

'American Idol' Contestant Alex Preston Says His Girlfriend Kept Him Going



By Liz Kim

Even before making it to the top three on *American Idol*, 21-year-old Alex Preston had a pretty impressive background in music. He can play up to 12 instruments (none of which he took lessons for) and has opened for Of Monsters and Men, Gavin DeGraw, and the Backstreet Boys. Music must be in his blood because he's also cousins with country music star Jo Dee Messina, who he's even written songs for.

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Week after week, the judges praised him for this artistry, and he managed to avoid being in the bottom up until the end. A common criticism *Idol* contestants hear is about making each performance seem like an original, but this musician never struggled with that. "When I hear a song, I think of how I would do it, and then I usually take an hour or so and run through the song and run through alternative chords and chordal structures," he says of his process. "I had the most fun arranging songs and making them my own."

This week, the singer broke out of his comfort zone, and during his performance of Bastille's "Pompeii," he played both the drums and the guitar. "This competition has really taken me out of my shell, and I've learned a lot of myself as a performer. I've become more confident."

Although covering popular songs can be a fun challenge, Preston truly enjoys performing his own music and believes allowing more original content will improve *American Idol*. "Playing original music on the show was definitely an amazing opportunity because it's in front of millions of people," he shares. "It's your own lyrics and composition, and playing your own music on a show like *Idol* pushes it to the next level because it shows artistry."

Preston was especially excited to show off his talents when he and his fellow competitors were welcomed back to their hometowns. He went home to Mount Vernon, New Hampshire and gave an "incredible" concert for over 6,000 fans. "I got to show people who I really am outside the show, and that was probably the coolest experience for me."

Despite all of his achievements, the rising star remains humble. "I was expecting to be eliminated this week because Jena and Caleb are so good and their performances are so big," he explains. "I knew deep down that it was going to be them in the finale, but I'm proud to have been in the top three." His strategy during the competition was to take it week by week.

“But once I hit top three, I did start thinking about the months ahead, where I want to be, and long term goals outside of the show.”

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Beyond improving his musical skills, *Idol* is also where Preston met his girlfriend Jillian Jensen, who fans might remember from season two of *The X Factor*. The couple met during Hollywood Week, and while being apart has been difficult, the couple are making it work. “It’s tough because we live on opposite sides of the country, but it works out because we can always talk and Skype. She came to the shows a lot too,” he shares. “It sucks because we can’t see each other as much as we’d like to, but since we’re both musicians, we understand each other’s schedules.”

Being a reality television veteran herself, Jensen was a great source of advice. “She always kept me positive. She was completely honest with me whether it was good or bad and told me what she thought. She helped me through a lot in that aspect and kept me going.”

Preston’s time on the *Idol* stage may be up, but he knows that this is just the beginning. “I’m already starting to try to figure out a way to plan my record. I have a couple co-writes lined up that I do want to get on the album as well,” he says. “If I could release a single, that would be awesome. I want to release something as soon as I can and kind of take advantage of the wave of publicity that the show has given me.”

Want more of Preston? You can catch him on the American Idol summer tour, but until then, follow him on his Twitter [@RealAlexPreston!](#)