April 20, 2026: American Idol: The Top 9

1. Hannah Harper. With the exception of Lucas Leon who picked an awful song (***Life Is A Highwa***y is not a competition song because it just lies there lifeless and boring, and, Lucas did nothing to bring it to life), the other eight contestants sang well tonight. If left to me, I wouldn't have sent Kyndal home tonight but I don't get to make that decision. I saw nothing tonight that caused me to change my mind about the top two. Hannah's cover of ***Almost There*** via ***The Princess and The Frog*** was a bit awkward but tender, sweet , girly, and vocally perfect. I really loved what she did. She's quite likable and at this point, I am not even sure if Keyla can beat her. As a result, I am left with the same conclusion as last week; e.g., this competition will end up a two woman race between Hannah and Keyla. Regarding motion, Jennifer Hudson is a superstar on broadway, in motion pictures, in the record industry and on television. Her entire life involves motion so of course she will impart her knowledge of live entertainment to the Idol contestants. But honestly, It doesn't bother me that Hannah does not move much on stage primarily because all of her songs are sacred, sacred-leaning, or secular ballads and do not require a lot of movement. It's inconceivable to me to envision Hannah moving like Kelley Clarkson in her tribute to big band jazz, with Betty Hutton's ***Stuff Like That There***. Hannah looks awkward bouncing around the stage. She will need some motion in the entertainment portion of her career so it's only natural that the mentors and the judges want to prepare her as best they can for a career in live entertainment. That's why they are asking her to move more.

2. Keyla Richardson. Keyla sang ***The Circle of Lif***e from the ***Lion King***. It was a great performance but also a bit awkward because I didn't like the arrangement. There was nothing wrong with the original arrangement. But this kid sang her heart out tonight. She always brings everything in her arsenal to the Idol stage and leaves nothing behind. She is a true warrior and its obvious to me that she desperately wants to win the title and is putting up a fierce fight to do just that. And her adorable son is definitely doing his part to help her. We learned from Jamal last season that the presence of a contestant's kids in the audience can influence voters. But Hannah has kids of her own, three of them in fact, so there's no real advantage for either of them with respect to this factor. I just think it will take a Herculean effort to beat Hannah because she has not made a costly

mistake regarding song choice. Nor has she put a wrong foot forward regarding anything else. Hannah understands fully how this game is played. So does Keyla. So does Braden. And so does Jordan. I am not so sure about the others. But I loved what Keyla did tonight on the Idol stage.

3. Jordan McCullough. Jordan's ***Colors Of The Wind*** via the movie ***Pocahonta***s was beautifully sung. He got a bit excited near the end and overcooked it a bit but the first three quarters of this performance was just magical. I loved it. Jordan is a contestant who is slowly applying more and more pressure on both Keyla and Hannah. He's doing it nobly, like a gentleman, but applying pressure nonetheless with his powerful pipe. He's also fighting hard to win this competition. As he should. Jordan is still moving up in my rankings.

4. Brooks. I liked what Brooks did tonight ***(The Climb*** via the movie ***Hannah Montan***a) but honestly, I don't understand why he just didn't stick with the original melody. Sure, all three judges and Jennifer Hudson can change a melody to advantage on a moment's notice but they are seasoned professionals whereas Brooks is not yet in their league and should stick with the original melody for now. Parts of this performance were off key and off melody. I noticed something else tonight. The experts seem to agree that Brooks is a coloratura tenor but I still think he's a countertenor. And I am even more convinced now because most coloratura tenors have a lower register whereas Brooks does not appear to have a lower register or is choosing not to use it. So, I think he is a countertenor. Of course, Brooks generates high pitched, unfamiliar, extraterrestrial tones so who knows. It is quite possible he's not even one of us.

5. Daniel Stallworth. ***A Whole New World*** (from ***Aladdin***) was also beautifully sung. Got to hand it to Daniel. He's singing better than ever and smiling more and more and engaging with the audience, the other contestants, the judges and joking with Ryan. He's now playing the game the way its supposed to be played. It's impossible to win American Idol with out some interaction with the audience because the studio audience and the viewers at home are the ones who decide whether a contestant stays alive or goes home so fan service is necessary for any contestant who wants to win.

6. Braden Rumfelt. ***Remember Me*** from the movie ***CoCo*** was an odd song choice, but, I think he sang it well. Its just that there aren't many places in that song to showcase power vocals. This is a contest so you must match the powerful pipes of your competitors or counter them with stylized arrangements. Otherwise you end up being out-sung, which is exactly what happened to both Braden and Chris tonight. I knew it would happen. Some viewers are taking note of Braden's good looks and wondering if that has any effect on his road to top 7. Of course it does. Looks and sex appeal are just two of the many tangential factors that pad a contestant's vote total. He would be an absolute fool not to use them to advantage. To this date, Kris Allen won't admit that his looks helped him increase his vote total. I have no idea how many votes he received because of his looks but I know he received some because of it because I observed it during the voting sessions. Braden did nothing wrong. Contestants should exhaust themselves in utilizing every tool in their tool box if they want to win.

7. Chris Tungseth. Chris sang ***Let It Go*** from the movie ***Frozen***.The slowed down ballad part was a good listen but most of it was pop rock which I do not like so I didn't get much from this performance. He was moving quite well across the stage, even if stiff and robotic, trying hard to engage the audience but I am not sure he succeeded. He just hasn't learned how to properly engage and entertain his audience yet. For him, that will take time, time I'm not sure he has.

NOTE: We started tonight with 9 contestants and Kyndal and Lucas were eliminated. We have seven contestants remaining.
NOTE: Lucas sang ***Life Is A Highway***. That was an awful song choice. That song is boring in many ways and clearly not a competition worthy song.
NOTE: Kyndal sang ***Butterfly Fly Away*** from the movie ***Hanna Montana***. She sang it brilliantly. I think it was one of the best performances of the night. Left to me, she'd still be in the competition but I don't get to make that decision. America decided and I must respect her wishes and decisions.
NOTE: I did some research and tried to match each of the remaining seven contestants with his/her perfect song. My song choices are shown below for the seven remaining contestants.

My Perfect Picks (perfect match of Singer & Song For The Remaining 7 Contestants

Hannah Harper:

1. Not Losing You----------Maddie Poppe

2. Stay Strong----------Danny Gokey

3. When We Were Young----------Adele

4. There Will Come A Day----------Faith Hill

5. Something In The Water----------Carrie Underwood

6. String Cheese (Reprise)----------Hannah Harper

Keyla Richardson:

1. Here I Am (Singing My Way Home)---Jennifer Hudson (via Respect, movie)

2. Always On My Mind----------Jennifer Holiday via Willie Nelson

3. The House I live In----------Patti Labelle (via Frank Sinatra in The House I Live In movie)

4. Die With A Smile----------Lady Gaga and Bruno Mars

5. One Wing----------Jordin Sparks (via the movie Sparkle)

6. One Moment in Time----------Whitney Houston

Brooks:

1. Dancing In The Dark----------Bruce Springsteen (see

Jorgen Dahl Moe's ballad version on The Voice, youtube)

2. The A Team----------Ed Sheeran

3. Carry You Home----------James Blunt

4. How Do I Say Goodbye----------Dean Lewis

5. A Better Place To Be----------Harry Chapin

6. Never Tear Us Apart----------INXS

<u>Jordan McCullough</u>

1. For The Good Times----------Al Green via Ray Price via Bill Nash

2. When A Man Loves A Woman--------Percy Sledge

3. Dance With My Father----------Luther Vandross

4. The Storm Is Over----------R. Kelly

5. How Can You Mend A Broken Heart---Al Green via The Bee Gees

6. Earth Song (2nd half)----------Michael Jackson

<u>Daniel Stallworth</u>

1. Bed Of Roses----------Bon Jovi

2. On Bended Knee----------Boyz II Men

3. Tell Me What You Want Me To Do---Tevin Campbell

4. Say Amen----------Howard Hewitt

5. If I----------Jesse Powell

6. Let The Word Do The Work----------Donald Lawrence & Company

<u>Chris Tungseth</u>

1. I Remember You----------Sebastian Bach (Skid Row)

2. Still Loving You----------Scorpions

3. Sting Me----------Black Crowes

4. What Are You Listening To?----------Chris Stapleton

5. Fast Car----------Luke Combs via Tracy Chapman

6. Drops of Jupiter----------Train

<u>Braden Rumfelt</u>

1. Adorn----------Miguel

2. Bruises----------Lewis Capaldi

3. Lose Control----------Teddy Swims

4. When I Was Your Man----------Bruno Mars

5. How Do I Say Goodbye----------Dean Lewis

6. Mirrors----------Justin Timberlake