

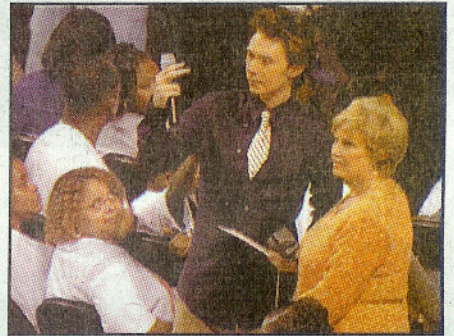
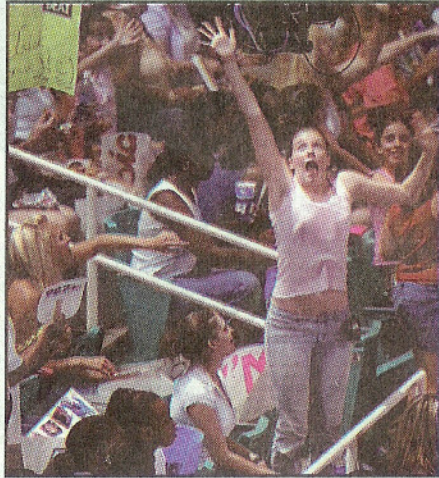
AND THE WINNER IS ...

FANTASIA



Staff photos by David Holston

Crowd packs Greensboro Coliseum (above). Marianna Eddington (right) of Chapel Hill waves to camera.



High Point Mayor Becky Smothers and 2003 runner-up Clay Aiken attend party

It's official: High Pointer takes crown

By Heath E. Combs
STAFF WRITER

High Point's Fantasia Barrino went from being one in 70,000 to one in a million.

She started among the thousands vying for the title

Triad

"American Idol 3" as her journey on national television culminated to her arguably becoming the most famous person in America Wednesday night, laying claim to reality television's crown jewel.

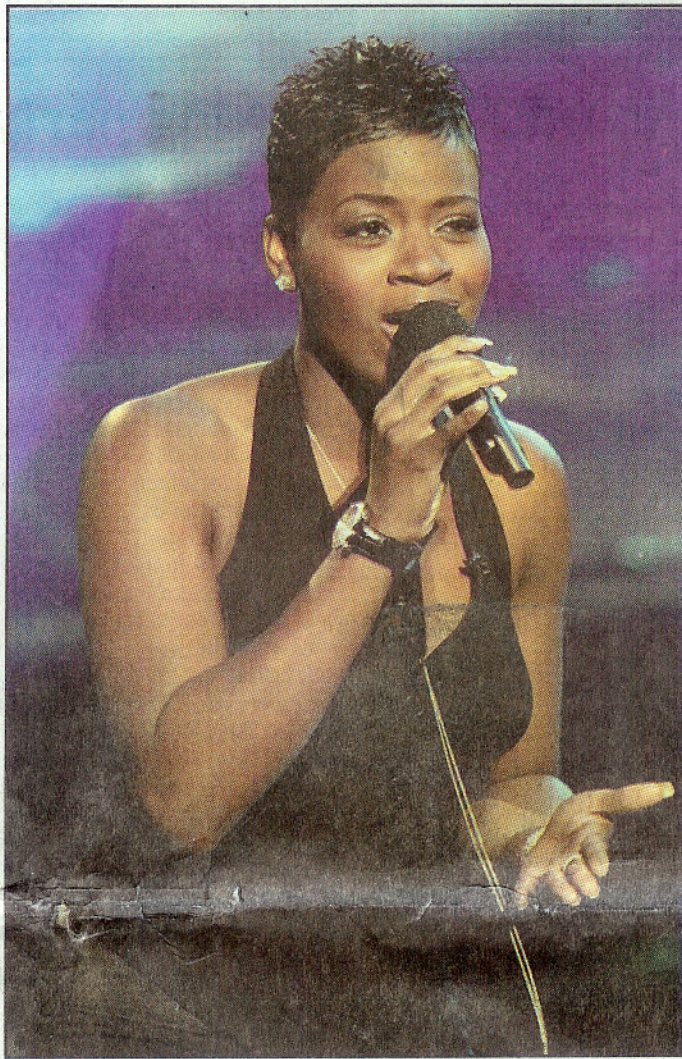
Barrino was announced the new American Idol over Diana DeGarmo, 16, of Snellville, Ga. A tearful Barrino thanked audience members Wednesday night.

"I've been through some things, but I worked hard to get to where I'm at," Barrino said.

Barrino was a judges' favorite throughout the competition, performing unique memorable renditions of "Always on My Mind" and "Summertime" in her signature gospel-tinged style of singing.

On Tuesday night, "Idol" judge Simon Cowell said the singer delivered her acceptance speech for "American Idol" with her gospel choir-backed performance of "I Believe."

Cowell also told Barrino she was the best contestant



AP photo

Fantasia Barrino sings "Impossible Dream" during the "American Idol 3" finale in Los Angeles Wednesday

he'd seen in the show's history, nationally and internationally. Barrino capped the announcement of her win with a performance of

"I Believe," written by season one contestant Tamyra Gray.

For the 8,100 fans that gathered at the Greensboro (See 'IDOL' on 2A)

Emotions run high for fans, friends

By Natalie Jordan
STAFF WRITER

After a stifling silence fell over 8,000 fans, the Greensboro Coliseum Complex literally shook with excitement as Fantasia Barrino was announced the 2004 American Idol.

Hordes of people ran up and down the aisles and

Triad

jumped up and down from their seats once host Ryan Seacrest read the final results.

"To God be the glory," said Patricia Broadie, cousin of Barrino. "For all day he helped her."

Broadie said she was crying because she was happy.

"Happy because she's my cousin, happy because she's made it," she said. "It was predestined."

From the moment the coliseum doors opened at 6 p.m., people were yelling, screaming and chanting Fantasia, while holding colorful signs and T-shirts.

Clay Aiken, last year's "American Idol" runner-up and a resident of North Carolina, hosted the support party. He said Tuesday night had to be the most stressful night for the two competitors.

"They've done a pretty good job this season," he said.

(See EMOTIONS on 2A)

'IDOL': 8,107 attend Triad viewing party

(FROM 1A)

Coliseum to watch the "American Idol" finale, Barrino's spotlight shone just as brightly on them.

"This'll be history for the area. If she wins, I think they'll have to rename the show from "American Idol" to "North Carolina Idol," High Pointer Jerry Leonard said.

Barrino made the Atlanta cut, becoming one of 12 finalists vying for the title. As the singer ascended in celebrity, so did her status in the community.

"When I heard Fantasia sing 'Summertime,' I said she's going to win now. I love Fantasia," said 8-year-old Tamyra Casterlow of Greensboro.

After Tuesday's performance, Australia McLendon said schoolmates knew Barrino's win was inevitable.

"Some like the other, Diana, better, but they said Fantasia came back and rocked the house and they said she's going to win it," said McLendon, 10, of High Point.

Leonard said Barrino's future as a singer was sealed when she

won praise from recording industry mogul Clive Davis.

"As many stars as that man has made, he knows what he's talking about," Leonard said.

As Leonard waited for the inner doors of the coliseum to open to a crowd of wall-to-wall Fantasia fans Wednesday, he summed up what this year's competition meant to many local residents who followed Barrino's climb to the finals.

"It was more interesting this year. I think they just had a lot more talent than they'd had in the past. It's never been boring with (Barrino)," Leonard said.

Fans began to gather at the coliseum at 1 p.m. Wednesday and waited until the doors opened at 6 p.m.

Messages on signs carried by fans at the coliseum varied from "In God We Trust + Fantasia" to "God Loves Fantasia" to "Watch Out Disney. We Have Our Own Fantasia."

By the time doors opened, a sea of fans rushed inside, hoping to get good seats for North Carolina's official "American Idol 3" viewing party hosted by former "Idol" runner-up Clay

Aiken.

Guilford County Commissioner Bruce Davis sat in a front-row seat for the Greensboro viewing party. Davis was instrumental in helping arrange watch parties for Barrino and supply monetary support for her family to travel to Los Angeles.

Davis said almost \$10,000 in family assistance was raised through "Friends of Fantasia," the community support organization funded through T-shirt sales and donations.

The "American Idol" show cut into the coliseum for live television feeds from Greensboro. Andrew Brown, public relations manager for the Greensboro Coliseum Complex, said the biggest part of the planning was coordinating technical items with Fox television network.

The coordinating had to be done quickly, because the viewing party was announced Friday. The venue was prepared to handle up to 5,700 people, but Brown said curtains could be raised to accommodate up to 20,000. By 7:30 p.m., the curtains were raised and Brown estimated 6,000 were on hand for the event.

In the end, Brown said 8,107 attended the event. The mood in the coliseum was pandemonium after the performance, he said.

"I was actually in the administrative office adjacent to the arena floor, sometimes when there's loud rock concerts you can feel the vibrations. That was the same kind of sensation," Brown said. "I could actually feel the vibrations of the audience jumping up and down."

EMOTION:

Final moments tense for many

(FROM 1A)

Waiting for the winner to be announced was tense for many Barrino family members.

"I'm real nervous, real shaky right now," said Ishmael Lindsay, Barrino's godbrother, earlier in the evening. "Many already expect her to win. I hope she can pull it off."

"American Idol," a Fox television talent show, is in its third season. With the competition starting 40 weeks ago, it all came down to two competitors – Fantasia Barrino of High Point and Diana DeGarmo of Snellville, Ga.

"(I) knew from the beginning Fantasia and the other girl would be the last two standing," Broadie said.

Lindsay agreed.

"Diana has her own style," he said. "She's good, too. To have this opportunity is a blessing."

Many in the Triad have been rooting for Fantasia since the beginning of the competition. But there were times when some believed Fantasia was not going to make it.

"There were a couple of times we didn't know if she was going to pull through," said John Merlini of Greensboro. "Not because of her performance, but because of the voting. She was in the bottom two."

That wasn't the feeling of Carla and Shanika Bailey, High Point residents who have been watching "American Idol" since the tryouts.

"She was ready for it," said Carla Bailey. "It was her time."

The competition has given two talented people from North Carolina a chance at the big time.

"I am glad to be a part of this," said Renee Merlini, who was in attendance with her husband and two daughters. "It was such a big crowd. Having two people on this show gives name recognition for those who do not know the Triad area."

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