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THE VOICE

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DOUBLE ISSUE



The Voice
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Tuesday, May 23,
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The Voice

Soars



As the competition heats up, the coaches dish about what it takes to win and what keeps TV's No. 1 reality show on top **PLUS:** Must-see season enders—mark your calendars!

BY **MARISA ROFFMAN**



THE VOICE COACHES—MAROON 5 frontman Adam Levine, No Doubt's Gwen Stefani, country superstar Blake Shelton and multiple-Grammy winner Alicia Keys—may spend a lot of time together when filming their hit singing competition, but absence (during the break between the Knockout rounds and the live playoffs) sure made the heart grow fonder for this fab four. "I was genuinely excited to see everybody again—it's very rare," joked Levine as he geared up to reunite with the team for Season 12's live shows.

Thanks in part to this camaraderie, the NBC juggernaut remains the No. 1 show in its timeslot, beating competitor *Dancing With the Stars* in viewers age 18–49 and snagging musical luminaries John Legend, Luke Bryan, Celine Dion and Shania Twain to mentor this season's contestants.

And though all four coaches desperately want to win (Shelton's team has claimed victory five times in the show's history, while Levine's singers have won three times; Stefani and Keys are looking for their

first championship), the mood is light as the competition gets more intense. Each of the coaches has a viable contender—Team Adam's Jesse Larson, Team Alicia's Chris Blue, Team Blake's Lauren Duski and Team Gwen's Hunter Plake appearing to have an early edge. But now is the time *anything* can happen.

The coaches sat down with us to talk strategy, their off-screen bond and how long they'll stay in those big red chairs—turns out not very long for Keys.

The live shows are traditionally when things kick into high gear. What do you expect from the competition as you head toward the finale?

Stefani: For me and Alicia, I would say our teams are next level.

Keys: They're killing right now!

Shelton: Why are we going to make it like that?

Stefani: Because it's true. There's a couple of people that are on our teams that are just crazy good. Overall, the talent is *really, really* good. I honestly don't know what's going to happen.

**Levine, Stefani,
Keys and
Shelton**



**Season 12
frontrunner
Chris Blue**

Keys: Every Tuesday [elimination], I want to quit. I'm distraught. Until the moment comes and either me or Gwen win...then it's going to feel really good.

Stefani: I love this part [of the season]. Everybody has fans now, so their whole attitude starts to change. I see these contestants on Instagram—and you get a whole different side of their personality. When they're with us, they're really serious, trying to get it done. But they are goofy and silly with everybody else.

Stefani: And the first time I met Adam, it felt like I knew him already. It was the weirdest thing. He's basically the same guy I've hung out with my whole life: a band guy.

Shelton: Adam, were you a fan of Gwen's before?

Levine: To the point where I didn't know how much I should say. I didn't want to make her feel weird.

Shelton: When he heard Gwen was coming, he was like, "Dude, you don't understand. This is a big deal for me."

Stefani: I love you. You know that.

Levine: I do! I love you too. [To Shelton] But in a platonic way, so relax.

Shelton: Good.

Teams Gwen and Alicia are looking for their first win. How do you plan to bring that trophy home?

Levine: It takes a village.

Stefani: Particularly beating Blake. He knows what he's doing.

Keys: As long as Gwen or I win, we both win.

Levine: I'm fully on your side about Blake not winning. I feel like this is more of a trio.

Shelton: That's really all you guys have.

Keys: I'm cool with three-on-one. But I'm here to win.

Stefani: I am happy for anyone that wins.

Keys: Except for Blake.

Levine: God help us if he wins again.

Do you have different techniques this far into the season to make sure your artists stand out?

Stefani: Let's talk about iTunes.

Levine: [Putting performances on] iTunes is a good early barometer of success on the show. But it's scary,

"I've had early success and not won. So much happens from now to the end...these contestants are coming alive. They come out of their shell and surprise you—and some let you down" —Levine

This is the first time you have coached together as a team. What do you feel that your particular group brings that we haven't seen in the past?

Keys: We're the best.

Stefani: [Laughs] Alicia and I performed together previously and knew each other for a long time. But it's been such a blast to get to know her here.

Keys: I love this one.

Levine: Jeez, get a room! Obviously, we're all very comfortable with each other and that's what makes coaching together awesome. Well, clearly. [Gestures to Shelton and Stefani, who are dating]

Stefani: I'm comfortable with Blake.

Shelton: She makes me a little nervous!

Levine: Their level of comfort is highly discomfoting to me. [Shelton and Stefani laugh]

because it can be a red flag; I've had early success and not won. So much happens from now to the end...

these contestants are coming alive. People come out of their shell and surprise you—and some let you down.

Stefani: I think the hardest thing for the coaches is finding a song that fits.

Levine: That gets important right now in the season.

Stefani: It's a lot of pressure. On Easter, I [was] trying to think of songs. I wanted to turn to Blake and be like, "What song do you think?" Is that cheating?

Levine: It's not cheating. It's just a horrible idea. [Imitates Shelton] "Do a deep cut from Huey Lewis's third album."

Stefani: It's hard because you're still getting to know the people on your team. I mean, do you guys find it easy picking songs?



Pope with
coach
Shelton

Winners' Club

Our favorites—and where they are now!

SAWYER FREDERICKS

The Season 8 winner—and the sole victor for former coach Pharrell Williams—released a self-titled EP in 2015 and the full-length album *A Good Storm* in 2016. Fredericks opted to become an independent artist in 2017; he is currently working on new music and touring.

SUNDANCE HEAD

In the aftermath of his *Voice* victory, reigning champ Head joined his coach, Blake Shelton, on his 2017 tour. Head has also recorded a yet-to-be-released single that reportedly features a guest spot from a Country Music Hall of Fame singer.

CASSADEE POPE

Team Blake's Pope—the show's first female winner—released her album *Frame by Frame* in 2013 (which bowed at No. 9 on the Billboard 200 charts) and a follow-up EP, *Summer*, in 2016. Since her Season 3 crowning, Pope has toured with Tim McGraw, Dierks Bentley, Rascal Flatts and The Band Perry. Additionally, Pope's duet with Chris Young, "Think of You," earned a 2017 Grammy nomination for Best Country Duo/Group Performance.

JORDAN SMITH

Immediately after his Season 9 win, Smith (coached by Adam Levine) set chart records: He became the first artist to hold the No. 1 and 2 spots on Billboard's Hot Christian Songs simultaneously with *The Voice* numbers "Mary, Did You Know" and "Hallelujah." In 2016, he performed "You Are So Beautiful" with David Foster and released two studio albums, "Something Beautiful" and "'Tis the Season." —MR

Keys: My team has a very good sense of themselves. The last time I was on the show, I didn't feel the same; I felt I had to cherry-pick things.

Levine: You start wanting the control in the beginning and then realize you have to let them do what they love, because that's how they're the best.

Keys: Blake, you're not saying anything. Give us some of your secrets and tricks. Come on, buddy.

Blake, you have won the show the most times of any judge—is there a particular strategy that you use?

Shelton: That's the hardest thing to answer, because strategy doesn't really mean anything on this show. How can we talk about a strategy when what works for one makes no sense for another?

Levine: It's more like putting together a puzzle.

Shelton: Some people have a good gauge that what sounds good on record may not translate on television for a reality singing show.

Stefani: Blake has a gift to be able to choose songs that work for certain situations. I think that's one of the reasons he's won so many times.

Keys: Learning the audience of this show has been my most interesting journey.

Levine: It's also songs you *think* are going to work. Sometimes you have a nostalgic feeling with a song but no one else gives a s--t about it.

Stefani: That's my problem.

Levine: Your feelings can't get involved with the song choices. Songs that I don't even like sometimes are the perfect song for somebody. It's tricky.

How long do you see yourself continuing with the show?

Levine: It's not that I hate Blake...

Shelton: "...it's just that I'll quit before I'll sit next to that guy."

Levine: My job is highly contingent upon him. [Shelton laughs] But really, this is all I care about. Right here, right now, you know?

Shelton: I won't ever take a break from the show; I'll either do it or I'm quitting...or I'm going to get fired!

Keys: This is my last season.

Shelton: You're not coming back?!

Keys: Who knows what the future holds, but I know this one is my final season.

Levine: I'll tell you what the future holds: you being on the f---ing show!

Keys: I am excited for this; it's like a finale for me. That's why I'm so passionate about my team.

Levine: You know why she's not coming back? She sees us and she's like, "I don't want to be like that."

Stefani: I don't know anything yet. I would be open to continuing; I love it.

Shelton: [To Keys] Don't you want to at least keep going a little bit longer to get better?

Keys: This is my season, Blake. This is it!