

INDIAN IDOL IS BACK WITH SEASON 5, THIS TIME LOOKING BEYOND JUST NATIONAL TALENTS. PLUS, A COMEDY SHOW WITHOUT CUTS ON THE NET

With IPL 3 out of the way, now all eyes (and ears) are on *Indian Idol* Season 5 as it unleashes its own brand of triumph, defeat, drama and anxiety on television screens. Once again contestants from every corner of the country queue up to take a shot at their *Idol* dreams.

In keeping with the show and its razzmatazz, the launch event in Delhi got off to an exciting start with guests urged into a singing shot inside an *Indian Idol* booth equipped with camera and boomstick for a hands-on feel of the challenge. Inside, a familiar voice rang through the banquet hall as Prajakta Shukre, one of the five finalists at *Indian Idol*'s first season, belted out *Vande Mataram*.

Four years down the line Prajakta is all geared to play host in this edition of the contest joined by Abhijeet Sawant, the first one to win the coveted title. After two albums and a shot at acting, Abhijeet is ready to take on his role of playing anchor. "The stage feels a bit changed for me since this time I'm here with a different sense of responsibility. Hosting a show is very new to me so I went through three months of learning how to read the

script, interact with contestants and help balance the mood of a show," said the season 1 champ.

A glance through images from the show's archives of frenzied contestants, bizarre moments and success stories of a Monali Thakur, Amit Sana, Rahul Vaidya and Abhijeet himself brought alive the last four seasons of the *Idol* mania.

Excited about this year's talent pool Anu Malik made up for his absence through a lively video message. "The talent has been fantastic this time. It was an impossible task saying no to many contestants during eliminations. It's been great fun having Salim and Sunidhi as co-judges. Salim always has an answer for the oddest of questions and with Sunidhi it's both *naram* and *garam*! But both bring a lot of colour and glamour to the show," he grinned.

Season 5 took off two months ago with more than a lakh of ambitious participants

**SALIM MERCHANT,
SUNIDHI CHAUHAN AND
ABHIJEET SAWANT**

GLOCAL SOUND



pitching from dawn to midnight. After the first round of filtering out 80 contestants, the number currently stands whittled down to 17 with names and faces that will unfold over the coming weeks.

"It's the biggest show on our network this year. It's an international format that has worked in multiple cultures. Last year we had 48 million tuning into the show and this time we hope to reach the 50 million mark," said Manjit Singh, CEO, Multi Screen Media involved in operation and distribution of television channels in India. "We've managed to create a power brand like none other in the past 15 years. It even stands way ahead of popular programs like *Boogie Woogie* or *Comedy Circus*."

Ajay Bhalwankar, programming head, Sony Entertainment Television, said: "It's been four years and it was important for us to innovate. The show this time is very crisp. There's an initiative to find a good playback voice with greater stress on vocals than showmanship. The show will wrap up in 16 weeks with mentors from all genres of the music industry coming in at regular intervals to offer tips and train contest-

ants".

Looking dapper in a black jacket and jodhpuris Salim Merchant of the Salim-Sulaiman duo made a quiet entry as he settled down before a grand piano and rendered the soulful *Alhi Maula* from *Karbaan*. In a not-seen-before avatar he performed a string of songs belting out *Karbaan hua* and the anthemic *Aashayein* from *Iqbal*.

"We're looking for a versatile singer who can sing a ghazal and a rock song with equal ease. The goal this time is not just about finding a national talent but a global one," he assured.

Curtains came down with a high-powered performance by Sunidhi Chauhan who makes her television debut as a judge. Stepping up the tempo with her charmbusters *Shut up and bounce*, *Deedar de* and *Sajna main vari vari*, she grabbed the mike to share her experience so far. "I had never thought I'd be on a reality show but I couldn't say no to meeting so many people from all parts of the country with this passion and hunger to be heard. I'm looking for excellence whether people like it or not," she signed off.

So tune in to *Indian Idol 5* on Sony every Monday to Thursday at 9pm.

Mohua Das