

YO, SIMON, I CAN SING!
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BY CRISTINA KINON

NEW 'AMERICAN IDOL' judge Kara DioGuardi was just 12 when she got her first taste of stardom, wowing a crowd of 1,000 with 'New York, New York' at the Waldorf-Astoria.

"I told Kara that to hear strangers clap for you, that's how you build confidence," said her father, former GOP congressman Joseph DioGuardi.

Twenty-five years later, DioGuardi needs all the confidence she can get as she goes head-to-head with Simon Cowell, Paula Abdul and Randy Jackson at the judge's table on Fox's hit series.

The show doesn't return until January, but the Westchester County native is off to a rockin' start.

A throng of screaming fans greeted the singer-songwriter outside the New York auditions yesterday as she emerged from a Town Car, smiling and waving.

She headed straight for Monica McCabe, 22, of Long Island, who was clutching a photo of DioGuardi for her to sign.

"She was shocked that she had a fan here," McCabe said. "She said this was her first autograph."

DioGuardi, 37, is hardly a newcomer to the music scene, having spent two decades writing music for Celine Dion, Kelly Clarkson, Pink, Hillary Duff, Carrie Underwood and Avril Lavigne.

Her talent and passion dates all the way to kindergarten at the Immaculate Heart of Mary School in Scarsdale.

"We'd have music teachers come in and teach the students a song at least once a week and she was very much into it," said teacher Enis Chiavetta.

DioGuardi's dad realized his daughter had something special in October 1983, when she belted out Frank Sinatra's signature tune for a Columbus Day crowd at the Waldorf that included Sophia Loren.

"It was just a wonderful moment as a father to see her get up there like that," he said. "She had a phenomenal voice."

Born and raised in upstate Ossining, DioGuardi graduated from The Masters School in Dobbs Ferry then earned a political science degree from Duke.

She adds ads for Billboard and started a few of her own bands, including Platinum Weird with former Earth, Wind & Fire musician Dave Stewart.

She began to pen lyrics when labels wouldn't send her way to record and was soon turning out hits for others. She earned a reputation in the biz for being a "one of those people who walks in a room and everyone just gravitates to her," said Steven Vincent, a vice president at the Disney Channel, who's worked with DioGuardi on hits such as "Camp Rock," "Cheerish" and "Hannah Montana."

News that DioGuardi is joining "American Idol" thrilled stars with whom she worked.

"She is fully qualified to share her opinion with everyone," said former "SNY"er J.C. Chaves, who worked with DioGuardi on his upcoming album.

"She'll probably stand up to some of the things that Simon says," said "American Idol" host Ryan Seacrest.

"And I think that she will actually be really honest with the contestants, which is good."

With Nancy Dillon and Richard Huff
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Who's your 'Idol'?
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 CITY + FINAL
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by: Christina Kinon

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Life & Style

The Journal News

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NEWSDAY.COM

When she landed on the audition of her husband's eighth season, she landed a job for a good portion of the week. Her family's home in the Westchester County town of Rochelle, N.Y., is a quiet place, but she has a growing interest in the music scene, which she realized her husband shared.

"I'd always loved music, but I never knew how to do it," she said. "I didn't know how to write it." She wrote the first track and sent it to her husband, who called her "Carrie Underwood." She's a fan of the country singer and the musical "Idol" in town at the moment.

"I'd announced to my parents that I wanted to be a singer and they were not happy," she said. "They were like, 'What are you doing? This is a waste of time. You're going to be a singer? You're not a singer!'"

She decided to do it anyway. "I've been there for you," she said. "I know that will help you to know all these things you're doing. You're not doing it for me, you're doing it for you."

In 2007, she began a two-year stint working at Billboard magazine. When her husband's eighth season of "Idol" started, she was again in a musical mood. Although her singing career never took off, she became more confident and started working as a songwriter and producer.

Months in the auditioning for the show, she and her husband were working together on the show. She was working on the show, and she was working on the show.



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FLASH!

NEWSDAY.COM/CELEBS

New 'Idol' judge stays composed

BY VERNE GAY
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Here comes the new judge. "American Idol" yesterday named veteran songwriter **Kara DioGuardi** as a fourth judge, joining the three originals. To say this is one of the biggest changes in "Idol's" production formula over the years seems almost redundant, but here goes anyway: This is big.

Largely unknown to the public, DioGuardi, 37, is a songwriting star who has forged hits for (among others) **Christina Aguilera**, **Gwen Stefani**, **Celine Dion**, **Faith Hill**, **Santana** and **Pink**, and, per Fox, has worked for some ex-"Idols" as well, including **Carrie Underwood**, **Kelly Clarkson**, **Bo Bice**, **Clay Aiken** and **Taylor Hicks**. In addition, she had a brief run as a judge on ABC's short-lived "Idol" rip-off two summers ago — "The One," yanked due to low ratings.

Nonetheless, yesterday's appointment was a huge surprise, coming partway through the eighth season's audition process. During a call with writers, DioGuardi admitted that she may have been the most surprised of all, explaining that she "fell off a chair" when the show's production team called a few days ago to offer the job.

"I think they [the producers] were aware of me in the industry, though I'm maybe not a household name. They ['AI'] asked me to come in and we had a nice discussion and that's basically what happened. I've also worked with many of the Idols, at least six or seven ... and in the studio, I'm constantly giving my opinion [and] working with talent."

Any auditions with the other judges? None. "They added me and obviously this is a very successful show.

It's their choice to do what they want to do [but] I can't comment on why or what it means."

How would she describe her judging style? She said, "[I'm] honest, believe in what I believe in and am willing to fight for it, and I'm feisty."

In announcing the new judge — DioGuardi starts today in the New York rounds — show creator **Simon Fuller** said in a statement, "We are turning the heat up on Idol this year and are thrilled to welcome Kara to the judges' table. She is a smart, sassy lady, and one of America's most successful songwriters. We know she will bring a new level of energy and excitement to the show."

GETTY IMAGES PHOTO 2007
Kara DioGuardi has been judged a worthy "Idol" judge



