

2015 Top 12

XFACTOR 7





Big T

Tangaroa Te Tai – affectionately known as Big T – wowed the judges and the crowd at auditions with his stirring rendition of Stevie Wonder’s *Signed, Sealed, Delivered*.

He impressed the entire panel, particularly James Blunt, who declared: “You are the man who will win the Sony record deal.” The 22-year-old railway yard worker hasn’t looked back since.

Born and raised in New Zealand, Big T moved to Perth three years ago for work.

He now flies in/flies out to the Karratha mines. “It’s definitely tough work,” he says. “We work 12-hour days. It’s so humid; sometimes you struggle to breathe.”

He’s eager to trade in his uniform and make music his life. “I want to be the guy who packs arenas. I want a record deal and a good, solid fan base. I’ve been dreaming about this for a long time.”

Big T started singing seriously at 13, when he would travel around Australia performing with a group promoting the prevention of suicide and family violence. “I hold that stuff pretty close to my heart. If I can change one life, it would mean everything.”



Cyrus

Cyrus Villanueva only started singing a few months before his audition but he struck a big chord with the judges following his brilliant acoustic performance of The Weeknd’s *Earned It*.

Guy Sebastian proclaimed: “You’re exactly what we’re looking for on this show.”

Hailing from Wollongong, NSW, the 19-year-old is fresh out of high school and studying graphic design at university.

Music is in his genes. His father is a professional entertainer as is his brother. “Because dad is a musician, I grew up listening to jazz and classical music; all the old soul, pop. That’s the music I love.”

The self-taught guitarist counts Nat King Cole, Stevie Wonder, Michael Jackson and Ray Charles as his biggest musical influences.

In his spare time, he performs gigs in bars, cafes and at weddings. Now he’s keen to make music his number one priority. “Music is a passion of mine. I want to pursue what I love doing. That’s the dream.”



Jimmy Davis

When Jimmy Davis heard about The X Factor auditions, he jumped in his Kombi van and made the road trip from his hometown in Cooran, north of Brisbane, to Sydney.

It was worth it as his cover of The Beatles’ *Oh! Darling* blew the judges away. “You took the song and made it your own,” Chris Isaak raved.

His mother Robyn is his biggest supporter. She says, “He would wake up singing.”

The 21-year-old mastered the music rhythm video game Guitar Hero before deciding to pick up the real thing at 14. “I’d play all the buttons and get really high scores. I got to the point where I thought, ‘Why am I putting so much work into Guitar Hero when I could be playing the real thing?’”

Since then, he’s been performing at gigs and open mic nights. His dream is to play at sold-out music festivals around the world.

“I’ve been going to festivals since I was 14. I want to be the person singing out to the masses. I want to be playing shows with people singing my songs and hopefully making someone’s life better.”



Michaela Baranov

Michaela Baranov won hearts around the country when she performed Sia's *My Love* at auditions.

The song was dedicated to her late father Paul, who lost his battle with cancer only six days before. "I was still in shock," she said. "It's getting harder as time has gone on because I've realised I'm never going to see him again."

She says her father was her biggest supporter. "He loved hearing me sing. He always said I'm going to make it."

Despite chronic ear problems and trouble hearing, the 24-year-old was born with a determination to succeed.

After winning the ACMF National Songwriting Competition in 2007, she travelled overseas in her early 20s to further her career.

A six-week trip turned into three years. She performed shows in America, France, Greece and Dubai, where she secured a three-month contract at the Waldorf Astoria doing three 40-minute sets, six nights a week.

The Madonna, Taylor Swift and Christina Aguilera fan hopes to emulate the career of her idols. "I want to be performing in stadiums and sell out arenas around the world. My goals keep getting bigger and bigger. They seem reachable now because of this show."



Mahalia Simpson

Mahalia Simpson captivated the judges and the country with her enchanting audition performance of Corinne Bailey Rae's *Like A Star*.

Guy Sebastian said: "If I was the head of a record label and you came in, I would sign you on the spot."

Named after gospel singer Mahalia Jackson, the shy 22-year-old is the youngest of eight kids, all of whom can sing. "I'm half-Samoan, half-Kiwi. In the island culture, a lot of people are naturally gifted."

Being from a big family, Mahalia struggled to be heard. "It was really hard for me to find my voice and speak up."

She ventured to Australia from Christchurch, New Zealand, earlier this year with just a guitar and a carry-on bag of clothes. "I didn't have enough money to pay for luggage," she says.

She settled in Brisbane, earning money as a barista, before deciding to audition for the show. "I came into the competition because I knew it was going to be personal growth for me and I would learn a lot from it."

Inspired by the likes of India Arie and Lauryn Hill, Mahalia dreams of one day being at the Grammy Awards. "That's the big dream. But that's miles away. It sounds cheesy, but I just want to be happy."



Georgia Denton

Georgia Denton dazzled at the auditions with a powerful voice that belies her 15 years.

Singing Kelly Clarkson's *Beautiful Disaster*, her performance rendered the judges speechless. "You will leave this being a name to remember," James Blunt said.

Georgia's voice is a natural gift having not had any formal training other than a few singing lessons.

"I started singing as soon as I could talk. When I was little I used to watch *The X Factor*. I told mum I wanted to be on that stage. I just want to share my music and be able to sing all the time."

Her musical influences include Beyonce and R&B legend Etta James. "I love the roughness in her voice."

The Year 10 student moved to Melbourne from the UK with her family seven years ago. It's home for them and her dog and two horses.

If it wasn't for music, Georgia says she'd pursue a career in veterinary science. But for now she has her sights set firmly on the prize. "Being able to make a living or career out of music would be amazing. Being in the car and hearing myself on the radio would be awesome!"



In Stereo

The 14-year-old trio have set teenage hearts aflutter ever since they took to the stage at auditions with Taylor Swift's *Style*.

The performance has already attracted over two million views on Facebook and garnered comparisons to One Direction. Even James Blunt predicted: "There are going to be posters of you on girls' bedrooms very soon."

Chris, Ethan and Jakob first met as solo performers in Sydney. After becoming good friends, they decided to combine their talents and form a group about a year ago. "We all have a passion for music so we thought why don't we make a cool little band and perform together," Ethan says.

Music runs in their respective families. Chris' father is a musician; Ethan's grandfather was musically inclined and Jakob's sister performs in her own band.

Collectively they look up to the likes of Ed Sheeran, Justin Timberlake, Bruno Mars and 5SOS.

While they're only still in Year 9 at school, the boys have big plans for their future. "The dream is gigging to sell-out crowds and releasing successful records," says Jakob.

Ethan adds: "To have a concert where everyone knows the lyrics and they sing along to every single word with you would be the ultimate."



Jess & Matt

Jess & Matt have been making sweet music together for the last 12 months.

A couple on stage and off, they impressed at auditions with their acoustic version of Vance Joy's *Georgia*. "Your voices complement each other so beautifully," Guy told them.

The 24-year-olds started out as solo artists but became a duo a year ago. "We had this one gig together and the venue really liked us so they asked the agency if they could have Jess & Matt," Jess says.

Matt laughs: "Saving petrol and using the one car was a big thing!"

The Sydney lovebirds have been slogging it out on the pubs and clubs circuit for the last five years. They saw The X Factor as an opportunity to share their music with a wider audience. "The dream is to be playing to millions of people and having people know your songs. The X Factor is a great platform for that."

Jess grew up listening to 70s folk music from the likes of James Taylor and Carole King while Matt was influenced by blues and R&B legends such as Stevie Wonder.

Being a couple will work in their favour according to Jess. "We know each other inside out and have each other as support through the competition."



The Fisher Boys

Their synchronised moves and killer harmonies have already garnered comparisons to the legendary Jackson 5. "I was looking to see if there was a Jermaine Jackson [among you] but it's all Michael's," Chris Isaak said.

The Fisher Boys were raised in Australia by their New Zealand born parents, both professional musicians.

Conrad, 17, still attends high school; Joshua, 19, works as an educator's assistant; while Brandford, 18, and Tyler, 23, work as tradies when they're not making music.

They all started singing music and learning musical instruments at a very early age. "We grew up singing and playing music together in the same house. It wasn't hard getting a rehearsal in."

The band already have a huge social following after their dad posted one of their jam sessions on YouTube. "It got a bunch of shares and likes," Joshua said.

They describe themselves more as mates than brothers. "Our hope is to be the biggest band out and have a career like the Red Hot Chili Peppers," Tyler says.

"They had a number one song and album the year I was born and then again when I was in Year 11. We want to be a sick band that has that kind of longevity."



Louise Adams

South Australia's Louise Adams describes herself as a late bloomer in the music industry.

"I didn't sing in front of too many people until I was 25, 26," she says. "I still recall the look of shock on my parents faces when I first picked up the guitar and sang a song."

The 31-year-old enthralled at auditions with a captivating version of Nina Simone's *Feeling Good*. "It was outstanding yet totally understated," Dannii said.

Before finding music, Louise worked as a lawyer. Her style is an eclectic blend of blues, rock, soul and folk. Blessed with a strong and gravelly voice, she's developed a flair for writing original music and lyrics.

A regular on the festival circuit, she's played successful shows in Melbourne, Bendigo, Adelaide, Castlemaine, Mount Gambier, the UK, South America and New York.

She's also been the front woman of Louise and the Tornados, who've enjoyed sell-out shows at the Adelaide Fringe Festival and supported the likes of Jeff Lang, Mia Dyson and The Backsliders.

The married mum of one-year-old daughter Frankie is looking forward to sharing her unique style and sound with Australia. "I saw The X Factor as a great opportunity to work with amazing folk in the industry and maybe score a record deal. I love a challenge and believe you have to give things a go!"



Natalie Conway

Natalie Conway had the audience and judges jumping to their feet when she sung Rozalla's 1992 hit *Everybody's Free* at auditions. "You absolutely smashed that," Dannii said.

The 33-year-old nearly missed her once-in-a-lifetime audition after sleeping through her alarm. And fear was something that had held her back from trying out for the show in previous years. "I was always so shy and intimidated by the idea," she says.

The Sydney-sider comes from a family of academics and fell into music by accident. She was studying teaching at university when she randomly scored a role in a musical. "It opened an avenue for me to learn to sing at gigs."

With a recognisable sultry tone, Natalie has sung both locally and internationally over the past five years. Classically trained, Natalie branched into jazz under the guidance of renowned vocal coach/jazz singer, Joy Yates, from the Sydney Conservatorium of Music.

From there, she developed a love for soul, R&B and funk music, eventually branching into pop. She's worked with a number of different bands and performed live with some of the country's best DJs.

It's been a long road to here and Natalie is determined to succeed. "They say when you're looking back at your life, you always regret the things you didn't do. I want to be able to look back and say, 'I did it!'"



Dan Hamill

Dan Hamill was crowned the new 'King of Swing' at auditions following his swing-pop version of Michael Jackson's *The Way You Make Me Feel*. "What a performer," Chris Isaak said afterwards. "That's my definition of The X Factor right there."

Hailing from Perth, Dan won the West Australian Young Performer of the Year in 2002 and 2003. The 30-year-old honed his craft at WAAPA (Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts), embarking on a Diploma of Contemporary Voice in 2003 and a Bachelor in Music Theatre in 2006.

In 2004, aged 18, Dan was a Top 10 finalist in Channel Seven's *Popstars Live*. The next year he took out second place in the Music Oz Australian Songwriting Awards in the R&B category.

Dan has appeared in films as well as TV with guest roles in *City Homicide*, *Neighbours* and *The Doctor Blake Mysteries*. He's no stranger to the stage having starred as Curly in *Oklahoma* opposite music theatre legend Jill Perryman and *West Side Story*.

The Melbourne-based singer now performs with his group the Dan Hamill Band. "If Michael Buble and Justin Timberlake had a love child, it would be me."

After treading the boards for so long, he's ready for the big time. "I would love a career where I'm doing an album, then a tour, film or TV show. I've been waiting my whole life to show what I've got."