – it’s always a possibility.”

Still, he’s proud of himself for his performance of Bon Jovi’s “You Give Love a Bad Name” on Wednesday night. “I can’t believe I performed a rock song on live television,” he says with a laugh. “If somebody would’ve told me I was going to do that, I never would’ve believed them.” He adds that he “learned to roll with the punches” during the competition.

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Of his save song, the singer says that it wasn’t about him being saved by the judges. Instead, he wanted to leave his mark. He certainly did that, ending the song by kissing fellow contestant Amber Holcomb on the cheek. Of his relationship

with the singing beauty, he says, “We’re still learning about each other. We’re not moving too fast. We’re both young, but we really like each other.”

Taylor also had a big effect on judge Mariah Carey and contestant Candice Glover, who were both in tears over his departure. “I never knew how much they cared about me. To see that they were so genuine really touched me. I broke down too.” As for Carey’s advice, Taylor says, “She told me that this wasn’t the end, that I should run with it. And that’s what I’m going to do. I feel like it’s about what you do after the show.”

So what does the crooner want to do now? “I want to be a storyteller and get as personal as I can with my album. I want to be honest. That’s what I feel is missing from the industry.” When asked about comparisons to John Legend, he shares that the Grammy winner is definitely of his inspirations. “As far as my music, though, I want to be as original as I can and do something that nobody’s ever done before.”

He graciously thanks his fans – who he calls family – for their support and adds, “We shall meet again – and it’s won’t be too long.”

You can follow Taylor on [Twitter](#). Be sure to check him out on the American Idol summer tour too!

‘American Idol’ Performer

Paul Jolley Talks About His Future Plans



By [Whitney Baker](#)

[Johnson](#)

Many viewers were disappointed to see Paul Jolley eliminated on last Thursday's *American Idol* episode. The sweet Southern boy from Palmersville, Tennessee, knew that it would be his final week though. "I was just so ready for it," the performer said of leaving the show. "I talked about it throughout the day. Everybody could see that I was going to be okay no matter what."

As for his future plans, Jolley hopes to record a pop country album. "I don't want to change what I feel in my heart. That's what my calling is, and that's what I need to be doing," he shares. Of course, his dreams aren't limited to music: "I want to have my own clothing line. That was a custom shirt that we

had made during my 'Eleanor Rigby' performance. I also want to act. I want to dabble in a lot of different areas, put my Paul Jolley stamp on everything."

To his fans – affectionately known as Troopers – Jolley wants to say a "huge thank you. It's a true blessing to have such loyal people that are there for me no matter what." If you want to see more of him, don't miss the *American Idol* tour this summer!

To keep up with Jolley, follow him on [Twitter](#) or [Facebook](#).