



April 13, 2024: American Idol Top 24 Part 1

1. Gabby Samone. This was, in my opinion, the best vocal of the night. One could say the same thing about Kolbi Jordan's sassy cover of Patti Labelle's *New Attitude*, because both young contestants are blessed with booming, powerful pipes and know well how to use them to maximum effect. Between the two of them, I think I like Gabby best because, at least on this night, she was the one that displayed not only power and range but also excellent control and mellifluous nuance. In other words, Gabby, at strategic times, in the midst of all that power, also gently caressed lyrics to give them even more meaning and emotion. Although I don't think Celine Dion's *It's All Coming Back To Me Now* is about vulnerability, as Gabby stated, it doesn't matter much. If the song, the music, the lyrics, connects with your soul, it has fulfilled its purpose. That is the nature of all Art.

2. Kolbi Jordan. This was also a hell of a vocal. Fantastic. Booming pipes and limitless power. Entertainment at its finest. And she never let up from start to finish. This was a startling stadium tour de force performance that brought down the house. I am not a big fan of *New Attitude*, but only because there are many songs in the Patti Labelle songbook that I think are better; e.g., *You Are My Friend*. Kolbi is a very talented singer and is also quite likable. She should go deep into this competition, if she can stay in her lane even when asked to explore lanes different from her own; e.g., different genres.

3. Slater Nalley. I was not impressed by Slater in the early rounds. And I don't think he succeeded in trying to adapt Judy Garland's pop classic *Somewhere Over The Rainbow* to Willie Nelson-esque country blues. But what he did here was pure soul, all heart, all art. I loved it. I hope with everything in me, we get to hear Slater sink his unique talent into Willie Nelson's poignant *Angels Flying Too Close To The Ground* or Damien Wright's *Delicate*, at some point in this competition, because those songs are right smack dab in his wheelhouse. He's going to be tested this season by booming pipes, belters, and talented caressers of lyrics but if he can continue doing what he did tonight (and what he did with his wonderful *Traces Of You*), he, too, should go deep into this competition. Because of her likability, talent, and versatility, Gabby has all the right stuff to win this competition, but if she doesn't, watch out for Slater Nalley. There's stuff inside the soul of this dude that we have yet to see. And I want to see all of it. He's a dark horse that could easily win this thing.

4. Jamal Roberts. I don't think he was at his best this week or last. He seemed disconnected from his lyrics last week and exhausted himself inside Jelly Roll's *Liar with* too much animation this week. I love his passion and his powerful pipes but unlike the judges, I prefer Jamal in control and a bit subdued, for example, his powerfully emotional but passionate interpretation of Anthony Hamilton's wonderful anthem to romantic love, *Her Heart*, was a work of art. I believed his every word. I can't say that about the last two performances. But when I see him, I always think of *Her Heart*, and know that this contestant is something special and I must watch his performances.

5. Breanna Nix. This is another performance that I deemed weaker than earlier work. I loved her interpretation of Kelly's Clarkson *The Trouble With Love*, her best effort so far. I also liked her version of Lauren Daigle *You Say*, one of my favorite songs. *Still Rolling Stones* is a good song and I think this was a good performance. Just not in the same league as her earlier efforts. Basically, Jamal is at #4, and Breanna is at #5, not so much because of what they did tonight, but because I know that both are fantastic singers and capable of so much more. And rather than take a chance on an unproven singer with developing and/or improving talent, I would rather cast for my votes for proven singers at this stage of the competition even if they are not at their best this night. The intensely emotional *Rescue You* (Lauren Daigle) or *Piece By Piece* (Kelly Clarkson) would have been much better choices.

6. Che. Che is a good singer. He sounds a lot like Stevie Wonder and looks like a younger, more hirsute version of Justin Timberlake. He seems to connect with R&B; e.g., I think he did a good job in the early going with Donny Hathaway's *A Song For You* and tonight's *Master Blaster* was also good. And I think he has chosen his songs wisely so far. He has avoided the old school, wrong-side-of-the-tracks, down-and-dirty R&B. As well he should. He would never survive old school R&B against the likes of Gabby Samone, Kolbi Jordan, and Jamal Roberts because all three do it better. Not to mention two other wonderful R&B singers that have yet to perform in this round. Pop R&B is the right strategy to compete against the heavy hitting, melisma infused, authentic, old school R&B stylists that would surely send him home early in a head-to-head. In addition, there are some wonderful pop R&B songs and singers; e.g., Justin Timberlake (*Til The End Of Time*), Robin Thicke (*When I Get You Alone, Lost Without You*), Ne-yo (*Sexy Love*), or even Miguel's R&B masterpiece, *Adorn*. Che has a

good strategy in place to get round and survive all of the many authentic old school R&B specialists. Let's hope it continues and he advances.

7. Zaylie Windsor. In earlier rounds, I thought she was a Billie Eilish clone but now I don't really know who she is as an artist. But she is appealing and she is interesting. I want to see more of her. Billie Eilish and Heart are good singers but because of the Idol demographic, I think she be better off with something more middle-of-the-road; e.g., Tracy Chapman's *Fast Car*, or the Joni Mitchell's *Both Sides Now*, or Taylor Swift's *Begin Again* should serve her well. Oddly, she's also a perfect fit for many songs in the Bob Dylan catalog.

8. Isiah Misailegalu. I am a bit perplexed by this one. He's quite likable and he can sing but there are so many singers in this competition that do it better and he really hasn't done anything to distinguish himself so far or set himself apart from or above the rest of the competition. But any contestant who can endear him or herself to Idol viewers and to the Idol judges can go deep into the competition, and, develop as they go. He has. And I think he will advance. I have never heard of Maoli so I listened to several Maoli songs and they all sound like they are straight out of the Bob Marley songbook, reggae. *You Can Have It All* sounds a lot like Bob Marley's *I Want To Love You*. I love reggae so I liked what Isiah did here.

9. Victor Soloman. At first, I thought it was a musical interpolation because it was so different from the original, but Luke said that Victor's version of *That's My Kind Of Night* was an accurate interpretation. It's his song so he should know. Victor injected this song with so much muscularity, high energy, and physicality, that it turned out to be one of the most entertaining performances of the night. But Victor is yet another Idol contestant without a musical identity or genre so it's hard to identify with him since I don't really know who he is as an artist. *Lady Marmalade*?

10. Baylee Littrell. His version of Pharell's bouncy *Happy* had none of the joy, muscle, or infectious flavor of the original. Baylee has basically leaned on his original compositions to advance. When asked to interpret works by other artists, he hasn't fared well. And I don't think this performance did him any favors either. Baylee is raw, clearly disconnected from lyrics, melodies, and music not of his own making and, if tonight is an accurate indicator, a dispassionate performer. But my faith lies in Idol. This show has endured for 23 seasons. These guys are not stupid. They know this business well; they know what

they are doing. There are reasons why they picked Baylee, even if they are not obvious to me. So I'll just have to wait and see if they made a mistake or if Baylee can last long enough and improve enough to live up to the judges' expectations of him. Time will tell.

11. Penny Samar. She is season 23's first *crow flying left of the murder* [Incubus], a space oddity. Zaylie is a bit weird too but is a stylist and is musically refined. Penny is out there. And her muse, I assume, is the loud, flamboyant, in-your face, out-and-proud lesbian, Chappelle Roan. Honestly, I don't know if the Idol demographic is ready or accepting of sexual fluidity but it will be interesting to see how they respond to Penny and her music styling. I brought her here at number eleven because I don't think this performance was a good vocal. Even so, she is a very interesting Idol contestant and I she brings a huge smile to my face whenever she's on stage so I really hope to see more of her. She intrigues me.

12. MKY. This performance was a miss. A short while ago, I ranked the top eighty best R&B songs of all time. Miguel's *Adorn* came in at #2, right behind Aretha Franklin's *Respect*. That's how much I love this song. MKY's version, however, lacked rhythm and blues, passion, and romance. MKY seems like a wonderful young man and I wish nothing but the best for him and his wonderful family. But if this performance is an accurate reflection of his true talent, he's going to have trouble advancing in this competition.

Let's see what tomorrow night brings to the stage.....