

April 22,, 2024: The Top 12

1. Will Moseley: *"Well the road rolls out like a welcome mat. To a better place than the one we're at. And I ain't got no kinda plan. But I've had all of this town I can stand."* Although we are never told in the first stanza of this song exactly why the singer wants to leave this town so badly, we are certainly led to believe that he wants out; wants to make a new start somewhere else. But the message of the song is clear. This is a love song to the woman he loves: *"And it don't matter to me. Wherever we are is where I want to be."* *"I can be your lucky penny. And you can be my four leaf clover. **Starting Over.**"* This is Will's first stop at #1. It was a difficult choice but I think I got it right. I've said it many times but that's doesn't make it any less true. Will Moseley and a Chris Stapleton lyric is an unbeatable combination of singer and song. After Will's wonderful cover of Chris Stapleton's hit song, **Starting Over**, I doubt many would disagree with me, or, disagree with my promotion of Will to the top spot. He earned it.

2. Jack Blocker: When asked what the 80s synth pop ballad **Blinding Lights** was about, The Weeknd (before he changed his name to Adel Makkonen Tasfaye) responded: *"Blinding Lights is about how you want to see someone at night, and you're intoxicated, and you're driving to this person and you're just blinded by streetlights."* he explained. *"But nothing could stop you from trying to go see that person, because you're so lonely. I don't want to ever promote drunk driving, but that's what the dark undertone is."* I'm not surprised that Jack picked this megahit. His tastes in music span almost every genre. If the judges told him to sing the aria, **Nessun Dorma**, from the opera, Turandot, he'd find a way to make it his own. If they ordered him to sing Refused's punk screamo anthem, **New Noise**, he'd break it up and reconstruct it in his own image. Hell, it wouldn't have surprised me if he rolled out a Minimoog or a Roland Juno-60 (the polysynthesizers heard in the **Blinding Lights** music track) to augment his slowed down bluesy version of **Blinding Lights**. I'm not joking. I really think Jack can sing any genre of music. What do these songs have in common? Enya's **Caribbean Blue**, Madonna's **Like A Virgin**, Cyndi Lauper's **Girls Just Wanna Have Fun**, Rod Stewart's **Young Turks**, George Michael's **Last Christmas**, and The Eurythmics' **Sweet Dreams (Are Made of These)**? Answer: The Roland Juno-60 synthesizer.

3. Mia Matthews: Miranda Lambert's **Over You** was voted Song Of The Year and Single of the Year at the 2012 CMA Awards and she was voted

Best Female Vocalist of the Year as well. The song was written by Miranda and her husband, Blake Shelton, as a way for Blake to cope with the lingering effects of his brother's death in a car accident some twenty years ago. It's a beautiful song with a simple melody but quite sad. Of all the girls, I think Mia's transformation has been jaw-dropping. She went from plain to pretty. The Idol makeup artists deserve a raise. All the girls look great. Show the makeup artists love. Give them a raise.

4. Julia Gagnon: Something In The Orange by Zach Bryan is a breakup song beautifully presented by Julia. The Orange is the sunset; a metaphor for the ending of his romance. But the singer is holding out hope that his relationship can still be salvaged. Why does he think that?

Because **Something in the Orange** is telling him so. This was a magnificent vocal. But Julia is the only contestant of color left and not likely to last much longer no matter how well she sings. As I argued before, the Idol voters are a microcosm of the America as a whole. We are a divided country now with a tribal code of behavior. Blacks make up 13% of the USA population and all four of them are gone now. It's not easy to advance on Idol with the support of only 13% of the viewers voting for you and/or the genre of music that defines those contestants of color. Because I've watched this show for 22 seasons, I have experienced the crowning of five contestants of color. So contestants of color absolutely can win this competition. But it requires more than just singing well. You also need a strategy to win. In short, minorities need to learn to play the Idol game better. Yes, the obstacles are real and formidable but they can be overcome. I've seen it done five times. Julia is not Black but she is a contestant of color so her path to victory will be fraught with difficulty. My advice to contestants of color would be to organize voting blocks long before they audition for Idol because it's hard to do that once the competition starts.

5. Emmy Russell: Lose You To Love Me is about her tumultuous relationship with Justin Bieber. While coping with depression, she resolved that the only way she could learn to love herself was to let go of, or lose, Justin Bieber from her life. This was a much better performance than her last outing. I really enjoyed what she did here. Primarily, because she believed in these lyrics. That's how it's supposed to work on the Idol stage. That's how contestants advance in this competition.

6. Abi Carter: All Too Well is Taylor Swift's bitter commentary on her emotional breakup with actor, Jake Gyllenhaal who she claims left her for a

younger woman, stood her up on her 21st birthday party, and failed to return her red scarf that she left at Jake's sister's house. She hit the right notes and sang it well but I don't think Abi ever found the heart of this song. I wonder why she picked it if she didn't believe it or had nothing in common with it.

7. McKenna Faith Brienholt: Another vocally accurate and well sung Taylor Swift breakup song. Structurally, this is a much better composition than **All Too Well**. According to the lyric, the song tells the story of a woman left scarred by a relationship with her ex; so scared that she feels like an old discarded cardigan. Then she meets a man that makes her feel better and she soon becomes his brand new cherished cardigan. Vocally, this was a wonderful performance, but honestly, by the time McKenna showed up, I had already grown weary of breakup songs. Funny the gender divide: Will sang a sweet love song, Tristan sang a sweet love song, Jack sang a horny love song (that's what The Weeknd called it) but it was very much a love song. Roman dedicated a song to Katy. Kayko was the only male to sing a breakup song but for want of a nail, he ignored the sad lyrics, flipped the song on its head, and turned the Idol stage into a head banging mosh pit. I'm not sure what he was doing but it wasn't a sad breakup song. On the other hand, all the girls except Mia (Over You is not a romantic breakup song but it is about a separation of filial loved one) and Jayna sang a sad breakup song. C'mon ladies!. There are some really good guys out there. We're not all bad I promise.

8. Kaibrienne: Is **Wrecking Ball** a good song? Absolutely. Did Kaibrienne sing it well? Absolutely. Did the judges like it? Absolutely. Did I enjoy this performance? No. It's another sad breakup song. And this time, there's a wrecking ball involved, even if a metaphor for carelessly rushing into a relationship. This breakup involves Miley Cyrus and her toxic relationship with actor Liam Hemsworth. C'mon ladies! You're making it look like most men are bad guys when most of us are actually good guys. Just one song about the joy and happiness of being in love. Please. I can list hundreds of them for you to pick from but here are a couple: **Love Story** by Taylor Swift, **Teenage Dream** by Katy Perry, **A Thousand Years** by Christina Perri, and **Strawberry Wine** by Deanna Carter, etc.

9. Tristan Harper: For me, this was Tristan's best performance on the Idol stage. He wasn't simply singing words and verses. He meant it. Honestly, I was shocked. He actually sounded and looked like an adult. Luke Combs' **Crazy Beautiful** is 100% a love song between a man and a woman,

and, it's definitely not about a boyish puppy love. But Tristan found the heart of this song. At 15! Is it possible that a 15 year old could actually recognize true love and project it in song? This was a very good cover of a wonderful Luke Combs love song.

10. Jayna Elise: This was a very good vocal, but, when you're a target, you need more. Had I known she planned to sing **Diamonds**, and knew how to reach her handlers, I would have messaged her to watch La'Porsha Renea's exquisite jazz version of this Rihanna's classic. La'Porsha finished second in Season 15 of American Idol behind Trent Harmon. Her version of this wonderful song is an Idol classic. And the message in this song, that she and her lover are like diamonds twinkling in the sky, forever together, and indestructible is an affirmation of eternal love.

11. Roman Harper: Roman did a good job in the verses of Katy Perry's **Roar**, but, like Jayna, he, too, was vulnerable and had to over-perform to stay in this competition. He tried hard; fought a good fight, but in the end, was unable to win over enough voters. It's the same old story. With minority contestants, its really a question of numbers. Minority contestants must find ways to overcome their disadvantages. It absolutely can be done.

12. Kayko. I have no idea what Kayko was doing. Gotye's **Somebody That I Used To Know** is not a rock song so I don't think dancing around the stage like it is a mosh pit is consistent with the message in these lyrics. Having said that, both Gotye and Kayko are rebels, and, Kayko has a huge social media following. He's done well so far in this competition and the judges love him, so what I think won't matter much. If there's one thing I know about Idol, it's this: do whatever you must to survive to fight another day because you cannot win if you don't survive nights that showcase genres not in your lane. Kayko is in a difficult position. He can't out-sing the competition. His instrument is too weak. So he has to stand out in other ways. I don't like what he did here but his decision proved the right thing to do since he advanced. It's just that Gotye's protagonist is such an unlikable fellow who never did right by his girl; never gave her the attention she craved, just ignored her and strung her along. I don't see the honor in that. I don't see that as a reason to dance and celebrate. But here's the kicker. During my research for this post, I ran across the Dutch dance group CDK's interpretation of this song. It was brilliant. It was nothing like the head banging Kayko did tonight but it started me thinking. I found out that this

song climbed the dance charts in several countries so wondered if perhaps Kayko's interpretation of this song was not as weird as it seemed. When I get confused about anything I always resort to Archibald MacLeish famous line from the poem, *Ars Poetica*: "a poem should not mean but be". Singing is an art form so the line from *Ars Poetica* can also be applied to American Idol. Gotye offered this song to the world and we took from it what we needed to satisfy our own unique artistic temperaments. So I decided to get off my elitist, know-it-all, holier-than-thou, high horse and accept the fact that Kayko sees this piece of art differently than I do and that it's okay that we got something different from the same work of art. I accept that Kayko is not wrong because there is nothing absolute about art, there is no right or wrong, just preference. Like Archibald MacLeish's *Ars Poetica*, it just is. So I will close this post by saying that Kayko and I simply disagree about the meaning of this song, stop bashing him for having a different artistic vision than I do, and let it be.