

# fastchat Kara DioGuardi



Heavens to Murgatroyd! Peta Murgatroyd is one of the new "Dancing" pros.

## Fresh feet on the dance floor

As any true-blue "Dancing With the Stars" fan knows, the biggest stars of "Dancing With the Stars" are the pros like **Derek Hough**, **Maksim Chmerkovskiy** and **Cheryl Burke**.

They win the crowns, whip the flab out of the neophytes and — in the process — have helped make "DWTS" one of the most-viewed television series in the world. But the 13th season, beginning Sept. 19, boast three newbies — a real crowd for a show that relies on the tried and true, season after season.

By way of a quick introduction, here they are:

### ■ PETA MURGATROYD

The New Zealander has been a backup dancer on the series. She has performed in the Aussie version of the show and has choreographed for Enrique Iglesias and New Kids on the Block.

### ■ VAL CHMERKOVSKIY

Maks' younger brother is a U.S. Amateur Latin champ. He has been on "DWTS," but not as a pro partner.

### ■ TRISTAN McMANUS

A native of Bray, Ireland, who has performed in Europe and the United Kingdom, including the stage version of the West End's "Dirty Dancing." He also was part of the dance touring show "Burn the Floor."

— VERNE GAY

**'A**merican Idol" may be about finding the next pop star, but it's almost as successful as a springboard to Broadway. In recent years, season 6 champ Jordin Sparks reached new heights in "In the Heights," "Grease" was the word for season 5 winner Taylor Hicks, and season 3 "Idol" Fantasia earned raves for "The Color Purple." Season 4 finalist Constantine Maroulis even scored a Tony nomination for "Rock of Ages."

Now former "Idol" judge Kara DioGuardi, 40, is ready to give audiences the old razzle-dazzle starting Monday (through Oct. 30) when she takes on the role of Roxie Hart in the smash "Chicago," just one week after it surpassed "A Chorus Line" as the longest-running American musical in Broadway history.

Newsday's Daniel Bubbeo recently caught up with the singer-songwriter at Manhattan's Davenport Dance Studio just before rehearsal; she talked about "Idol" as well as strutting her stuff on Broadway and in the pages of *Maxim*.

**You're the 29th actress to play Roxie on Broadway. What do you bring to the role that's different?**

Just having this rawness and openness about just going out there and taking risks, which I've been doing so much in the past two years, works for me. I don't think I could have done this years back, because I would have been too concerned about am I doing this right, people are looking at me, they're judging me. Now I've been like, I'm gonna go for it. . . . And I'm a songwriter. I really bring a respect of honoring exactly what's written. I'm not saying that the others haven't, but I know about getting inside of the writer's head.

**When you were on "Idol," one of the critiques that often came up, especially from Simon, was "It was very Broadway." I never understood why that was an insult.**

It's not an insult. It's just that there are certain voices that don't translate when you go into pop music. Pop isn't necessarily about having the best voice, it's often having a quirky voice or a quirky tone. Many women on Broadway have tried to make that transition to pop, and it's not easy because it's not just about singing. If you look at



pop stars of today — Katy Perry, Ke\$ha, even Britney — you know exactly who it is. And sometimes with Broadway, it's about a louder crescendo or vibrato, not necessarily that the tone is distinct.

**Do you miss doing "Idol"?**

I don't miss it. I had a great time. Definitely it was very difficult in the beginning, but it helped me so much with my fears about being in front of a lot of people. I learned so much about television. I certainly wouldn't have been able to do this ["Chicago"] before "Idol."

**Did you watch "Idol" at all this season?**

I saw bits and pieces of it. I have a publishing company and we publish songs by Bruno Mars, Cee Lo, so I'm constantly listening to music and listening to artists. I'm listening to what America listens to on "Idol" every day. So as much as I loved the show when I was on it, when I go home after a day

like that, I just want a glass of wine. I don't want to watch any more singing. I did see clips of people like Pia [Toscano], and thought they were really good. The judges seemed to really have fun, they had a nice chemistry.

**Did you feel like you had good chemistry with the judges when you were on the show?**

The first year was really rough. . . . The judges that were there had a chemistry and then you come in as a fourth person and you're trying to understand the language. It was just very strange. And then the next year I felt like Simon let me in more and really respected what I had to say. I think it's much easier to come in when the panel's being rebuilt. When I came in, I was the first change, and I took on a lot of the "Oh, my God, why are they changing it?" I have nothing but love for "Idol." It changed my life, and it taught me a lot about myself.

**And then you did the Maxim layout. Why did you decide to do that?**

I'm someone who loves to try new experiences. . . . There's still a side of me that wants to be sexy and wants to be perceived as hot, and if you're not going to do it in your late 30s, when the hell are you going to do it? It was fun, it was a dress-up.

**You also were a judge on Bravo's [music-reality show] "Platinum Hit." How was that experience, compared to doing "Idol"?**

It was so different because I had such a small hand in it. I judged the last part of the show. It was also taped, so not being live was great. At the beginning of "Idol," I was so nervous to speak, I was so out of my comfort zone. Not having that pressure of live TV made it much more relaxed. And then here I am opening on Broadway. [Laughs.]