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A little 'Idol' chatter with makeup artist Mezhgan Hussainy

By Sandra Barrera
Staff Writer

Whenever she's applying makeup to the face of potentially the next "American Idol," Mezhgan Hussainy is overcome with the urge to pinch herself.

"This is huge," she says. But this is no dream. The 35-year-old makeup artist from Sherman Oaks, who goes by her first name (pronounced mish-gone) and recently launched her own Me by Mezhgan Cosmetics line, has been transforming ordinary contestants into superstars since Season 2 of the hit Fox reality competition, which crowns its seventh "Idol" on Wednesday night.

And she's seen just about every faux pas walk through the audition door: no makeup, too much makeup, not enough makeup.

"There has to be a balance," Mezhgan says. "If you're going to go dramatic on the eyes, you've got to be a little more subtle on the lips, and vice versa. There's a way of looking fresh and clean and groomed without people paying attention to your makeup."

She's the expert — even if she only stumbled into makeup by accident, she says, thanks to her parents' decision to flee war-torn Afghanistan in 1982 so that she and her brothers could have a better life.



Mezhgan Hussainy has been working with "American Idol" contestants since Season 2.

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AMERICAN IDOL

> **What:** The two-night season finale pits baby-faced crooner David Archuleta against scruffy alt-rocker David Cook.

> **When:** 8 p.m. Tuesday; 9 p.m. Wednesday.

> **Where:** Fox.

You were 8 when your family fled Afghanistan, which at the time had been under Soviet occupation since 1979. Do you have any memories of what life was like during that time?

I remember hearing a loud explosion once in the middle of the night. Our whole house shook and the windows rattled. Jets were flying overhead. A house down the street had blown up or had been bombed, I don't really know which. But I remember being scared.

And so your family crossed the mountains into Peshawar, Pakistan, on foot?

Sometimes we came to an area where there were donkeys or horses. But I would say that at least 90 percent of the time we were on foot. We would walk when it was dark and as soon as it would start getting light, we would hide out until it was safe to start walking again because we didn't want to be seen by helicopters or planes.

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Thank God, we made it to Pakistan. We were really lucky to only be there for 10 months and be able to come to the United States and get a start on life.

How did you get involved in makeup?

I was going to dental school to become a hygienist, and I became friends with this girl ... who worked at Robinsons-May behind the counter for Origins. She told me there was an opening ... so, long story short ... I became one of the top beauty advisers for Lancome. I had never worked in makeup before. But from

there I got recruited by Estee Lauder at Bloomingdale's, and from Bloomingdale's I got recruited by Christian Dior as a national makeup artist who traveled to stores for big events. And then I got my first show, and that was "To Tell the Truth" with John O'Hurley.

And now you're the head makeup artist on "American Idol." Would you talk about some of the looks you've created?

With Carrie Underwood, I couldn't go wrong. She's your all-American beauty. I kept her very natural because she doesn't need a lot. Fantasia, on the other hand ... I went up to her and told her to stop

plucking her eyebrows. She had such a habit of plucking from the arch out, and she would pluck it so thin that it almost looked like she was shaving it off. But she listened. And by the end of the season it was like a huge transformation in how groomed and elegant and beautiful she looked.

How do the guys respond to getting made up?

The first two seasons they were like, "Do I really need makeup? Am I going to look like a girl?" But this season: Like, David Cook loves the Luminous (Me) foundation from my collection because it doesn't look like he's wearing anything. His skin looks perfect. That's why I have a lot of men clients, because they love the way I make them look. On camera, they

always wear foundation, concealer, powder, bronzer, some more than others, but I balance it out so that it doesn't look like they're wearing anything at all. Simon (Cowell) wears everything but you would never know it. With Randy (Jackson), it's the same thing.

Do you have anything special planned for the season finale?

I do. Usually I start coming up with ideas when there are girls involved. But this time it's just two Davids. So, we might rock it out a bit. We might change it up. I'm thinking about doing something fun with David Cook but not until I see what he'll be singing.

Who knew there was so much involved with makeup?

I know. A lot goes into it.

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