

April 7, 2024: The Top 24: Part One

1. Will Moseley: My choice to win it all the first time I heard him sing and saw him interact with the judges and Ryan. I won't list them here but he checks almost every box: he's not handsome but he's male, a guitar player, and a good singer, humble personality, a good old Southern country boy, loves country music and the blues, and exudes an obvious patriotism. Otis Redding's **Sitting on the Dock of the Bay** is a good song but there's nothing special in these lyrics. It's just a song about a guy who is unemployed and lonely but mostly just tired of listening to everybody telling him what to do so he sits on the dock and ponders the state of his life.

2. Nya: One of the most interesting arrangements and phrasing of Tina Turner's **The Best** I have ever heard. Didn't like the chorus much (prefer the original) but Nya's jazz-inspired verses were heavenly. She doesn't check many of the boxes at all and is unlikely to win (yes, I do believe in historical data and I've been harvesting Idol data for 21 seasons now) and is going to need a lot of things go her way to win it all. But I had no choice but to bring her here at #2. What she did tonight was one of the finest performances I've ever seen on Idol.

3. Abi Carter: A formidable opponent when in her lane. But part of the Idol experience is for the judges at some point to force contestants out of their lanes. When out of her lane, she's beatable. Christian music, however, fits her like a glove. I loved Hillsong United's **Oceans (Where Feet May Fail)**. It's the Biblical story of the Apostle Peter walking on water in Matthew 12: 22-33. When God told Peter to leave the boat and walk, he did. He walked on water toward the shore. But as soon as his eyes wavered from God, he started to sink. The moral of the story is that we should keep our eyes on God and not stray from his presence. If we don't do that, then our feet, like Peter's, will fail. Here, "feet" is obviously a symbol for "faith".

#4. McKenna Faith Breinholt: An old school rock classic on the Idol stage. Brandi Carlisle's **The Story** is telling the story of a woman who's lived a full life, a hard life, and suffered setbacks in her love life and other relationships. "All of these lines across my face tell you the story of who I am. So many stories of where I've been and how I got to where I am." I don't know about the Tiktok crowd but Baby Boomers everywhere will love what she did here and express that love in the form of a vote. Sheepishly, I confess. I liked it too.

#5. Jayna Elise: Demi Lovato's **Confidence** is not one of my favorite songs. I don't like the song structure or the lyric much. But Jayna sang it very well. It's a song about confidence and this performance was loaded with it. So it was a perfect song choice for Jayna. She doesn't check many boxes either but in life, upsets happen all the time so we cannot count her out, especially if she continues to do what she did tonight. This was a wonderful performance.

#6. Julia Gagnon: My God, this young lady has pipes! But there's something missing. Adele's **Rumor Has It** was very well presented, as was **Ain't No Way**. Every note was money but she never found the heart of either song. She hasn't yet learned how to establish an artistic contract between her and her audience and you simply cannot win Idol without it. She reminds me of Jennifer Hudson who, despite the best pipes Idol has ever seen, never learned to play the Idol game and left the competition much earlier than her talent warranted. Call me jaded, but Idol is a competition and you've got to work it to your advantage. Absolutely contestants must sing well and emote well but that is not enough to win a title. You need votes and you need a strategy to get them. Grace Kinstler was a wonderful talent but an even better strategist and tactician. She played the Idol game better than anyone I've ever seen and reaped the benefits.

#7. Blake Proehl: If he gets past this round, I think he'll stay around awhile. But he will need to be careful of his song choices. He is a nice young man with all-American looks. And actually Justin Bieber is in his lane. The problem tonight was that **Anyone** was not in his lane. We all have different artistic preferences and perhaps this song has special meaning for Blake, but, if it were me, I would have chosen Justin's **Peaches** because it has cogent lyrics, an irresistible beat, and an irresistible hook. If done correctly, it is a guaranteed crowd pleaser. In addition, it would have forced him to sing different parts of the same song and also would have forced him to move about the stage. Right style, right genre, right singer, wrong song.

#8. Jordan Anthony: Titanium is a wonderful song with wonderful lyrics and an important message: no matter how many times you fall, rise up and try it again. I liked the last run but the song, as a whole, was over-cooked. If this truly is his lane, he's not likely to last long on Idol. When I look at what he's done to date, it makes me wonder why he chose Titanium over such tried and true crowd pleasing competition songs like Harry Style's **Adore You**, Lewis Capaldi's **Before You Go**, or Post Malone's **Circles**. These singers seem to be in his lane as well.

#9. KaiBrienne: Bryan Adam's classic **Heaven** is an Idol staple but it doesn't bring the same reward it used to. There's no debate here, however. She sang it well. Her alto register is money. This was a good performance. It's just that it has been done so many times on this show and if it's to be done again, should have a new or at least unique arrangement.

#10. Kayko: His moving tribute to his mom, **How Do I Live Without You?** will probably send him through to the next round. He's got a lot to learn about performing. It isn't enough to disappear inside a lyric unless the artist can bring the audience along with him. And the audience can't do that if it can't understand the words of the song. There was a bit too much shouting and screaming of lyrics in this performance for me so I couldn't join him on his journey.

#11. Hailey Mia: She's All I Wanna Be is a rather sad, depressing, and self-deprecating song about a girl in love with a guy whom she imagines is infatuated with the most beautiful and voluptuous girl in school. A girl that has everything she does not have. The singer wants to be that girl. Why? I don't know. She already has the guy she wants. The theme is similar to Jax's hit song, **Victoria's Secret**.

#12. Quintavious: I doubt he ends up here since he seems to be quite popular with the judges and the audience. But this was not a good version of Carrie Underwood's wonderful **Something in the Water**. I love gospel music, especially wrapped up in rapture, but it still has to have structure, tone, and discernable lyrics. It still has to breathe. On Idol, gospel is judged the same as any other genre. For fairness, it has to be that way. In a gospel church service, this would likely go over well but there was far too much off-key screaming for a singing competition. Yes, screams and shouts are a natural part of Rock, R&B, and Gospel music but it must be done with tone and fit naturally into the song structure. James Brown, Aretha Franklin and Patty Labelle are masters of screaming with tone. Joshua Ledet and Fantasia Barino, the best two R&B/Gospel singers ever to set foot on the Idol stage, are also masters of screaming with tone. Quintavious hasn't yet mastered this skill.