

'North Of Normal'

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Yankton Native Discusses 'American Idol' Experience, Her New Album And Her Future



Yankton native Rebecca Culhane competed on "American Idol" last winter and has just released her new album, "North of Normal." The singer/songwriter currently lives in Mitchell with her husband and two children. (Courtesy photo)

Since competing on "American Idol" last winter, Yankton native Rebecca Culhane has not stopped shooting for the stars.

Her new album, "North of Normal," was released on iTunes and Amazon.com earlier this month. Recorded in Lincoln, Neb., at Sad-Son Music Group, the album reached No. 38 in the Singer/Songwriter category at iTunes upon its release.

"I've had so much support and amazing feedback," Culhane told the *Press & Dakotan* during a recent phone interview. "On the first day, when it reached No. 38 on the iTunes Singer/Songwriter chart, it was a pretty proud moment."

She said the album title refers to "getting out there, doing something different and shooting for the stars."

The genesis of the project began well in advance of her being a contestant on "American Idol." Because of contractual obligations with the entertainment franchise, this was the earliest she was able to release the album, which is her second.

"After that first album, I decided I wanted to go in a completely different direction (from the R&B sound I had been doing)," Culhane said. "I immediately started writing for my second album, which began about three years ago. I wanted more of an indie pop sound. I always explain it as minimal and organic, because I really don't know what genre I am."

Writing for the album continued for about a year, and it was then recorded over two years.

"We kind of had it finished, and I would have liked to have released it," Culhane said. "But when 'American Idol' came along, I had contractual obligations, so I wasn't able to release anything until three months after the finale aired. It was actually good, because I continued to write through that process and even recorded a few more songs that wouldn't have otherwise been on the album."

She was among 200 contestants selected to compete on 'American Idol' out of 39,000 My-Space submissions. The online finalists joined 200 more contestants that had tried out in Los Angeles. Culhane made it to the final 20 among those 400 contestants.

"Los Angeles was the last city, so I didn't have any time to prepare at all," she said. "I basically went home, had a few weeks to rest and then went back to Los Angeles."

Because her elimination wasn't televised, Culhane said many people don't know why she got cut from the competition.

"It's kind of a funny story because my friend had been trying to introduce me to (the music of Bruno Mars)," she stated, adding that she never got around to checking out the artist. "I got to group night, and my group's song happened to be Bruno Mars' 'Grenade.' I was the only one in the group who didn't know the song. I was kicking myself for not listening to my friend."

The group got the song assignment at 9:30 p.m. and stayed up all night to arrange the vocals and choreograph it.

"By the time we had the audition, I was a zombie," Culhane said. "I couldn't function. I got in front of (the 'American Idol' judges) and I didn't have the lyrics, so I couldn't audition. I just kind of stood there and knew my time was up. I was OK with that. That kind of stuff happens. It was still a fun experience."

Upon returning from Los Angeles, Culhane decided to record some new songs, as well as work on the sound of some of the tracks recorded previously.

"When you're writing your own music and you have a vision for how it sounds, you have to have it a certain way. It's very personal," she stated. "I recorded 12 songs in 12 days. At that point, it had been so long that I had everything figured out. I knew I didn't have a lot of time, but I think it worked out well."

Culhane thought about auditioning for "American Idol" again this year but ultimately decided to take a break to pursue some acting opportunities. She has acted in six commercials that have been aired in the Midwest, and one song from her new album, "Outstanding," has been featured in a commercial for Sanford Health.

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