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Savannah Church – American Idol Contestant 2021

Posted on March 29, 2021 (<https://bluegrasstoday.com/savannah-church-american-idol-contestant-2021/>) By Sandy Hatley (<https://Bluegrasstoday.com/Author/Sandyhatley/>)



Bluegrass singers are well represented in this season's *American Idol* competition. One of those contestants is **Savannah Church** (<https://www.facebook.com/thesavannahchurch>), formerly of the twin sister duo, The Church Sisters.

Born and raised in Danville, VA, Savannah started singing around age five.

"My mom sang around the house all the time. It was beautiful. I asked her, 'How do you do that?' I started listening to country greats."

At age nine, Savannah enrolled in her first talent competition, called WAKG Rising Stars, sponsored by a local radio station. Unfortunately, she didn't make the cut.

A year later, her fraternal twin sister, Sarah, decided to get involved.

"Sarah said, 'Why don't we try something?' We started singing a song from the Disney Channel. Sarah has a natural ability and can hear harmony parts. We sang for mom in the car and she was flabbergasted."

Savannah auditioned for the same talent show, but this time with Sarah by her side. They not only got to compete, they won for their age division.

"Things just took off after that. Our stepdad played guitar, and we started singing at fairs, festivals, and churches."

Over the years, the sisters played the Nashville icons like the Ryman Auditorium and the Station Inn. They recorded for Carl Jackson's Grammy-winning *Orthophonic Joy* project, and sang backup for Eric Church and Hank Williams, Jr. on the CMAs. They were featured on the TV shows, *Larry's Country Diner*

and *Country's Family Reunion*. Promoting Virginia tourism, they traveled to London and played the Underground Club with the Virginia Luthiers.

As the girls matured and married (a week apart), they decided on different paths. Sarah wanted to take a break from music. Savannah sought it as a career. That decision did not include a nationally televised singing contest.

"*American Idol* was definitely not on my radar, but in 2020 COVID hit," the young vocalist stated. "Shows shut down. Producer Julian Raymond called and got me set up with a producer of the show. After a couple of Zoom meetings where I sang 3-4 times for different producers, I was selected to go for audition with the celebrity judges."

On October 13, Savannah flew to San Diego. She brought Sarah with her, and was grateful for her support.

"No matter what you go through in life, as a twin you're born with a best friend."

Due to the pandemic, strict guidelines were in place for the *American Idol* auditions. Once the twins arrived at the hotel, they were tested for COVID and ordered to remain in their room for the first full for day.

“Everything was in the hotel. They had us on lockdown trying to keep everyone safe. There was a lot of sitting and waiting. We had to be in the lobby everyday at 6:00 a.m. in our audition clothes. We waited three or four days.”

Wearing masks and socially distanced, Savannah did interviews and visited the social media room while she waited her turn to perform for Lionel Ritchie, Katy Perry, and Luke Bryan.

Finally, the south Virginia native’s turn came. She talked briefly with Ryan Secret, and stepped into the judges’ arena.

“I wasn’t nervous going in, but my heart was beating so fast when I came out. Before I sang, I talked about my background.”

With the show’s Phredley Brown accompanying her, Savannah performed two songs: *I’ll Always Remember Us This Way* from the movie, *A Star Is Born*, and *Ghost in This House*, Alison Krauss’ version.

The judges were intrigued. They asked who came with her, invited Sarah into the room, and encouraged her to sing. Savannah’s twin performed the same tune, *I’ll Always Remember Us This Way*.

“Lionel said she was super talented and tried to get her to audition. Sarah said no, that she was here to support her sister.”

With a golden ticket in hand, Savannah talked again with Secret as she exited, did more interviews capturing her reactions after being selected, and was filmed as she walked away. The whole audition experience lasted a week from start to finish. She headed to Hollywood the second week in December.

“It was a quick trip. I was only there three days and no one could come with me. I had a really good time, but it was very nerve-racking.”

The first level of the Hollywood competition was the genre challenge. Savannah selected country as did many other contestants.

“I was in line six or seven. They lined you up, and you walked out on stage and sang one at a time. I had to fight through nerves.”

The judges asked each competitor why they think they are the next *American Idol*.

“I said, ‘I believe if you work hard enough to get something, it will come to you.’ I also added a Reba quote, ‘You don’t have to be the best, you’ve just got to want it the most.’”

Then the young vocalist sang Miranda Lambert’s, *The House That Built Me*.

Once her line was called out, Savannah was cut for the competition.

“There wasn’t a lot of feedback. I was a little bit shocked, but I had no expectations so I wouldn’t be disappointed. I was happy with what I did. I was honored to just be included.

After you’re cut, you are sent on your way. Presley Barker and I went to the airport on the same bus.”

Savannah flew back home to Bluefield, WV, and re-joined her husband of five years, Zach Alvis, lead vocalist and mandolinist with **Chosen Road** (<http://www.chosenroadmusic.com>). The couple have just announced that they are expecting their first child in September.

Savannah isn’t giving up on music as a career. “I’m getting back to my Gospel roots.”

Currently, she is in the studio recording a bluegrass Gospel album.

“Tyler Roberson, Chosen Road’s banjoist, is helping me work on it. Zach is producing it. *In the Garden* is one of the songs. It’s one that I’ve never recorded and I’m anxious for people to hear my version.”

Look for much more music from Savannah Church. “*American Idol* is not the end of me,” she confidently stated.

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About the Author



Sandy Hatley

Sandy Chrisco Hatley is a free lance writer for several NC newspapers and Bluegrass Unlimited magazine. As a teenager, she picked banjo with an all girl band called the Happy Hollow String Band. Today, she plays dobro with her husband's band, the Hatley Family.

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