

Christian Idols?

✘ A couple of years ago I had the opportunity to interview “American Idol” season five finalist Mandisa Hundley (more commonly referred to as just “Mandisa”). I asked her about the ironic nature of someone such as herself, a staunchly devout Evangelical Christian, on a show that celebrates the concept of world-driven stardom.

The irony wasn’t lost on the national recording artist. She fully understands how strange it must seem for so many Christians to be popping up all over the smash hit television show “American Idol.” After all, doesn’t one of those Ten Commandments expressly warn against the creation of idols?

But for the outspoken woman of faith, it all made sense once she realized just how powerful the show’s reach really was.

“Every time I think about this, I think its funny-and just like the Lord that I know-that He would actually take a show like ‘American Idol’ and use it as a platform for Him,” Mandisa said. “That’s who He is. And so I don’t think it’s a coincidence and I think He’s up to something in our generation and He wants to let the world know that it’s cool to love Jesus. I think He’s using the biggest show in America to do it and I think that’s true to His nature.”

Take for instance Idol winners Kelly Clarkson, Ruben Studdard, Fantasia Barrino and Carrie Underwood who are just a few contestants who got their starts in church. Studdard actually recorded a gospel album and Underwood’s biggest hit to date is

the faith-tinged “Jesus Take The Wheel.”

Other participants such as Kimberly Locke, Kellie Pickler, Chris Daughtry, Lakisha Jones, Jason Castro and George Huff have also displayed their beliefs through music and personal commentaries. The sixth season of *American Idol* produced perhaps one of the largest Christian contingencies with the likes of winner Jordin Sparks and finalists Melinda Doolittle, Phil Stacey and Chris Sligh.

Sparks has participated in various Christian talent events and has been outspoken about her beliefs on conservative issues such as abortion and abstinence. Doolittle sang backup for Martha Munizzi and Anointed and has since performed with Michael W. Smith. Stacey led worship at a church in Shawnee, Okla., and recently signed a record deal with Reunion Records. Sligh covered songs by dcTalk and Mute Math on the show and has seen great success at Christian radio with songs like “Empty Me” and “Arise.”

And this year (season eight) was no different. Finalist Scott MacIntyre, the visually-impaired piano virtuoso, cut his musical teeth in the local church as did fellow finalists Michael Sarver (who led worship at Harvest Church) and Matt Giraud. Top three competitor Danny Gokey was a worship leader for Faith Builders International in Wisconsin. His on-air trip back home highlighted a strong connection to that church body.

And of course the surprise winner and proverbial underdog Kris Allen has been seen on YouTube leading worship songs such as Chris Tomlin’s “God of This City.”

Mandisa told me that these things are just another sign of how

God is using the foolish to confound the wise-and hopefully changing lives in the process.

“Our success on [*American Idol*] isn’t just about how we can reach the fans,” she said. “This is also about reaching out to the people who are involved with the show. I can’t say enough about what I hope the impact is on Paula, Simon and Randy. I think the Lord is using contestants to be his mouthpiece. I just don’t think it’s a coincidence.”

It’s a strange dynamic for sure-one that Christians usually either shun or embrace. Personally, I think having a Christian presence smack dab in the middle of a show like *American Idol* is nothing short of amazing.

And as long as the aforementioned believers can handle the fame and maintain their faith in God, they might just do something that Simon Fuller and Simon Cowell never intended-put the spotlight back on the Creator of all things creative.

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