

# GRAND SAM!

The powerhouse singer who won 'American Idol' on Sunday hails from Harlem and got her start singing on the subway

By **CHUCK ARNOLD**

**I**T'S been about 37 hours since Harlem's Just Sam was crowned the new American Idol, and the 21-year-old former subway busker is still getting used to her new title.

"This is definitely unexpected," Just Sam tells The Post from the West Hollywood apartment where she's been on lockdown. "It's only been one day, so . . . it's been wild."

The first LGBTQ "Idol" champ, whose real name is Samantha Diaz, was raised by her grandmother in Manhattan's Frederick Douglass Houses, where residents held a viewing party for the show's finale.

But because of coronavirus concerns, Just Sam was unable to fly back to be with her grandmother after her victory.

"I plan on flying back out there and quarantining for 14 days," she says. "And then I'll go check in with Grandma. And I might be staying for a couple weeks — just because she told me that she misses me."

Just Sam was adopted — along with her older half-sister Anabelle — by her father's mother, Elizabeth, at age 6 because her parents were not able to take care of her. But the musical spirit kept her going from a young age.

"When I was younger, and my grandmother had first adopted me and my sister, we used to put on little shows for her in the house," she says.

When she got to middle school — at Global Scholars Academy — a teacher noticed she had something special when she sang Alicia Keys' "Un-thinkable (I'm Ready)" for an audition. "My teacher in sixth grade told me that my voice gave him chills when I was auditioning for a talent show," she says. "And I had never heard that before that day . . . So from that



Born Samantha Diaz, her stage name Just Sam emerged in high school when she says she didn't fit any mold. "I wasn't a girl, not a boy, but both. And I'm like . . . Just Sam!"