

Six Little Engines That Tried

Tonight was the episode of “American Idol” that I have been waiting to see since season two. Not because it featured music from the Andrew Lloyd Webber songbook but that a good question was posed to a certain British judge whom everyone admires greatly: “Given the rather negative comments you pose to performers who would be better suited for the Broadway stage how does one approach these songs?” Mr Cowell responded: “Make them memorable yet contemporary.” A rather cryptic response if ever there was one.

Six contestants remain. Those who were familiar with the songs showed it and those who were less familiar showed it (perhaps even more so).

Syesha Mercado started the evening with “One Rock & Roll Too Many” from [Starlight Express](#). Not being extremely familiar with the show, I cannot say too much about it. However, the bluesy rendition was quite nice.

The next contestant, Jason Castro, did not fare as well. Even Lord Andrew commented that he never thought he would see the day when “Memory” would be sung by a young man in dreadlocks. The composer even provided a bit of background into the character from [Cats](#) who performs the song (“a rather old glamour puss”). Jason looked like the proverbial deer in the headlights on stage.

The halftime performer, Brooke White, also had difficulty. The song “You Must Love Me” was composed by Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice for the [movie version](#) of [Evita](#). It is sung by Eva Peron (played by Madonna) on her deathbed. Unfortunately, Brooke lost her lyric in the first line, stopped, apologized, and started over. I’m not sure if this would be allowed in an actual audition but to do so on a television show which is seen by (reportedly) millions of people each week takes some

degree of chutzpah.

The “contestant to beat” this year, 17-year-old David Archuleta, chose to take a diva song of nearly operatic proportions and turn it into a boy band pop ballad. Lloyd Webber wrote the role of Christine in [*Phantom of the Opera*](#) specifically for his wife at the time, Sarah Brightman. For a young man to change such a song with the composer sitting in the audience watching and listening takes a great deal of courage. However, good ol’ Simon did not find the performance especially memorable.

The Irish female rocker, Carly Smithson, decided to change her song from “All I Ask of You” to the title track of [*Jesus Christ Superstar*](#). A wise choice on her part.

However, the final performer did not choose wisely. Male rocker David Cook attempted to sing “Music of the Night.” The rendition was as unimpressive as the movie version of [*Phantom of the Opera*](#). I was hoping he would chose a song better suited to his rock sensibilities, but he decided to go a different route and it just did not work.

I guess I found half of the performances enjoyable. But as Lord Andrew told most of the contestants: you must know not only what you are singing but also what you are singing about. Find the meaning behind the words.

Baby You Can Drive My Car

Finally, after 7 seasons on the air, American Idol contestants can sing songs from the Lennon/McCartney songbook. Of course, what better way to celebrate the feat of convincing Michael Jackson to allow it (since he owns the rights to the Beatles

works) then to have an all Fab Five show. Let me also point out that (IMHO) after seven seasons, the show has lost some of its luster. It is no longer the "must see show" of the week. It is becoming tedious watching Randy say: "It was just awiight fo' me Dawg." Or Paula exclaim: "You look beautiful" when what she really means is "That was really bad." Or even Simon bashing the hopefuls. It has all become a bit formulaic.

Two of the performances stood out to me (one good; the other... welllll). The first was a performance of "Let It Be" (the final single released by the Beatles in 1970). Brooke White chose to perform the song while accompanying herself on the piano. It was a truly heart-felt performance.

However, Kristy Lee Cook decided to change the classic "Eight Days a Week" and give it a country flavor. Not only did the judges totally dismiss the brave choice, she will probably be in the bottom three tomorrow night. I am not what one would call a country music aficionado, but it was just a strange rendition.

So while it is becoming a bit tedious, I still do try to catch American Idol when I can. I can actually say I know where Carrie Underwood came from... and she is a country singer.