



For the 20th time, it's time to find an "American Idol."

The competition that launched a genre of musical talent contests begins a milestone season – its fifth on ABC, following the hugely successful run it originally had on Fox – Sunday, Feb. 27. Ryan Seacrest continues to preside over the show, with Luke Bryan, Katy Perry and Lionel Richie continuing as the judges who assess the hopefuls at auditions around the country, then when the finalists are brought to Hollywood.

Though the coronavirus pandemic has necessitated adjustments to the "American Idol" process, Seacrest reflects, "It's been navigated to become a very heartfelt, human and artist-driven show because of what the judges have done. I think they've done that deliberately, and I think that that's what you are seeing with these artists that may never have normally auditioned for 'American Idol' in the past. The fact that we can audition on a computer allows us to tap into talent that has never sung in front of human beings before, yet can make it to the next level with these three superstar judges."

"What I love about what 'American Idol,' " adds Richie, "is that we're the microcosm of the way the world should be. If you look at the four of us – the judges and Ryan – we represent America and the music business.

We come from very different walks of life, but at the same time, we can come together and celebrate each other."

Indeed, Perry maintains, "It's not really about anything besides us holding that lottery ticket that we want to give to (the winner) at the end of the season and create a real superstar, and our track record shows. I think it's not really comparable to other talent competitions because there's not really anyone (who won those), let alone the ten people we can name on two hands, that have had successful careers. We are really, really proud of that."

As part of the 20th anniversary, executive producer Megan Wolflick hopes to bring back contestants who made their names on "American Idol." She also acknowledges that in current circumstances, "It is, of course, our goal to have the fans back in the studio because that's what makes the atmosphere. But having had this be our third year in the pandemic, we are ready to pivot on a dime at a moment's notice."

Still, Bryan insists "American Idol" will continue to operate the same way it has since he, Perry and Richie first arrived. He says, "We look at (each contestant) with an open heart and an open mind. And for the most part, we feel like our viewers at home are doing the exact same thing."

'American Idol' launches Season 20 on ABC

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