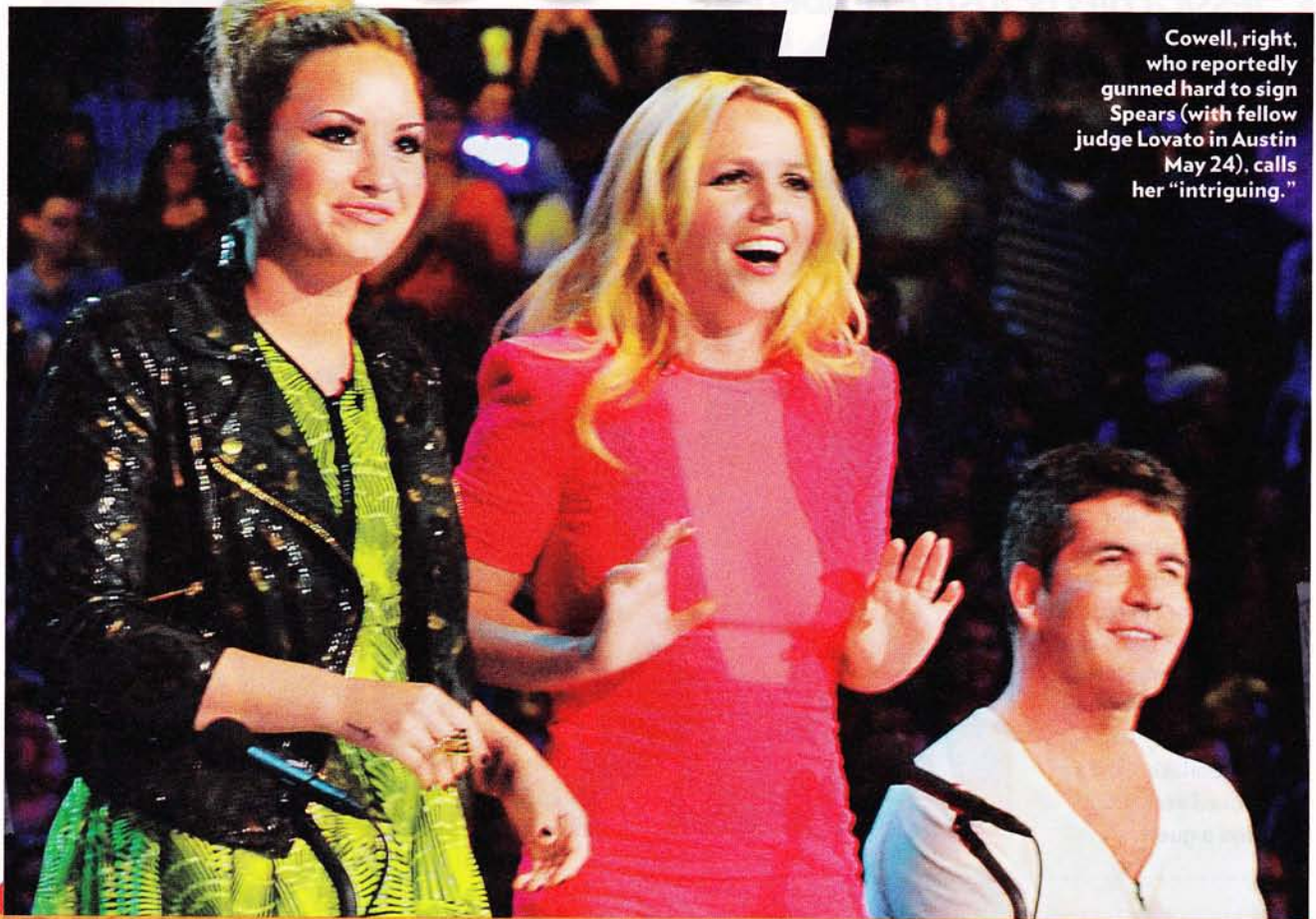


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Cowell, right, who reportedly gunned hard to sign Spears (with fellow judge Lovato in Austin May 24), calls her "intriguing."

BRITNEY SPEARS ON THE X FACTOR SOLID JOB AFTER A SHAKY START

➤ It's a "yes" for **Britney Spears!** Critics worried how the new judge would fare on the show alongside returning pros **Simon Cowell**, 52, **L.A. Reid**, 56, and fellow newcomer **Demi Lovato**, 19, but the pop star, 30, held her own at the first round of auditions in Austin May 24 and 25. Despite a few hiccups—she missed a handful of contestants' performances while taking breaks, and mixed up Cowell's and Reid's

names—fan-favorite Spears consistently drew loud cheers from the audience, especially when she disagreed with Cowell's critiques. Says a production source: "She was definitely enjoying it and grew in confidence all day." Her fiancé, **Jason Trawick**, 40, thinks she nailed the first round. "Princess," he told her in a congratulatory video posted May 26, "just wanted to say I'm very proud of you and I love you so much."

CONTRIBUTORS Jennifer Garcia, Jessica Herndon, Oliver Jones, Marisa Laudadio, Mia McNiece, with Pernilla Cedenheim, Alicia Dennis and Annie Lang

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