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Getting that "X" Factor

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Love it or loathe it, there is no disputing the Saturday night supremacy of ITV's "*The X Factor*" which sees the usual recipe of live competition between fame-hopefuls spiced up with a parallel race between music management. And, when faced with an option of the RIBA's Stirling Prize on Channel Four, or the extended tour of the Osbourne Mansion on ITV2 it has to be said that all the votes in my home went to Sharon and her low down on Ozzy's predilection for urinals, as opposed to Lord Foster's love of open plan class rooms and glass atria.

Of course, what avid fans have really been waiting for is the first show down between the nine finalist acts which will be screened live tomorrow night. As usual, viewers will be invited to vote for winners and losers, although bookies are already favouring Rowetta Satchell, the 38 year old singer from Bury who displayed such brilliant lunacy in the first round of auditions, and has continued to provide ample camera fodder ever since.

At a time when death by live TV is a very real possibility, it is interesting to note what makes this programme top the polls when compared to equivalent shows such as Fame Academy and Pop Idol. Almost without question the answer lies in the way in which the good old "X" pits the managers as well as the wannabes against one another, while at the same time allowing an enticing behind the scenes glimpse into the lives of messers Cowell, Walsh and Osbourne.

Surely it can't be long before someone in the good old ODPM sees the obvious transferability of such success. Picture the scene, the Deputy PM pitted against Ruth Rogers and Kevin McCloud, a smattering of Pathfinders and Growth Areas between them, vying for a sustainable funding package and a host of BURA awards. Camera cuts to a through the key hole tour of the River Café juxtaposed with the Prescott domicile in Hull while in between times, local authorities from Ashford to Oldham are encouraged to exhibit both the very best and very worst of behaviours in the battle for viewer votes. Improbable though it may seem, a watered down version



has already been screened hosted by re-styled heritage luvvie Griff Rhys Jones. But the problem was that it just never really went far enough.

While there is something decidedly satisfying about seeing the everyday elevated to the giddy heights of celebrity status, there is something even more reassuring about seeing self professed expertise scrutinized and tested. As they say on the letters page, "More please!"