

Q & A with Olympic Ice Skaters, Maia and Alex Shibutani

Written by Lauren Grifol

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If you tuned into the 2018 Olympic Games, you know who Maia and Alex Shibutani are; however, if you did not, the brother-and-sister duo is about to steal your hearts away... just like they stole the hearts of the judges who awarded them the bronze medal. These American sweethearts are not only known for dazzling the eyes of their audiences around the world, but also known for their engaging personalities and fun social media content.

In this exclusive interview, the Shib Sibs give us a taste of their shining personalities while letting us in on the inside scoop on their current tour, [Stars on Ice](#).



AFM: How has your style of skating developed over the years?

Alex: We have been skating together for 14 years now, and we both started skating at a pretty young age. Naturally, every skater goes through a progression whereas you develop more skills, your skating obviously improves from a technical side, but artistically as we have gotten older we started to try new things and really challenged ourselves with our material. I think over the past four years our skating quality and our style really developed because we started creating programs with the focus being storytelling. We are telling our own personal story.

Maia: Following 2014, which was our first Olympics, I think that our career really changed because Alex and I found our own point of view and took creative control over what our programs were. And so, that has been a really rewarding process and we are really proud of how we did at the 2018 Olympics.

Alex: Yeah we always try to make sure our programs are entertaining and dynamic. We skate to music that we really relate to, and I think at the end of the day that authenticity in our performance resonates with the people who are watching.

AFM: You have been skating to music more relevant to today's pop culture. Are you doing this because the music speaks to you more, or because you are trying to bring a younger feel to skating?

Alex: Well, we are young but it is both. Because Maia and I are younger we have different tastes. I think that there is sort of a reputation that figure skating has for using a lot of traditional and classical music and soundtrack music; we have skated to that multiple times throughout our career. But, more recently we have decided that we wanted to skate to songs that we related to a little bit more and, naturally, with the Olympics and the fact that we are trying to grow our sport, we skated to also appeal to a different audience that wasn't so locked into watching figure skating. We did shift our themes a little more toward contemporary music when we could.

Maia: The exciting thing is that what we have gravitated to ourselves has also really resonated with people, not just of the younger demographic, but I think it has been refreshing for the sport in general.

Alex: Yeah, and we did not get any complaints from people who maybe watched the sport 20 or 30 years ago, where even judges and officials who have seen so many different generations of skaters pass through the ranks. We were able to combine a lot of the classic elements while also being more daring with our music choices. Honestly, with Coldplay, there really aren't many people that are watching the Olympics that don't know who Coldplay is. So it was a relatively safe choice from that standpoint but daring in what people normally expect from figure skating.

AFM: Do you have any favorite memories from skating when you were a child?

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Maia: Well, I started skating when I was four years old. Alex and I started learning at the same time. So I think that one of my earliest memories was just being on a public session, which is how a lot of people get started. But, I know that I fell in love with the feeling of being on the ice right away and it really just took off from those initial first times on the ice.

AFM: Have you guys ever visited Arizona?

Alex: Several years ago on a family vacation, I think.

Maia: Yeah, I think it was about 10 years ago. We have actually never performed in Arizona, so we are really looking forward to the show.

AFM: What are some things your fans can expect from the Stars on Ice tour?

Alex: Well, Stars on Ice is a show that has about a 30-year history. The cast this year is comprised of members of the 2014 and 2018 Olympic teams. So, it is the best skaters in the U.S. and some skaters that competed in the 2018 games are performing some of the programs that they skated at the Olympics, or variations of those programs. So, people who tuned into the Olympics can expect to see something familiar. It is a celebration tour because of the success that the U.S. team had with winning the team bronze, and Maia and I winning the bronze medal in the ice-dance competition. We definitely enjoyed the energy in the crowds. The energy and the general enthusiasm for figure skating and the tour itself has been awesome, so we are really looking forward to skating for people in Arizona. And, you know, there are not very many big competitions in Arizona so I think it will be neat for the people in the area to be able to see some great skating.

AFM: Do you guys have any plans while you are in the Valley?

Maia: I have not looked ahead at the schedule, but the way it has been working with this tour with the 22 cities, is that we are in the city to skate the night we are there and then, unfortunately, we have to leave rather quickly to get to the next tour stop. So hopefully we will have maybe one or two hours, but we always rehearse before the show. Show prep is really a priority for the entire cast. So we'll see.

Alex: With that being said, Maia and I do enjoy getting out, on this tour and generally when we travel. We love trying different restaurants, and our fans who are local to the cities we are in are really good about letting us know where we should be eating. It's tough to find the time to do that while on tour, but we do when we can.

Clip from their YouTube channel, [The Shib Sibs](#).

AFM: If you had to pick a different sport or other occupation, what would you choose?

Maia: I think that it is hard to say at this point, since we have been in this sport for so long, but I just know that, for me, I am very grateful that figure skating combines so many different aspects. It is both extremely athletic and technically challenging while also having more of an artistic and creative side. So, going back to when I was four, it's difficult to say if there was another sport that I would have chosen instead, but I do know that thanks to figure skating we both have an interest in storytelling.

AFM: How do you guys like to unwind after a competition?

Alex: *Laughing* We definitely go home, sorry bad joke. *Laughing* We try to have to have a nice meal together, which is one of the nice benefits of having family on this tour. We catch up with our parents, obviously. At the Olympics, we didn't see them as much as normal, because in the athlete's village you are very separate from family and friends, but it is definitely nice to catch up after a competition when you have been focused so long on preparation and obviously the stressful environment that competing produces. But, yeah, we really enjoy competing, so there's not like a huge unwind that needs to happen after every competition.

Maia: Yeah because competing is really what all the work is for. So generally, we just enjoy the opportunity to travel the world and perform for audiences all over.

Alex: And not that we need a vacation, but we don't get any. So it's not an ordeal that needs to be recovered from at all. It is just genuinely an awesome experience.

AFM: What are some of your hobbies away from the ice?

Maia: Alex is a huge sports fan. Social media is a big part of our experience as athletes, but also just as people.

Alex: It has been great to be able to meet people from all over the world through our experiences in this sports and we have fans all over the world that really support us so social media is a really good way to keep them updated with what we are doing. We are traveling a lot. I think we have been in a different city every day for the past two months. So, that has been exciting. I am into photography. We have our YouTube channel, so we try to stay active on that. We do have a lot of interests. Skating, like Maia mentioned earlier, combines a lot of different components that we are interested in, so when we are not skating, it's not like we have nothing to do.