

## **“Echoes of the Heart”**

*Reflections on Life and Community Living*

Contact Dr. Frantz on the web at [www.mlchurch.com](http://www.mlchurch.com)

**American Idol and the American dream.** From the start, I have to come clean: I’m a huge *American Idol* fan. Furthermore, to be truthful, there’s much that I find appealing in America’s recent fascination with *reality TV*.

I’ve always been drawn to the arts, particularly dance, instrumental music and popular singing. To see aspiring participants—bursting with fresh energy and hope—throwing their spirit into dance, music and song, is for me uplifting. It’s *life-giving*.

*American Idol* is my favorite. But I also like *Dancing with the Stars* and *You’re the One That I Want* (finding a winning *Danny* and *Sandy* for a Broadway production of *Grease*).

Due to time constraints, my spouse tapes the shows and we enjoy them together (fast-forwarding through commercials and idle banter) before going to bed at night.

For me personally, the current bevy of *American Idol* prospects is particularly gifted. LaKisha’s voice is absolutely *the bomb*, to use the popular jargon. As *Idol* judge Randy Jackson says, *she’s got some major pipes*. It’s like, *hello, Whitney Houston, move over*.

But Melinda, too, is superb (already an outstanding performer)—very likely the odds-on favorite at this point. And then there’s seventeen year-old Jordin. Can she sing, or what? And what poise and presence at such a young age!

**Watching the unfolding.** However, what’s both fun and delightful with *American Idol* is watching the evolution—the unfolding and development—of the young aspirants along the way (Indeed, many of them are truly *diamonds in the rough*). With some of them, each week there’s a new sense of presence and an elevated confidence.

Noting that a great number of the final ten come from ordinary backgrounds (some even locked into situations of considerable *uphill* struggle) makes their ascendancy into the magical world of celebrity status all the more striking.

It’s like, suddenly, almost over night, they have this fame and renown. Talk about the American dream: rising up from obscurity, overcoming all odds, catching a break and all the rest. Beyond all the glitter and financial success, *American Idol* is all about hope. It’s about dreams being realized before our admiring eyes.

The fact that *American Idol* produces so many success stories (i.e., recent *Idol* contestant Jennifer Hudson winning the Academy Award for *best supporting actress*) makes us wonder about the amount of talent that goes undiscovered or unrecognized in our communities. It makes us wonder, too, about the sheer random nature of becoming a star (how much is it really about *right time/ right place?*).

**Holding onto hope.** Into its sixth year now, it seems like *Idol* offers a *leveling of the playing field* opportunity. If you have talent, you can *get a shot*. You can realize your potential, live out your dream; you can pull yourself up by your bootstraps to a successful career as a pop artist.

Always, it warms the heart to see fresh talent emerge and have its day in the sun. Hope is a powerful force. Hope that says, *hey, we're not totally defined by the constraints of yesterday*. Hope that believes that—always—we're meant for something more.

Something more than mediocrity. Something more than one more day of *going through the motions*. Something more than forever being held back, never able to soar with the eagles and catch the wind of our possibilities.

The *Idol* competition itself is an arduous *sorting out*. It's tough—the weekly pressure to perform at your best, the sometimes-biting feedback from the judges. And always, the day after the singing, when America has voted and one contestant is sent home.

But through it all, the hope lives on. When single-mother, LaKisha belts out another pop song, and one-time *back up*, Melinda (how could she ever have been a *back up*?) puts her touch on another stellar rendition of *whatever*, and young Jordin fills the stage once again with her blossoming magnetism and contagious warmth.

Sing on, *Idols*, and hold fast to your dreams. And may your *realized* hope spill over for all of us.