

'IDOL' PANEL GETS TUNE-UP
NEW JUDGE IRKS PAULA

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NEW YORK POST
SPORTS EXTRA
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'IDOL' PANEL GETS TUNE-UP

Tale of the tape

KARA DIOGUARDI	37	Age	43	PAULA ABDUL
New Rochelle, N.Y.	Home town	Los Angeles	Later	Los Angeles
Billboard mag.	Crowney	Later	Got	On-air criticism of contestants
Grammy-nominated	Professional	setback	yet	"second song" performed by assistant
US Daughter of	Simon Cowell	US Daughter of	Simon Cowell	Director Billy Wilder
Volunteers at Phoenix House rehab center	Extra-Curricular	Phoenix House	Accused of sleeping with "Idol" contestant	Phoenix House

New judge irks Paula

By DON KAPLAN and ALEX GINSBERG

"American Idol" will add top-selling, Grammy-nominated songwriter Kara DioGuardi to its notorious panel of judges beginning next year, the show announced yesterday.

"I'm gonna be a straight shooter, say it like I see it and try to help the contestants," said DioGuardi, 37, a native of New Rochelle. "I just plan on being honest and offering constructive criticism. I'll have my unique style."

DioGuardi, who attended Duke University before penning tunes for the likes of Celine Dion and Christina Aguilera, joins name-dropping Randy Jackson, loopy Paula Abdul and caustic Simon "Mr. Nasty" Cowell.

Although well known in the music industry, having won BMI's 2006 Pop Songwriter of the Year award and sold more than 300 million records, DioGuardi is still a relative unknown to the average "Idol" viewer.

"When I got the call, I thought they were calling the wrong person," DioGuardi said. "Next thing I know, I was on a plane to New York."

The move to a four-judge panel follows other changes at "Idol." Although still the top show in America, "Idol" has seen its ratings slip.

In recent years, contestants were permitted for the first time to play instruments on stage, and the age maximum was raised from 24 to 28.

The addition of DioGuardi raises the possibility of a 2-2 split - prompting a "Simon says" tiebreaker rule: Cowell's vote will carry the day.

The announcement prompted the unpredictable Abdul to call in to the syndicated radio program "Johnjay and Rich in the Morning" yesterday to voice her concerns.

Abdul welcomed DioGuardi, a longtime friend whose career she helped get started when the two collaborated on a Kylie Minogue song.

Abdul's spokesman, Jeff Ballard, dismissed said that DioGuardi's hiring was the first step in a plan to have Paula Abdul's "I'm gonna be a straight shooter" be said of the judges.

The show's producers tried to add five judges last August, but a fourth judge in 2002, but she left after only four days, citing her inability to dunk the hopes of talent-challenged youngsters.

DioGuardi is the son of former Westchester Congressman Joseph DioGuardi, now a spokesman for the Albanian American community.

DioGuardi said his daughter started singing seriously after he pushed her to it at the age of 12, at a 1983 Walkoff-America first stage he chaired.

"I think she'll be excellent, because Kara has always been a very good communicator," he said.

Additional reporting by David Li.

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The announcement prompted the unpredictable Abdul to call in to the syndicated radio program "Johnjay and Rich in the Morning" yesterday to voice her concerns.

"We're in our eighth season, and the producers want to try a change," Abdul told the Phoenix-based disc jockeys. "I'm excited, but I'm concerned about the audience and their acceptance of the changes. Time will tell."

Abdul welcomed DioGuardi, a longtime friend whose career she helped get started when the two collaborated on a Kylie Minogue song.

Abdul's spokesman, Jeff Ballard, dismissed talk that DioGuardi's hiring was the first step in a plan to boot Paula.

"It's coming from people who have nothing better to do than gossip," he said of the rumor.

The show's producers tried to add Hot 97 radio host Angie Martinez as a fourth judge in 2002, but she left after only four days, citing her inability to dash the hopes of talent-challenged youngsters.

DioGuardi is the son of former Westchester Congressman Joseph DioGuardi, now a spokesman for the Albanian-American community.

DioGuardi said his daughter started singing seriously after he pushed her to perform, at the age of 12, at a 1983 Waldorf-Astoria fund-raiser he chaired.

"I think she'll be excellent, because Kara has always been a very good communicator," he said. "She's polished."

Additional reporting by David K. Li