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INSIDE: *Meet three Sacramentans who competed on "The Voice"*



After "The Voice"

Our region is brimming with musical talent, and some of our locals go national. That's what happened to three Sacramento singers when they were chosen to compete on the NBC show.

Katie Rae finished in the Top 20 on "The Voice."

BY CATHY CASSINOS-CARR

Imagine performing on a stage with some 7 million people watching. That's what happens on NBC's "The Voice," where some of the nation's most talented singers compete to win the grand prize of a recording contract. The brave souls who pass the audition and land a spot on the show head to LA for an experience that's equal parts grit and glamour, by turns rubbing elbows with superstars (such as Kelly Clarkson and John Legend) and working their buns off to compete, week after week.

For Katie Rae, Larriah J and Shane Q—all Sacramentans who've competed (but not against each other) on "The Voice" over the past three years—it's been a game changer, rocketing them out of obscurity and into the public eye.

Katie Rae (Mortimer)

SEASON 21 (2021)

The Sacramentan who most recently appeared on "The Voice" (she finished in the elite Top 20 in November 2021), Mortimer is nothing if not persistent. After a recent bout with postpartum depression sidelined her from singing, she came back swinging, auditioning four times for the show before finally passing the audition.

A stay-at-home mom who describes herself as shy, Mortimer, 36, says she has battled nervousness when performing in the past but hit her stride on "The Voice." "I was less nervous and more prepared than I ever thought I'd be on stage," says the Milpitas-born singer, who now lives in East Sac. "They give you all the tools you need."

On Mortimer's first appearance (blind audition round) on "The Voice," her emotion-stirring performance of Maren Morris' "The Bones" inspired three coaches to spin their chairs around, meaning she could choose to work with any of the three. Mortimer went with singer/actress Ariana Grande but was subsequently stolen by "American Idol" champ Kelly Clarkson.

When did you start singing, and how did you develop your soulful R&B sound?

Growing up, I started out singing in coffee shops with my dad and brother, and would practice along with my dad's CDs. I sang everything from Nat King Cole to Lauryn Hill. It was mainly from Lauryn that I developed my tone. I worked hard to emulate her sound.

Why did you choose Ariana Grande as your coach?

I asked myself who was fighting for me—who wanted me super bad? I'm very happy I chose her. And later I got to work with another amazing coach, Kelly. They're so different and I learned different things from each of them. Ariana's very technical and Kelly is very social and emotional, like me.

What's next?

I have a band I'm starting to work with in Sac, including some members of my old band (Telephone). I want to go slowly, play some venues in Sacramento. I've never really written music before, but I want to try that and have some originals to show, and eventually do some recording.



Larriah J (Jackson)

SEASON 19 (2020)

Jackson was only 15—gasp!—when she appeared on “The Voice.” But if anyone was ready to do this at such a tender age, it was probably Jackson. The native Sacramentan was only 3 when she made her first public singing appearance at the Crocker Art Museum, and she’s been performing ever since.

Still, it’s a feat for someone so young to compete on national TV and spend months away from home and family, especially during the Year of the Lockdown. But Jackson prevailed. With her rich, mature singing voice and professional poise, she wowed pop star Gwen Stefani (who jumped at the chance to be her coach) and audiences, and made it all the way to the Top 20.

Now 17 and a senior at St. Francis High School, Jackson says she is “beyond grateful” for the experience of—and lessons learned from—“The Voice.”

You were in LA from July to November 2020 for “The Voice.” How did the pandemic impact things?

It was almost bittersweet because when they flew us out to LA in July, I was concerned we weren’t going to be able to do the show because of COVID. We were isolated forever, and there was so much uncertainty. I started school in August, and juggling school and the show was rough. Thank goodness we were doing distance learning!

You’re a very experienced performer. Were you nervous on the show?

I was extremely nervous during my first performance, singing “I’ll Be There” during my blind audition. The stage is so much smaller than it seems on TV—there’s not that much space between you and the judges. When Gwen turned her chair, I looked offstage and saw my mom jumping and screaming. I had to remind myself to stay in the moment to maintain my composure.

Takeaway lessons?

One of the biggest lessons I took is the idea of being OK with yourself and what you have to offer—being OK with having to learn, having to get better, and just being where you are physically, mentally and spiritually.

Being there for six months around already-established artists also helped me to see what’s possible, such as songwriting and producing. Before “The Voice” I was kind of at a halt, but now I have so many dreams, knowing what’s out there.



FOLLOW 'EM—You can follow these Sacramento singers on Instagram at:

- katie_rae333
- larriahj
- shaneqofficial



Shane Q (Quidachay)

SEASON 17 (2019)

When Quidachay belted out Chris Stapleton’s “Tennessee Whiskey” for his blind audition on “The Voice,” all four coaches spun around—a rarity on the show. It put Quidachay in the catbird seat, able to choose any of them.

He initially thought he’d go with country star Blake Shelton, but a last-minute change of heart led him to Kelly Clarkson. “I thought, ‘Kelly’s done this—she was one of the first to do it when she won ‘American Idol,’” says Quidachay.

A self-taught multi-instrumentalist with a strong, soulful voice, Quidachay made it to the coveted Top 10 before being eliminated in December 2019. Two years and a pandemic later, the 31-year-old Sacramento native is now gigging regularly (“just me and my guitar”), playing the Gibson acoustic Clarkson gave him as a parting gift.

How did you get into music?

Music has always been around me, starting with my dad, who performed his whole life. When I was around 5, my family noticed me singing around the house and they wanted me to sing more, but I was super shy and didn’t sing again for a long time. Finally, at Rio Linda High I joined the choir.

After graduating, I took music classes at Sac City College. I wasn’t really thinking about making it a career, but I started doing little gigs here and there, and started doing covers on YouTube, which is how I ended up on “The Voice.” Talent scouts saw my YouTube performances and reached out to me.

What was it like working with Kelly, and what did she teach you?

Kelly is exactly who you see on TV. She’s real, and such a fun person. She always said, “sing like it’s going to be your last time ever singing,” and I’ve taken that to heart.

The pandemic hit right after your run with “The Voice” ended. What timing!

It was rough. After the show ended, I lined up shows for the entire year 2020, and they all pretty much disappeared.

But once California opened back up, I reached out to every brewery, vineyard and winery I could think of. I’d say 90 percent responded “yes,” and now I’m playing all over the place, from Sac to Vacaville and beyond. I’ve got gigs lined up most every weekend. I also finished a five-song EP, which should be released soon. **IS**