

## LOCAL NEWS

# Tina Turner-like attitude helps local singer survive

## Deanna Johnston still vying to be lead singer of INXS

By Emily Sangster  
For The Whig-Standard

**D**EANNA JOHNSTON CAN STILL CALL herself a rock star.

Two weeks into the CBS reality TV show *Rock Star: INXS*, the 36-year-old Glenburnie native has turned out three solid performances that kept her in the competition to be the next lead singer for Australian supergroup INXS.

The band is seeking a successor to former frontman Michael Hutchence, who died in 1997.

Last week, Johnston earned high praise for her renditions of Janis Joplin's *Piece of my Heart* and The Clash's *Should I Stay or Should I Go*.

This week, she hit a slight hurdle when the show judges panned her performance of REM's *The One I Love*, saying it strayed too much from the song's original soft vibe.

But viewer votes were in her favour, sparing her from the nerve-wracking experience of performing an INXS song for the band, who make the final decision on elimination.

Johnston said she was happy with her performance.

"I didn't initially feel the song," she said. "But I think I ended up putting my stamp on it."

Other contestants have presented a mix of upbeat and low-key songs to



**JOHNSTON:** Glenburnie native

demonstrate their range of abilities, but Johnston has stuck with hard, fast songs throughout the competition.

She said she upped her REM song's intensity at the end to showcase her powerful voice. Johnston admits she models her approach after the feisty Tina Turner.

"I've got to show what I can do on every song," she said. "You'd never see her [Turner] sing a song mellow all the way through."

So far, Johnston has found the performance schedule a challenge. The musicians get their song selections each Thursday from a list containing as many songs as there are contestants. The performers decide among themselves who will sing what.

Johnston said they've developed a

ranking system that usually gives every singer his or her first or second choice. Unfortunately, the system failed last week, when Johnston gave up Black Sabbath's *Paranoid* to a fellow contestant. Mostly, she gets songs that she knows and sings well.

What's more difficult, Johnston said, is the time frame. Between Thursday and the Sunday taping, contestants each get two half-hour sessions with the show's house band.

It's not a lot of time to put together a performance, but the band's experience helps.

"All these players have played with big acts: Christina Aguilera, Pink," she said. "They're solid. You never have to worry about them messing up, and they always have good ideas for your songs."

The contestants also attend weekly rock star workshops led by the show's co-host, guitarist Dave Navarro. This week, the session centred on image and style.

Not all the contestants enjoyed it — one dismissed it as "playing dressup" — but Johnston found the workshop fun, although punk and metal looks were under-represented among the "earthy rock star" clothing, she said.

"I've been a homeowner for the last three or four years and haven't had a chance to really shop," she laughed. "But when people bring you clothes to put on ... things can change."

**Rock Star: INXS** airs Mondays at 9:30 p.m., Tuesdays at 10 p.m., and Wednesdays at 9:30 p.m. on CH and CBS.