

Kara DioGuardi: *American Idol*'s New Judge

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KARA DIOGUARDI

AMERICAN IDOL'S NEW JUDGE

A tough-talking songwriter will join Randy, Paula and Simon next season—but what does Paula think about that?

How best to scratch a seven-year itch? If you're the producers of *American Idol*, you bring in Kara DioGuardi—one of the industry's most successful songwriters. After the show suffered a ratings dip last spring, the 37-year-old Grammy-nominated DioGuardi will now join Simon Cowell, Randy Jackson and Paula Abdul on the judges' panel. "I almost fell off the chair," says DioGuardi of her reaction to the news. A longtime fan of the show, the New York native has written songs for former *Idols* Kelly Clarkson, Carrie Underwood and Clay Aiken. "I'm a little nervous," she says. "I'm not a household name. I'm putting some money into buying makeup." She's also playing down a dustup with Abdul, who told an Arizona radio station of DioGuardi's hiring: "I am concerned about the audience and their acceptance ... time will tell." Responds DioGuardi: "Anybody with the right brain would say something like that." Abdul—who collaborated with DioGuardi on Kylie Minogue's hit "Spinning Around" in 2000—later told *PEOPLE* she's "thrilled" about DioGuardi's arrival. "This is great for the show. It's about time—more girl power!" Though details are still being worked out (like what the judges' critiquing order will be and how a tie would be handled in audition rounds), DioGuardi says *Idol* wannabes can count on one thing when the eighth season kicks off in January: "I'm going to be honest," she says. "If I need to be nurturing, I will be. If I need to be hard, I will be. I'm up for the challenge."

Idol judges Randy Jackson, Paula Abdul and Simon Cowell have been on the job since 2002.

By Monica Rizzo with Paul Chi and Jeffrey Slonim in New York City

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A Tough-Talking Songwriter Will Join Randy, Paula and Simon Next Season—But What Does Paula Think About That?

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Contributors:

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