



Former 'American Idol' singers are 'Idolized' at South Point



Is there room for "American Idol" on a downsized Strip? Producer Barrie Cunningham is hoping that a former-contestant cavalcade he's staging at the South Point this weekend will drum up interest in a possible permanent Las Vegas show.

"Idolized" features former Las Vegas Mikalah Gordon, Nikki McKibbin, David Hernandez and Jasmine Trias crooning five songs each with a seven-piece band.

The emphasis is on the covers they performed on "Idol."

"People have wondered where they went, where they can go see them," says Cunningham, who has invited entertainment directors from all the major entertainment venues and crossed his fingers. "These kids get tens of thousands of hits on their MySpace accounts. There really hasn't been a venue for them."

"Idolized" is not licensed by the Fox TV show, and includes only former contestants who are out of contract. It's one of several touring music tickets produced by Cunningham, who is best known as the Neil Diamond tribute artist in the original versions of "Legends in Concert" and "American Superstars."

A permanent Strip show, Cunningham says, would probably spotlight various former contestants rotating out every few weeks, "to keep things fresh."

"These kids are hugely talented," Cunningham says, pointing out that Trias beat out eventual Oscar-winner Jennifer Hudson on the third season. "They're fun to watch, and they've got stories to tell and music to record. Just because some people think their 15 minutes are over doesn't mean they need to be."

Hernandez replaces RJ Helton, who was originally scheduled to appear in the show, but was forced to cancel for medical reasons. The controversial Hernandez was one of the Top 12 finalists from the seventh season of "American Idol." He was voted off shortly after an Internet Web site revealed he had been a dancer in a gay nightclub in Phoenix.

Gordon, 21, is enticed by the possibility of returning to her hometown more regularly. She sought "Idol" fame at age 16.

"To have a stable show in Vegas would be brilliant for me," she says, phoning from the Los Angeles apartment she shares with a roommate.

Since Gordon's 11th-place finish on the fourth season, she is discovering firsthand how fleeting — and financially unrewarding — fame can be.

"Unless you've really made it big, there's really no stable income," she says.

"Coming from 'American Idol,' you think you're gonna be the next best thing. And then reality hits and you're not."

Cunningham test-drove "Idolized" for six nights at Don Laughlin's Riverside in Laughlin in May. It went so well, he says, that he plans on taking it to casinos across the United States through next year.

Besides a sagging Strip economy, his dream of a permanent show is challenged by the fresh glut of 10 contestants "Idol" unleashes upon the same touring market at the end of each season. (The ninth starts in the fall.)

Stranger things happen every day in Las Vegas, however. For example, not many showbiz watchers would have predicted that the co-headliner with the Beatles show at The Mirage would be provided by "America's Got Talent." But ventriloquist Terry Fator now stars in his own show at the hotel. Contact reporter Corey Levitan at clevitan@reviewjournal.com or 702-383-0456.

What: "Idolized" featuring Mikalah Gordon, Nikki McKibbin, David Hernandez and Jasmine Trias

When: 7:30 p.m. Friday-Sunday

Where: South Point, 9777 Las Vegas Blvd. South

Tickets: \$15-\$25 (898-7542).