

April 28, 2024: The Top 10

1. Will Moseley: Travis Tritt is an anomaly to me. He's anti-vaccines (which I find irresponsible) but is also one hell of a singer. I roomed with my best friend Walter back in college. His girl, Linda, was a Travis Tritt fan and would spend all her disposable income traveling to his concerts. One day Walter was sick and couldn't travel so I took his place even though I'd never heard him sing before. When we arrived at the concert, Linda had front row seats. When Travis came out, he looked at her and recognized her immediately, waved, and said "Hi Linda". No matter how famous they are, entertainers are just people that want to be loved and appreciated. In the end I was sorry I went because when Travis sang a song called **Anyone**. I thanked God it was dark because I was choking up. I remember that song as one of the saddest I have ever heard in my life. Tonight, Will chose one of Travis' hard-rocking, toe-tapping, country anthems, **Modern Day Bonnie & Clyde**. It's a story of boy meets girl at a truck stop. They hit it off and leave together. They stop at a convenience store, she robs the place, and they take off down the road. Ultimately, they got arrested and thrown in jail. In my mind, this was Will's best performance of the season. It was a perfect song choice delivered with high energy and confident and genuine country swag. Will was on fire. It reminded me of a Casey James lyric via the song, **Bulletproof**: *I can't stop. I can't quit. I'm like a stick of dynamite and my fuse is lit* (a song from the best album ever recorded by an American Idol alum, Casey James' wonderful **Strip It Down**, a blues masterpiece). **Bulletproof** is a song tailor made for Will's voice and I hope he will one day add it to his stage set. Speaking of the best Idol contestants, Jacob Lusk's new retro R&B band, **Gabriels**, is taking the world by storm. They were nominated for Best International Group at the 2023 Brit Awards and just finished Coachella. Elton John called their first EP, **Love and Death In a Different Time** *one of the most seminal records I've heard in the last 10 years*, and, The Guardian said of their second EP, **Blame**, *Could this actually be the best album of the year?*. I had hoped to see Casey James and Jacob Lusk's as guest performers on Idol, but it wasn't meant to be. To add to my discontent, Luke had to go and mention heavy Is the crown which made me yearn to hear Daughtry's **Heavy Is The Crown**, from the second best album ever recorded by an American Idol alum, **Dearly Beloved** (I love that album). I had hoped Chris would come back and sing **Break Into My Heart** (my favorite track from **Dearly Beloved**) but that wasn't meant to be either.

2. Jack Blocker: Jack did a fantastic cover of Ella Henderson's wonderful adaptation of Cher's **Believe** (Season 9 of X Factor UK (2012)). Alexa Wildish topped even that with her emotionally draining country version of this song on The Voice Season 24. However, the best version of Cher's **Believe** belongs to Roby Gulton from X Factor Indonesia 2021. His version fuses both the ballad version and the original version with one of the purest, most beautiful, and powerful pipes you will ever hear anywhere in the world. While Jack's wonderful performance is not as good as these three, it was absolutely one of the best Idol performances of the night (and there were lots of them). I never thought much of **Believe** before Ella got me thinking. After analyzing the lyric, I realized there is deep meaning in this song: do not wallow in the misery of a broken love affair because some relationships simply can't be salvaged no matter how much you love the object of your affections, so, accept that it cannot be and open your heart to a new beginnings (said while musing the Semisonic lyric from **Closing Time**: *every new beginning is some other beginning's end*). At this point, I'm not sure if Jack can do any wrong. This song was delivered straight up, vocals center stage, without any of the Jack-isms we've come to expect from him, and he still kicked butt.

3. McKenna Faith Brienholt: She told us she wouldn't change the arrangement; that she would stay true to the original and perhaps she did for a bit but the second half had less to do with the Goo Goo Dolls than McKenna Faith Brienholt. The second half of this performance was beautifully sung and loaded with pure passion. It was classic McKenna. If you've heard the song, you know it's a love song. Many consider it one of the best love songs ever written including Billboard, Rolling Stone, MTV, and the Grammys. It's a song about an angel in heaven who falls in love with a beautiful earthling girl and is forced to make the difficult choice between love and immortality. He chooses love and must leave his heavenly home. Followed by the smash hit, **Name, Iris** brought the band world wide fame and money but the band's long time alternative and punk rock credentials were lost because of it. Rock fans abandoned them. The original Goo Goo Dolls' devotion to punk and grunge had been reduced to soft pop rock. But with millions of mainstream commercially friendly pop music fans, the band could only wave good-bye to their alternative rock fans. But as you know, some fans require genre-specific credentials and street cred before they accept you as one of them and once you lose that credibility, it's

hard to get it back because you're stuck with labels like sell-outs. It's a shame really. Goo Goo Dolls is a wonderful band. Who cares if they are alternative rock or pop rock? I love all genres of music but my broad love of music is definitely not shared by all.

4. Kaibrienne: Kaibrienne is right. **Here Without You** is about losing a lover but it also appeals to anybody missing a loved one; e.g., best friend, family member, loved ones serving in the armed forces, etc. Listeners take from this song what they need to fill a void pursuant to a need. Kaibrienne sang beautifully tonight. This was yet another wonderful performance. Incidentally, I do not agree with those who continue to classify 3 Doors Down as Grunge. Both 3 Doors Down and Three Days Grace are Post-Grunge, just like Foo Fighters, Nickleback, Creed, Matchbox Twenty, Shinedown, and Fuel. Our own Idol super band, Daughtry, is also 100% Post Grunge. Authentic Grunge bands utilize punk rock and heavy metal rock; e.g. bands like Nirvana, Soundgarden, Alice in Chains, and Pearl Jam.

5. Abi Carter: I knew it would happen this way. Abi and Cold Play is a match made in heaven. Both Abi and Cold Play personify and project pure emotion. There's nothing in it for an Idol contestant as it's not a competition song but Cold Play's **The Birds** is a magnificent work of art. I'll bet Abi loves it too. **Clocks** carry an age-old adage; e.g. time waits for no one so make the most of the time we are given. **Clocks** mark every moment of our existence from life to death. The poet Emily Dickinson summed it up this way: *Because I could not stop for death, she kindly stopped for me.* Do not dwell on the miseries of life. Find ways to cope until better days come again. With apology to Emily Dickinson and Cold Play, I prefer this alternate: *Because I could not stop for Love, she kindly stopped for me.* Surely this message, too, lies somewhere in the periphery of meaning. An Odd Decision: Why did Abi abandon the piano on a song famous for its very recognizable haunting piano riffs? But I won't complain. Turns out, she's got tons of stage presence and the camera absolutely loves her. The Idol makeup artists are working overtime. Give them more money.

6. Tristan Harper: Jason Aldean's **She's Country** is classic country rock. According to Jason Aldean, this is not just a song about a woman who loves country music. Rather, it's an ode to strong, independent women who

whole-heartedly embrace the country way of life. I can't complain about Tristan's dancing and wiggling tonight since Jason (and Luke Bryan) likes to wiggle too. Plus, he was encouraged to keep wiggling by Katy and Luke. Contestants must pay attention to the judges' critiques. They can't simply ignore them. If they do, they run the risk of invoking their ire and having to cope with negative reviews and the punishment that comes with that. Despite the wiggles, this was a very entertaining performance. Good vocal with lots of interaction with his adoring fans.

7. Emmy Russell: Blink182's most commercially successful record, **All The Small Things**, was written by Tom DeLonge for his then girlfriend, whom he later married and after 18 years together, divorced her. Blink182 is an unapologetic and irreverent pop punk band specializing in fast guitar riffs and in-your-face lyrics. **All The Small Things** is a love song wherein Tom describes all the little things his girlfriend does for him. It's hard for me to find similarities between shy and insecure Emmy and Blink 182, but, the contrast is jarring. Like System of a Down, Slipknot, Mudvayne, Korn, Disturbed, etc, Blink182 is loaded with testosterone. For example, System of a Down's audience is 75% male and they jump, leap, bang heads, and fly all over the arena. So it's kind of refreshing to hear a cute, ultra feminine, sugar sweet version of this punk ballad. Emmy will be successful in country music because there aren't many singers out there like her. She's a lot like our own Kelly Pickler, who is more outgoing and gregarious than Emmy but her instrument is almost identical to Emmy's. Specifically, there's not power or muscle in it, only a soft sweet mellifluous tone that goes straight to the heart. Listen to Kelly Pickler's **The Woman I Am**. You'll see what I mean.

8. Julie Gagnon: I am a huge Gagnon fan, but this was not her best performance. She is playing the game, I know, trying to mix in some pop songs with her R&B repertoire. After witnessing the dismissal of Nya, Jayna, Roman, and Aji, four very good R&B singers, it was probably a wise move to mix it up some, especially since it seems to have paid off. She's been safe for two weeks in a row. But this is not the Julia Gagnon I've come to love. **Here I Am** is a song from the soundtrack for the movie, **Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron** and tells the story of a young mustang as he fights for his freedom and his place in the herd. I'm guessing Julia connects spiritually with the meaning of these lyrics. Perhaps this is the reason she chose it. My worry is that switching lanes mid stream is never a good idea

on Idol. It takes time to grow a fan base and develop a rapport with your audience so while it might be possible to expand your lane, there won't be enough time to change lanes permanently. R&B is who she is. That's her home. Despite what happened to the other R&B singers, she needs to find songs in the R&B songbook that also have a wide audience appeal.

9. Mia Matthews: Shania Twain's **No One Needs To Know** is a good song about a woman that falls in love with a man but wants to keep it secret from the world. She forgot a lyric. Just as I predicted several weeks ago, forgetting a lyric in a tightly bunched race like Idol, will get you sent home in the later rounds where one or two votes can decide who stays and who goes home. I agree with Katy though. Luke didn't have to call her on it. He could have said something like *And I loved that wonderful pause you added*. It's an appropriate comment because it has two meanings; e.g., it's a classic double entendre (just like *I've never heard your sing better* which also has a dual meaning).

10. Kayko. Wheatus' **Teenage Dirtbag** is a song about a boy with a crush on the most popular girl in school. I have heard a rock version of this song. The trouble here is that Kayko is out-gunned in this competition and has been for some time. But I think he made a mistake tonight. He certainly can't imitate Wheatus but he might have fared better with One Direction's (1D) version of the popular song. 1D is no more but Harry Styles is still going strong and Niall and Louis are famous judging panelists so they still have visibility and maintain a loyal fanbase that remembers them fondly. The funny thing is 1D fans didn't know who Iron Maiden was. And I wouldn't be surprised if Idol's younger viewers are unfamiliar with Iron Maiden (Iron Maiden is mentioned in the lyrics several times). It's hard to advance with a song that even your fans are unfamiliar with. There was something cute about the Wheatus version of this song. He plays the part of a shy, empathetic young man in love with a girl clearly out of his depth. So you want to pull for him and hope he gets the girl. But what Kayko did neutralized all the cuteness and sympathy in the original version and replaced with something that was unlikable, unrelatable, and insincere. But Kayko went out on his own terms. He did things his way and was supported in his endeavor by the judges and by his fans. That's really all you can ask for..