

ANDRE RIEU

*Live your dream,
don't dream your life!*

André Rieu (1949) is a Dutch violinist, conductor, and composer best known for creating an international revival in waltz music with his Johann Strauss Orchestra. So far Rieu has sold more than 30 million albums and has taken his concert tours to perform on five continents, together with his 50-piece orchestra. His concerts attract over 700,000 spectators every year, making him one of the top ten touring artists in the world. On stage Rieu plays and conducts simultaneously, demonstrating his well-known flair and verve. With the gorgeous sets he uses – which have included a life-size reproduction of the Viennese imperial Schönbrunn Palace, complete with two ice-skating rinks, two fountains, and a ballroom dance floor situated above and behind the orchestra – he immerses his audience in a genuine waltz atmosphere. Rieu: 'People can see that we're authentic on stage and that we absolutely love making music.'

Fresh



Born into a musical family, Rieu began studying violin at the age of five and quickly developed a fascination with the orchestra. He studied violin at the Conservatoire Royal in Liège and in the Conservatorium Maastricht and attended the Music Academy in Brussels, where he won the Premier Prix. After performing the Gold and Silver Waltz by Franz Lehár at university, the enthusiastic response he drew from the audience made him decide to pursue the waltz. In that pursuit, he formed the Maastricht Salon Orchestra and performed as a violinist with the Limburg Symphony Orchestra. In 1987, he created the Johann Strauss Orchestra and his own production company.

Where do you find the inspiration for your albums and concerts?

'There is so much fantastic music out there, enough to keep going for years. My wife Marjorie and I always come up with the programmes together. That could be anywhere: in the garden, on the sofa, out on a walk... but the most important thing is that it needs to touch our hearts.'

Is that the key to your success?

'I can thank my success to hard work and, first and foremost, my love of music. It's so important to have joy and fun in your life. Live your dream, don't dream your life!'

How do people in the world of classical music view what you do?

'There used to be a lot of contempt for what I did, but by now I have the sense that people see what I'm doing as chique and have really gained respect for it. Waltzes are wonderful; they are a reflection of life as it actually is: melancholy, sad, cheerful, it's all in there. I've been called the King of the Waltz, the Mel Gibson of the violin... Sounds good, doesn't it? Everyone knows that I play more than just waltzes, but a concert of mine

without the Blue Danube is like coffee without cream; it just wouldn't work!'

In your concerts, does the audience see André Rieu, the product, or André Rieu, the person?

'I think that the secret of my success is precisely that: they see André Rieu, the person – not the product, because it's not a product as far as I'm concerned! I choose my programme with my heart, and people sense that. I work hard, but it doesn't feel like work to me. I do it all with lots of passion and energy. People can see that we're authentic on stage and that we absolutely love making music.'

Are you a showman?

'It's mainly important to me to connect to my audience, to sense what's happening in the theatre. Of course people come to enjoy the beautiful music, but they also come for the entire ensemble – the gorgeous dresses, the set – and they like it that I'm standing in front there and connecting to them. It makes them feel involved too.'

Who comes to your concerts?

'Everyone! That's the beautiful thing about it. Classical music is for all ages, young and old, and the way I present it makes grandmas and grandpas happy, but little children and their parents love it too.'

Most of your orchestra members are from the Netherlands. Is that important to you?

'It's not a defining factor, nor is it necessary. I have lots of different nationalities in my orchestra, but what does matter is that they all live near Maastricht. My studio is in Maastricht, and that's where all the rehearsals and recordings take place. What I find most important is that wherever we're playing, any-



where in the world, we always leave together from the studio. It creates a very important group feeling, and that's important later for the feeling when we're up there on the stage.'

André Rieu is a family operation. How does that work in practice?

'My wife and I are two peas in a pod; without her, I would have been lying in the gutter a long time ago. We come up with our programmes together; she writes my texts and is truly my strong right hand. We don't need any words to understand each other. The same is true of my son Pierre; he's the vice president of André Rieu Productions and holds an important position where tons of financial decisions are made. With a large company like ours that has 130 full-time employees, that's an important aspect and Pierre has demonstrated a huge talent for it. It's so wonderful when your own family wants to achieve the same dream and you can trust them implicitly. And of course I also have a fantastic production team. I have my people for everything; something like this can't be done alone. But then again, I'm a control freak, so I'm involved in everything.'

Are you more of a musician or a businessman?

'I am a musician, through and through.'

Still, you are running a company that makes millions.

'Yes, but I have always said I'm not in it for the money. I do what I like best, where my heart lies, and I love to give a good performance.'

At all cost?

'As an entrepreneur, you sometimes have to take risks and decide on policies for the coming years. And sometimes you have to invest a year ahead of time when you might not see the results until much later on. The Schönbrunn Castle, and all three

of its copies, have really cost us a lot of money. Not just the castle itself, but also the personnel costs involved in building and transporting it all over the world. If you write that investment off in a year, as we have done, you immediately end up in the red. And with us it is not about a few thousand euros, but more about a few million euros.'

With your reputation, is it hard to finance such a venture?

'Just like someone taking out a mortgage on their house and giving it to the bank as collateral, I too had to give part of my personal possessions, primarily my creative asset: my Stradivarius. That is how these things work; it doesn't matter whether you are famous or not. Fortunately, this investment worked out well, since our performances with the Schönbrunn Castle opened up new avenues for us. Partly because of that, we have conquered Australia and New Zealand. And strangely enough, by going to Australia, Great Britain has opened up for us. We will be performing a series of concerts there in September.'

Sounds like the company's future is looking bright?

'Our turnover has increased significantly, and 2009 has been very successful and profitable. Our expectations for 2010 and 2011 are also very favourable. We have earned back our investment and the bank has returned my collateral. It was all worth it, although I have to admit, the castle could have been a little bit smaller...'

What does the future hold for you personally?

'I am 60 years old now and I'm going to live to be 120, so I'm only halfway. I still have tons of time to do wonderful things, and especially to keep going the way I'm going now. I plan to enjoy life and make music for at least 60 more years!'

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