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[POP](#) Alejandro Aranda Changed 'American Idol.' Now, He's Ready to Make an Impact as Scarypoolparty: 'It's Okay to Be Yourself'



*American Idol* fans know Alejandro Aranda as the masterful guitar and piano player that came in second to Laine Hardy on Season 17. Less than four months after *Idol*'s May 19 finale, Aranda is already selling out 2000-person venues around the country under his artist name, Scarypoolparty. His instant success is proof that there's magic in the *Idol* machine -- but Aranda's may be the show's most authentic journey to date. Aranda's triumphs expand far beyond a TV program, though, which has already been proven with Scarypoolparty. The freshly 25-year-old signed to Hollywood Records shortly after *Idol* wrapped -- which he insists was nothing contractual from the show, as he's always aspired to sign a record deal -- and has officially released tracks titled "Tonight" and "Cholo Love." ("Out Loud" as well as two other songs titled "10 Years" and "Fading Away" have been available on streaming services since 2018). In June, Aranda sold out a small-club, 6-show acoustic tour in 15 minutes, shortly thereafter announcing a 30-date, major-market tour that is almost entirely sold out two months before its October launch. This month, Aranda made his [festival debut at Lollapalooza](#), and he just announced an appearance at Las Vegas' Life Is Beautiful festival next month.

Though *Idol* certainly gave Aranda a platform, his road to success essentially began with an Instagram message. In mid-2017, Aranda reached out to one of *his* idols, Dominican synth-rock singer-songwriter Twin Shadow, who almost immediately invited him to collaborate. Their friendship quickly turned into Aranda joining Twin Shadow on tour, during which Aranda would play his own backyard shows on off days. Following one Hollywood yard show, Aranda heard from an *Idol* agent, who asked if he'd like to do a screening audition.

"I did it on a whim, and I didn't like it," Aranda admits. "I was like, 'This is so not me and not what I've worked for.' I was already a musician, and I [was] trying to keep that headspace." But he found a compromise. "I was like, 'As long as I can do my own songs, I'm down.'"

He advanced to the official audition for judges Katy Perry, Luke Bryan and Lionel Richie in Los Angeles, where he did just that. After blowing all three judges away with his mesmerizing, quick-fingered guitar picking on an original song called "Out Loud," Aranda moved to piano, only to wow with another original, titled "Cholo Love."

When Perry asked what he feels is special about himself, Aranda replied, "I don't really think I'm special, I think I'm just hard-working." Right after that, Richie summed up the appeal of Aranda's humble approach: "You have such a career, and the fact that you don't know it makes it even more special."

Audiences agreed. Aranda quickly began an Internet frenzy, and his audition is now up to 14 million YouTube views (as of Aug. 22) -- 8.5 million more than any other Season 17 contestant's audition.

As Aranda told Perry, Bryan and Richie in his audition, he's self-taught after picking up music in his early 20s, and as a result, he's always been nervous about singing. But one thing that didn't dawn on him upon auditioning for *Idol* is the instant attention he'd receive. "I'm kind of antisocial when it comes to online stuff," he admits. "I only had a few followers, so to go from that to, boom, 100,000 people trying to message [me]... I was excited that my songs were being heard, but when you have that many people already trying to get to know you, in a sense, it's kind of scary."

Once he got further along in the competition, that uneasiness only increased as he also dealt with the stage fright that comes with a national television show -- much less, the number of cameras that were on him at all times. Aranda commends the *Idol* staff for knowing exactly how to handle those kind of nerves.

“There were times when I was telling the producers, 'I want to get off the show,' because I had such anxiety and panic attacks all the time,” he recalls. “A lot of people on the show were very kind, saying, 'We're just trying to benefit whatever you're trying to convey.'” But the singer-songwriter was more trying to convince himself that he was worthy of being there than anyone watching: “I was trying to prove to myself that it's okay to be an artist, and it's okay to sing your own songs.”

Ironically, those uneasy feelings are what inspired Aranda to write songs in the first place. “That’s what helps me get through things I’ve never felt before,” he says. “I wrote songs that had to deal with anxiety and how I felt.”

Aranda performed seven of his own songs during his *Idol* run, strictly sticking to originals for the finale. While his performances bore witness to the fact that he was getting more comfortable with being in the spotlight, Perry felt Aranda made a lasting impact with his authenticity. “Some would say, in the past, *American Idol*, it’s been a bit of a karaoke show,” [she told Aranda](#) on the finale. “Not anymore. When people like you come on, you bring original music, you bring artistry, and you make the stakes even higher.”

Aranda now recognizes what it meant for *Idol* to foster his artistry. “It was a really awesome time for me to be on it,” he says. “I think if it was a few years back when it was really popular, that shit wouldn't even go down.”

Though all of the songs Aranda performed on *Idol* were airy, acoustic- or piano-based tunes, Aranda insists he doesn't identify with a certain style or genre. He grew up on hardcore punk, and cites alternative rock figures like Thom Yorke of Radiohead and Trent Reznor of Nine Inch Nails as major inspirations, but upon picking up piano at 20 years old, he also dove deep into the works of Chopin, Bach and Mozart. With or without *Idol*, Aranda acknowledges that today's less genre-specific musical landscape adds another layer of divine timing to his blossoming career.

“That's a great place to be as an artist, where you're happy creating music and you have an environment that's accepting of it,” he says. “I just want to create whatever I feel like I can create, and presenting it in a way that makes people [think], ‘Oh, it's ok to make classical music and incorporate distorted guitar. There's no boundaries.’”

Aranda's Lollapalooza set was indicative of his desire for versatility. Now with a full band in tow (including Mutemath's Darren King on the drums), Aranda began with a couple thrashing, electric guitar-heavy songs before breaking out his acoustic guitar for tracks like "Out Loud" and "Tonight," and closing with his epic piano display on "Cholo Love." "It was a stepping stone into saying, like, 'Yeah, this is exactly where I need to be playing live music and presenting music my way,'" he says.

The way Aranda has presented his music so far has clearly resonated, and he's eager for fans to hear more of what he has created. In the meantime, he's sharing snippets of what's in store on [his Instagram](#). Whether or not his upcoming material lands, he's grateful for what music has done for him so far -- and hopeful for what it may be able to do for others in return. "It took me really getting out of my comfort zone to show other people to try things and be yourself -- be an artist and make your own songs, and not be ashamed of them," Aranda says. "[Thoughts] still seep into my brain, like, 'I'm not worth anything.' But in the end, if I'm creating music and I have a platform to be myself -- and if people can see that it's okay to be themselves -- then I'm going to try my best to do that."