

April 8, 2024: The Top 24: Part Two

1. Jack Blocker: Prior to this, he hasn't done a thing that stayed in my head. I still don't see him as a threat to win it all but this was one fantastic, emotional and heart-felt performance, delivered with crystal clear tone and texture. Kaycee wrote this uplifting anthem for the LGBTQ community to which she belongs, completely unaware at the time of its Grammy-winning potential or the massive universal appeal it would have on those "carrying weight on their shoulders". No doubt about it. **Rainbow** is the best thing Kaycee has ever done and to my surprise, Jack gave it full attention. I actually applauded this performance. Could it be Jack has an alter ego or a split personality? I don't need to know the answer; I just want this version of Jack to stick around.

2. Emmy Russell: If you've ever used Tiktok, you know this song. If you watch American Idol religiously (as I do), you also know the singer, Idol drop out, Benson Boone. **Beautiful Things** is a perfect, can't miss, competition song, made for the Idol stage. Emmy is a good singer, a stylist, a crooner if you will, and no one in this competition does it better, but, I can't lie. I miss Benson's bombastic, testosterone-driven delivery of the chorus. The song is about a man in love with what he knows to be the perfect girl but does not feel at all sure of his ability to keep her or that her feelings for him will last. So he pleads with God not to take away the one thing in his life that makes the other things in his life so beautiful.

3. Kennedy Reid: Easily the most entertaining performance of the night. Reba McEntire's tale of a small time girl named **Fancy** that makes it big in the city, is an Idol staple with built-in sass that needs only the right singer to make it work. Kennedy makes it go. Done many times, this is the best version of that song I've heard on the Idol stage. This young lady ticks a lot of boxes and could easily advance to the late rounds.

4. Roman Collins: Never thought I'd see a rousing gospel soul arrangement of Marvin Gaye's beautiful R&B ballad, **How Sweet It Is To Be Loved By You**. I'm not sure I know the object of Roman's affection. Is it God, his savior? Is it a lover? I decided I didn't need to know the answer. I just wanted to soak up this wonderful performance. What Roman did tonight was a master class demonstration of the proper use of R&B soul screams; e.g. screams done with tone and inserted into the song structure with purpose at the proper time and in the right place. This is how the masters of R&B (Aretha, Patti, James Brown, Al Green, etc) do it and Roman is a natural Gospel Soul singer. A terrific performance.

5. Jennifer Jeffries: According to the singer, Lewis Capaldi, **Bruises** is about an amicable breakup. He says he chose the title Bruises rather than Scars because bruises heal quickly and are repairable whereas scars are painful and lasting. He has only good memories of his former girlfriend and is open to the idea of getting back together. Jennifer generates beautiful, rich, crystal clear tone, the perfect vehicle for this sensitive song. She was totally invested in these lyrics and delivered a wonderful and touching performance.

6. Odell Bunton Jr.: This was a terrific performance as well and should easily propel him into top 20 but a ballad is the ticket to the late rounds on American Idol. So I hope Odell does not rely too heavily on hip-hop. Although popular, there's not really a message in **Uptown Funk**. It's a song about fashion, vanity, and masculine bravado. But he sang it well, worked the audience, and made them love him and his music. But there's no denying this was entertainment at its finest.

7. Ajii: I loved what he did here. Probably because I like Tems, one of the few Nigerian singers with world wide appeal. According to Songhits, the message of **Higher** is: "Tems desire to elevate her life and spirit above the turmoil and pain of her past experiences". Ajii has a powerful pipe but I would have utilized it on a different song, one known to the masses. I worry that viewers might not be as familiar with **Higher** as they are with some of the other songs. If left to me, Ajii would make top 20 but my experience with the Idol demographic tells me that familiarity matters and I'm not sure this song gave him the best chance to move forward. I hope he makes it in.

8. KBlocks: This was a very good and enjoyable performance. Who would have thought it? An Amy Winehouse impersonation and presentation of a jazz arranged Katy Perry song, **Harleys in Hawaii**? This thing had me doubled over with laughter. I loved it. Thank you American Idol. KBlocks is a unique talent and I really hope she makes top 20. I like her very much.

9. Mia Matthews: Holly Dunn's **Daddy's Hands** is a tearjerker whose very first lines tug at your heart strings. Mia sang it well but like Kelly Clarkson's **Piece By Piece**, it's a song guaranteed to make you cry. This song very likely guaranteed her a place in the top 20. My only criticism is that it's a safe song with little to no risk and the lyric draws in the audience on its own no matter who sings it. If this was purely a strategic move, I applaud the Mia Matthews camp. It means that they are playing the Idol game to win and there's absolutely nothing wrong with that.

10. Tristan Harper: I am confused and obviously missing something. Tristan is a good singer and insanely likable but in my opinion, there are much better singers in this competition. Despite that, he's going to be a tough out. This kid checks every single box needed to win this competition. I just wish he would up his game.

11. Elleigh Marie: Not a fan of Ceelo Green's **Forget You**. I would have chosen a different song, something that warms the heart rather than this cold dismissive song about a silly crush on a girl/boy. How is this song supposed to touch the hearts of viewers and make them vote for you? Elleigh is a good singer and may very well end up top 20 (I think she's done enough to advance) but it won't be because of what was done here.

12. Mackenzie Sol: I love Nick Jonas' **Jealous**. I didn't like it on Mackenzie. He's got a lot of things working in his favor: he's handsome, the girls love him, he can sing, his look and style is contemporary, and he's very likable. These are also the attributes that make him a prime candidate for a Boy Band. Mackenzie can't win Idol (other than gender-the majority of Idol winners are male-he doesn't check a single other box needed to win this

competition) so why not consider other opportunities? No, he doesn't have to join a Boy Band. He can find other ways to pursue a solo career in music (posting his songs and performances on social media is the obvious option). But he's got all the right stuff for a Boy Band and should at least consider it as a means to an end.