

HER JOURNEY TO THE TOP



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From the Village Idiot and Papa's Tavern to *American Idol* top three (and counting, hopefully), what a ride it's been for Crystal Bowersox. Along the way, the 24-year-old single mom from El- lison, Ohio, has won the hearts of many across the country. Her casual earthy demeanor and onstage artistry with blues, rock, soul, and even gospel songs have produced a highlight reel of *American Idol* performances from this season.

As the show winds down, it's time for a quick look back at how Bowersox arrived at this point through a week-to-week breakdown of her performances and special moments on the *Idol* stage, along with comments from the show's most notorious critic, Simon Cowell, often her biggest fan.

Chicago auditions SUMMER, 2009

Performed: Janis Joplin's "Piece of My Heart"

Breakdown: Weeks before winning the Blade's Battle of the Bands contest in July, Bowersox auditioned for *American Idol* in Chicago after learning of the show's tryouts from a friend.

Cowell reaction: The judge was only shown smiling during her performance, but celebrity guest judge Shania Twain asked Bowersox why she brought a guitar to the audition when rules prohibited her from playing it.

"It's kind of a comfort blanket for me," she replied. The familiar acoustic guitar with autographs from Twain and other female performers has been an integral part of many of Bowersox's *Idol* performances.

First round of eliminations in Hollywood FEB. 9, 2010

Performed: "(You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman," made famous by Aretha Franklin

Breakdown: Bowersox continued to gain national exposure on *American Idol* as the cameras followed her to a tattoo shop, where she had "Tony," her infant son's name, inked on her back.

"He's the reason I'm going to be the next *American Idol*, to give him a better life," she told the camera. "He deserves it."

Later in the show, in one of the final performances of the first night, Bowersox had her fellow contestants singing back to her and cheering her along as her vocals soared.

Cowell comment: "I think what you have is that you're infectious. People like you, so you have a head start. You're real. That was good."



Second round of eliminations in Hollywood FEB. 16, 2010

Performed: "If It Makes You Happy," by Sheryl Crow

Breakdown: Bowersox learned she made it to the Top 24 of this season's *American Idol* after impressing the judges with stirring performances, including a Dylan-esque take on "If It Makes You Happy," complete with harmonica and acoustic guitar.

Cowell comment: "I'm guessing that you would have looked normally on a show like this and probably thought this isn't the right platform for somebody like you," Cowell told her as she met with him and the other three judges to learn her fate on the show.

"I want this so bad. And I feel like I can surprise all of you," she replied.



Top 24 FEB. 23, 2010

Performed: "Hand in My Pocket" by Alanis Morissette

Breakdown: Dressed in dinner party casual — jeans, gray shirt, and a dark jacket — Bowersox's first live performance on *American Idol* went well.

Cowell comment: "It was good. ... The truth is there are thousands of you doing this outside subway stations every day at the moment. If I met you in real life and heard that, I wouldn't stop in my tracks and go, 'You are the most original artist that I've ever heard.' ... You doing an Alanis Morissette song is that you're doing a sound-alike. You've got to do something which is you, not try to sound like somebody else. ... Having said that, I'm trying not to be overcritical. I really, really like you and I think you're refreshing. You're going to do well."



Top 20 MARCH 2, 2010

Performed: "Long as I Can See the Light" by Creedence Clearwater Revival

Breakdown: Diabetes landed Bowersox in the hospital overnight and necessitated the switch of performance nights between the male and female contestants. The following night a vigorous Bowersox put her health issues aside, and delivered her breakout moment on the show with a "gospel-ly church" version of "Long as I Can See the Light" that had the judges gushing.

Cowell comment: "Crystal, I know how sick you are, actually, over the last 24 hours. It's not like catching a cold or something, you really were ill, and I didn't know whether you were going to be back here this week. What's great about you is that you didn't play the whole sympathy thing. You chose a great song. I have to tell you something, Crystal. I completely underestimated [sic] you from last week..."



Top 16 MARCH 9, 2010

Performed: "Give Me One Reason," by Tracy Chapman for Billboard Hot 100 Hits theme night

Breakdown: Bowersox made it look easy as she ripped through the bluesy Tracy Chapman hit with an electric guitar and continued to make a strong case for her being the best of the eight remaining female contestants on the show. And once again, the judges loved her.

Cowell comment: "You are one million, billion percent going to be in the Top 12 next week. I would say definitely the most improved artist, because what you've got now is that you've got confidence. And I can see that; you start to believe in yourself. And right now you are the one everyone has to beat. I'm telling you, it's yours to lose."



Top 12 MARCH 16, 2010

Performed: "You Can't Always Get What You Want" for Rolling Stones theme night

Breakdown: Bowersox had *Idol* audience members clapping and cheering for her long after she was finished with her bluesy-hymnal take on "You Can't Always Get What You Want." It wasn't her best performance, as the judges noted, especially with mounting expectations fueled by her crazy-good performances and online buzz.

Cowell comment: "You came out here tonight 100 percent the clear favorite. And I think you chose a song which just didn't have what you needed, kind of the drama. And this is the first time where I think you were beaten by somebody, and that was Siobhan [Magnus]. ... Just when you think you've got the competition in the pocket, you've got to dig deep. Week after week, you've got to come on that stage and you've got to kill."



Top 11 MARCH 23, 2010



Performed: "Me and Bobby McGee," by Janis Joplin for Billboard No. 1 Hits theme night

Breakdown: It was an easy week for Bowersox, who acknowledged the frequent comparisons between her and Joplin with a performance of "Me and Bobby McGee." The singer added a touch of home to the show by singing barefoot on a rug onstage.

Cowell comment: "I've heard Pink sing that version of the song, which is one of the best versions I've ever heard, and that was as good as that in my opinion. ... This is about finding a recording artist. I've seen you progress over the last couple of weeks. You're doing your own thing. You're not sliding all over the stage, jumping into the crowd like we've seen before, gimmicky. You just took a song, nailed it, and your only gimmick is a carpet."

Top 10 MARCH 30, 2010



Performed: "Midnight Train to Georgia," by Gladys Knight & the Pips for R&B/Soul theme night

Breakdown: The week before this performance Bowersox teased she had "big plans." Indeed she did, as she dropped the guitar for some brief piano play on the song, before stepping out to reveal a more glamorous look than her familiar earth-mama-casual appearances.

Cowell comment: "I think your choice of song was sensational. I thought the vocals at times were incredible. The problem I have ... is the backing vocalists shouldn't have been there because it made it old-fashioned. You are uncomfortable with the piano, so you are over-thinking it. And what I'm most concerned about here, Crystal, is, regardless of the advice you've been given, do not let this process suck the identity out of you."

Top 9 APRIL 6, 2010



Performed: "Come Together" by the Beatles for John Lennon-Paul McCartney Songbook theme night

Breakdown: Bowersox showed her diversity as an artist by incorporating a didgeridoo into her performance as a substitute for McCartney's deep bass riffs in the song. Battling a cold, she was initially stiff onstage, but loosened up as she poured it on at the end. Her performance drew comparisons to blues-rock singer-guitarist Bonnie Raitt.

Cowell comment: "That's a song or performance I could hear on the radio. It doesn't matter if that song was 30 or 40 years old, it just worked. ... And as always, terrific and much better, in my opinion, than last week."

Top 9 second week APRIL 13, 2010



Performed: "Saved" by Elvis Presley for Elvis theme night

Breakdown: After the judges used their only save of the season the previous week, two performers were sent home. Bowersox's fate was never in doubt, though, after she delivered another strong performance: a rocked-out, blues-gospel version of "Saved." As the first singer of the night, she set the bar impossibly high for most of the other contestants that night.

Cowell comment: "What I loved about that is that you didn't choose an obvious song. You chose something that suited you. You put your own slant on it, and most importantly, you didn't fall into the karaoke trap. ... For that reason — it was original, it sounded great — congratulations again. Terrific."

Top 7 APRIL 20, 2010



Performed: "People Get Ready" by the Impressions for Inspirational Songs theme night

Breakdown: After recent reports surfaced that Bowersox nearly quit *American Idol*, the singer left the drama for the stage this night. Without an instrument, and starting the song a capella, Bowersox delivered the buzz-moment of the season thus far with a powerful performance that had her choked up at song's end, as her dad, Bill, looked on for the first time in the audience.

Cowell comment: "That was inspirational. You know what, Crystal? I'm actually happy, in a strange way, to see you emotional because you have kind of like closed down a little bit. All of us felt this song meant a lot to you. You sang it fantastically, and for me, it was in a completely different class to everything else we heard tonight. Congratulations."

Top 6 APRIL 27, 2010



Performed: "No One Needs to Know" by Shania Twain for Twain theme night

Breakdown: Bowersox has her first stumble of the season with a rootsy version of "No One Needs to Know," complete with a double bass, snare drum, and steel and electric guitar. The song was meant as a "message" to her boyfriend to "man up," and, one would assume, pop the question. The judges didn't care for it.

Cowell comment: "OK, shocker. We don't like Crystal this week. I think that's really the story. I thought it was limp. It was very much something you would expect — and I've seen this happen before — when you're in a coffee shop and they hire a band to sing to you and you don't particularly want them to. And that's kind of what it reminded me of. I didn't feel any conviction from you. ... This is the only week where I haven't actually really liked your performance, I'm afraid."

Top 5 MAY 4, 2010



Performed: "The Summer Wind," by Frank Sinatra for Sinatra theme night

Breakdown: *American Idol* looked to be a runaway win for Bowersox, but consecutive stumbles made the race much tighter. Dressed in a black gown, Bowersox was every bit the jazz club torch singer. The judges liked her effort, but reserved their biggest praise for the other contestants.

Cowell comment: "I loved the song. I don't know if I would've chosen it for you, though, because it felt a little bit indulgent. The first half was too jazzy for me — too small nightclub — and the second half obviously got a lot better. But I'm not going to lie and say this was one of your strongest performances. For you, Crystal, I think you've had two OK weeks. ... It's about being in it to win it."

Top 4 MAY 11, 2010



Performed: "I'm Alright (Theme from Caddyshack)" by Kenny Loggins for her solo performance; "Falling Slowly" by Glen Hansard and Marketa Irglova from the film *Once* for her duet with fellow *Idol* contestant Lee DeWyze

Breakdown: Bowersox rebounded with her loose and fun take on "I'm Alright," a statement of sorts following the so-so performances from her previous two weeks. Her much-praised duet with DeWyze rocked the house and had the judges saying it would be a radio hit if released.

Cowell comment: "I would say after that [solo] performance that you, Crystal, are back in the game."

For the duet he opined: "I don't know if I would call that a good song. I would call it a fantastic song."