

# Killer Constantine

**P**erhaps best remembered for his lady-killer glances, leather jackets and dramatic stagings of songs like Queen's *Bohemian Rhapsody*, Constantine Maroulis finished a disappointing sixth during the fourth season of *American Idol*.

**But if the number of appearances on the pages of *People* magazine is any guide, Constantine's popularity today arguably eclipses some of those who supposedly finished first. And he hasn't even released his first record yet.**

**What does *this* Idol understand about cultivating fan loyalty that others apparently don't? We caught up with Constantine in the midst of his successful twelve-week run on Broadway in *The Wedding Singer*, and he offered his insights.**

## What did you learn about fan loyalty when you were on *American Idol*?

I tried to pick up on what the fans were interested in and how they were viewing me. My brother and I would liaise every day. He'd be surfing the 'net and getting the vibe of what was out there. I'd try to feed my fans just enough of what they wanted to keep them really, really interested.

For example, fans were teasing me about how I was this modern-day David Cassidy type. For the moms it was like a blast into the past of the '70s. They just remembered what it was like when they were kids and I gave them sort of that feeling. So I took the piss out of them and did a *Partridge Family* song on the show.

## The show's judges didn't seem to appreciate it, though.

They wanted to market me as this bad, New York rocker from this metal band from Brooklyn. I went with that in the beginning. I had my leather jackets on — and I'm into that, that's what I do.

But I maybe tried to be a little too "rock" in the beginning and I was afraid to stray from that because subconsciously I thought that if I showed the fans that I could really, really sing, then people wouldn't think I was as "rock."

I was also trying to market my band in the back of my head and trying to play both cards the whole time. A part of me wishes I went out there and started singing songs like *Bohemian Rhapsody* from the beginning instead of mixing things up by crooning some of the time so people would know that I could really sing.

## Who exactly are your fans?

They are loyal, amazingly patient, and predominantly female. They range from teenagers to grandmothers and everything in between. They are housewives, with kids in school, feeling like they got their groove back. They're maybe feeling like a teenager again because they found a new sorority of girlfriends who believe in me and have a sort of maternal vibe about my personality and my career.

They look out for me, and they want to see me do very well. They know how hard I work, and they know what sort of family I'm from. They know I'm an educated man and they know I'm for real. They know I'm not perfect, but that I am a good role model for kids because I care about their futures.

## When your fans didn't come through and you were voted off, what did you learn?

I made the mistake of picking this really popular rock song that I didn't know that well. I didn't know it in my *heart*. That's what my fans came to realize with me... that I really interpreted the lyric and sang from my heart and communicated with them. I couldn't do that with this song.

But I was doing really well at that point on the show. I had friends on the inside who were telling me that my votes were off the charts. I thought — *everyone* thought — I was sailing into the finals, and my fans just didn't vote that night because they thought they didn't need to.

## **An American Idol on the vagaries of fan loyalty and life after 30 million viewers.**

Ultimately, I picked the wrong song, and I didn't trigger everyone to vote for me like crazy like they normally would because they thought, "well, it's not his best performance, but he'll be fine." And then I was gone.

### **You don't think that the show is rigged.**

I can't say that it's rigged because that would just put too much at risk to have any kind of foul play. We're talking about millions and millions of dollars in advertising from companies like Ford and Coca-Cola. I think at the end of the day, they don't really care who wins or loses because they make their money no matter what happens. And I am totally cool with that.

### **How do you pursue both Broadway and pop stardom without confusing your fans?**

I'm still trying to figure that out! It's definitely a process. I refuse to give up my habits—I want to sing, I want to dance, I want to act and I want to direct plays. I want to do television and I want to develop television shows. I want to continue to develop my own record company and put out my own records.

I want to be able to dictate what happens to "Constantine" and build it into more of a household name than it already is. Certainly it's difficult and it's taken me some time to put the right sort of things together. I just try to surround myself with great people and do great work.

### **Why do great people want to work with you?**

I think people gravitate towards me because I can communicate well with them. I know people. I grew up in New York and New Jersey and I have a street sense about me. I come from a good family. My grandparents moved here as Greek immigrants with nothing and they built a small empire from a diner cart in Brooklyn.



It's in my blood. I wake up and I think of new ways to push my own craft and I don't wait for people to call me for a job. I go out and find work. I might not be starring in a big movie right now and I don't have the number-one song on the radio yet. But I will. I have songs that could choke an elephant, and I'm just waiting for the right time to get them out, and to do the projects that I want to do.

### **What does your new music say to your fans?**

You know, I grew up in a very ethnic family and I want to portray that. People know that I'm for real. More and more people are starting to realize that. I'm about the work. I have the chops, and I have a great fan base. Give me a chance, and I'll do the job.

### **And now you're working your way back up, on the club circuit.**

Yes, and these rooms want me there because they know that my band kills and that the show is going to kill. And they know that next time around there's going to be twice as many people there because word spreads. When the songs really start getting out there, and hit the radio, it's going to be crazy. I'm confident of that. ■