

Motown Week Exposes Some Early Favorites

Written by Butch Burney
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In the first real “theme” week for American Idol, we saw some of the favorites slip between the cracks. Motown Week showed us some of what we already knew about the contestants – Scotty is a one-trick pony and Naima is a no-trick pony, but it also revealed what we had been suspecting for the last couple of weeks – Lauren is not as engaging as we once thought, and Stefano is not as good as the judges would lead you to believe.

But before we get into the contestants, can someone explain what the make-up artists were thinking when they did J-Lo’s face? The woman is beautiful, so they didn’t have to slather on pink blush and light blue eye shadow to make her look like an HKK scum.

I digress, though. Back to the singing.

Casey Abrams, “I Heard It Through the Grapevine,” (Marvin Gaye) – Casey had turned me in his favor with last week’s performance, but this ended up being kinda more of the same. He prowled and growled – as he has done all three weeks – and did OK. But, but being in the opening slot is difficult, and he didn’t make his performance extremely memorable. He could be in the bottom three this week.

Thia Megia, “Heatwave,” (Martha and the Vandellas) – Finally, Thia did an uptempo song after an eternity of ballads, but I always feel like she is in a Disney production or singing at a beauty pageant. She has a great voice and looks cutesy, but it’s all just so Hanna Montana. I tried to picture her singing an original song, and it just isn’t happening. Bottom three material.

Jacob Lusk, “You’re All I Need to Get By,” (Marvin Gaye and Tammi Terrel) – Yeah, you knew Jacob was going to get all into Motown, and he did. One of the three best performances of the night. Jacob makes some weird faces and emits some otherworldly sounds, but the dude has a little sumthin-sumthin. Steven Tyler thought the performance was hug-worthy – and so did several people in the front row. I’m not sure if it was that over-the-top good, but it was pretty darn solid.

Lauren Alaina, “You Keep Me Hanging On,” (The Supremes) – One of the top early picks to make it deep in the competition, Lauren has gotten in a rut and is spinning her wheels. Sure,

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she looks great and has a good voice, but she takes the safe route every single time. None of her performances are memorable, and while she'll sail through for another week, she has gone from contender to pretender.

Stefano Langone, "Hello," (Lionel Ritchie) – Stefano said he grew up on Motown, but had never heard this Lionel Ritchie song. It makes me believe he probably never heard of Motown. It didn't matter, because Stefano is going to throw his head back, close his eyes and try to make every third note into a glory note. If you have 54 glory notes in a song, then you really have none. Once again, he looked very much like a man giving birth, suffering immense pain to somehow sing the two syllable word, "Hello." It would trouble me not if AI voters decide to tell Stefano "Goodbye."

Haley Reinhart, "You Really Got a Hold on Me," (The Miracles) – Poor Haley. She has been in the bottom three twice, and will be in it again. Haley has the look and the growly, sexy voice. She likes to wear strapless tops and short shorts to get attention. But she is lacking in charisma, and it shows every week. This performance will probably be her last because her voice is made for Motown, and instead of slugging it out the park, she settled for a sharp single past the shortstop. That's good but not good enough.

Scotty McCreery, "For Once In My Life," (supposedly by Stevie Wonder) – Scotty sang a country song with Motown lyrics. That's the best way to describe the way he messed up Stevie Wonder's hit. I get that Scotty can sing only two types of music – country AND western – but c'mon, try something different. Every song sounds like a different version of babylockthendoors. Tiresome and boring.

Pia Toscano, "All In Love is Fair," (Stevie Wonder) – Pia has the look, definitely. She has the voice, definitely. But, I wonder if she set the bar too high with her early performances. Her last two songs have been really good and really forgettable. She is playing a little too safe with her overuse of slow ballads where she just stands behind the mic and sings, but she is so good that she hasn't garnered much criticism. Yet.

Paul McDonald, "Tracks of My Tears," (Smokey Robinson) – I thought immediately that Paul should do a Smokey song, and though he was a little rough and his voice trailed off a couple of times, I liked his performance. His voice is definitely unique, and unlike some of the other safe performers, I remember what Paul sang. I don't think he's the next American Idol, but he is interesting, which goes a long way.

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Naima Adedapo, “Dancing in the Streets,” (Martha and the Vandellas) – Hands down (or should I say hands flailing wildly in the air) the worst performance of the evening ... again. How Naima didn’t get voted off last week, I’m not sure. She has the weakest voice, and her puny rendition of Dancing in the Streets and her attempt to get votes with a tribal dance should spell doom for her this week, but it probably won’t. And that’s too bad.

James Durbin, “Living for the City,” (Stevie Wonder) – James strengthens his hold as one of the top two or three contenders in the competition. He was a little more restrained, except for the very end, and he showed that he has a strong voice even without his screaming. Right now, he seems like a shoe-in for the final three.

Best Performance – James.

Worst Performance – Naima.

Bottom Three – Naima, Haley, Stefano.

Going Home – Haley.