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WALTZING THE WORLD!

André Rieu

"I always see the positive side of life. And I try with my music and my orchestra to bring this message all over the world."

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PHOTO CREDIT: JANITA SÄSSEN



ISSN 1834-8483
RRP \$9.95

WALTZING THE WORLD!

André Rieu

André Rieu is a musical phenomenon. He has sold over 40 million CDs and DVDs and been recognized with more than 500 Platinum and 270 Gold awards. His extraordinary success, particularly in terms of longevity, is indicative of the depth of his international cultural connection. He reflects the power, positivity and purity of music.

BY IMOGEN A. ROSE

André is the owner and Principal Conductor of the world's largest, privately owned orchestra, the Johan Strauss Orchestra. Its name honours Johann Strauss II, arguably the world's greatest waltz composer.

The word waltz stems from the late 18th century German word, wälzen (to 'turn' or 'revolve'). Borne of humble origins, from the dances of the lower classes, it shares many characteristics with the Weller and the Ländler. Its emergence ignited something of a social and cultural revolution. Indeed, the unavoidable intimacy and the direct physical contact between a man and woman, required by the closed position, resulted in widespread condemnation of its perceived immorality and scandalous style. Its increasing popularity, proliferation and prestige contributed to more modern images of romance, refinement and royalty.

Fittingly, André has created something of his own musical revolution. Furthermore, he has long demonstrated great vision and faith in creating this new dawn of classical music.

Certainly, there have been disparagers and critics along the way, including

those who doubted the commercial viability of classical music on a mass scale, as well as those who objected to André's, perhaps unorthodox, utilization of the classical canon.

André goes beyond demonstrating or repeating the past. He wants to do more than reveal its rich history. He aims to create something meaningful, magical and memorable within a stunning atmosphere of celebration and freedom. He embraces a communion of past and present and a harmonization of traditional and contemporary themes. His concerts are unique – theatrical, energetic, engaging and filled with warmth. It is this warmth and ultimately, the man himself, to whom audiences around the world gravitate.

André has a wonderfully natural and unassuming air. He speaks sincerely and directly with a graceful, linguistic lilt that is befitting, given the often floating, marvellous measure of his music.

Despite the calls of many suggesting he was "crazy to travel the world with such an expensive orchestra", he gains tremendous personal and professional fulfilment through his work. André says, "It really gives a meaning to my life".

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I always see the positive side of life. And I try with my music and my orchestra to bring this message all over the world.

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Music is a universal language that surpasses national, linguistic, cultural and even temporal barriers. It is capable of creating unity and solidarity, and speaks to all people in an individual way. Great musical scores transport humans into a world of infinite possibilities - each note capable of inspiring, uplifting, stimulating and even transforming, lives.

There is a magic in music, without which, the world would be but silent noise. What's more, the evidence suggests that of all the senses it is hearing which is the last to perish. Thus, even at the final hour, sound may soothe the soul.

André's life has revolved around music. He was born in Maastricht, The Netherlands in 1949, into what he describes as a strict and austere household. His father, André Rieu Senior, was a classical conductor who presided as Principal Conductor of the

Limburg Symphony Orchestra – originally the Maastricht City Orchestra – from 1949 to 1980.

André describes his father as “very, very severe”. He says, “When you are in front of an orchestra, you have to be severe because you have to practise and it has to be together. But children are not an orchestra”. In 1978, André spent one year in the Limburg Symphony Orchestra under his father's direction. Although he believes his father was a “very good conductor”, he remembers how “stressed” his father was. He did not enjoy the experience.

Happier memories are of his immediate attraction and affinity as a very young child to the music of Johann Strauss II, whose waltzes his father regularly played at his concerts during the encore.

André enthusiastically communicates the love he felt to the sound of Strauss. He

remembers too the instant transformation of the audience - the immediate relaxation, the gentle swaying and the wonderful expressions of pleasure - as the more traditional compositions were paused for waltzes such as *The Blue Danube*. The impact upon André was immense and he knew he wanted to touch people through music.

In many ways, André was constrained by his childhood environment. He felt a passion for life and an interest in people that was stifled by his familial circumstances. Like his father, his mother was also very “severe” and André recalls a distinct lack of affection and love. He says that at no stage during his life did his mother or father express pride in the achievements of their son.

It can be soul destroying for a child denied the fundamental right of love and affirmation. However, whatever clouds or confines this created for André were dissolved when he met and married his soulmate Marjorie. He says, “She believed in me and I immediately grabbed that feeling”. His relationship with Marjorie was liberating in many ways enabling him to flourish and to become the man he is as both a person and a professional. He believes it is “very, very, important that you have somebody in your life who believes in you”. Their great love story is well known

“

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”



and remarkably, they have kept their homelife private.

Freedom is central to André in every way. He believes "the most precious thing a human being has in life is freedom. Freedom of thought and Freedom of what you do with your life".

William Wordsworth wrote, "The child is father of the man". One senses that such is the strength of André's character and self-belief that he could have only ever walked to the bold beat of his own drum.

His heart has always leapt at the sight and sound of love, beauty and joy. As a boy he defied his mother's demands that he refrain from eye-contact since it was "not polite". He says "But that's exactly what I wanted to do because that's how you make contact and that's how you make people happy".

As a man, André rejected the traditional style of a conductor by choosing to face his audience. Indeed, there is a striking parity between participation and performance at his concerts. André is very much of the music and his original engagement with his audience is intrinsic to his popularity. Furthermore, most of his orchestra - whom he regards as his second family - have been together for over twenty-five years. Thus, there is a lovely familiarity that enhances the

creative qualities of the performance. André says "I only have to look at them and they know - or vice versa".

André plays an exquisite 1667 Stradivarius violin. To play the violin is "a very physical experience". It reflects "all the moods you are in, when you are nervous, when you are happy, when you are sad, it's really one with you".

He has a simple, straightforward, soulful approach which powers his expertise. He says "music speaks to my heart and that's why I make music".

It is through passion, precision and personality that he is able to communicate so evocatively and palpably to his audience. Having created the ambience and palette, the master conductor weaves the threads - the ensemble of instruments, the piercing siren of the sopranos, the colourful, coordinated costumes and the mellifluous, merry mood. The music is alive. It is as though the notes are borne upon the stage, frolicking to and fro, before a flourishing flotilla of floating sounds settles within the hearts of the audience.

André has something of an ancient, aristocratic nobility, yet he is also an everyman with a universal touch. He has an abounding enthusiasm, energy and zest for

life. "I always see the positive side of life. And I try with my music and my orchestra to bring this message all over the world".

Highly composed and reflective, André is a man of wisdom, integrity and character.

One feels the sincerity in his voice, one hears the truth of his heart. His family are his foundation, "The highlight of my life was the moment I met Marjorie and the birth of my two sons". This deep personal happiness has allowed him to become the professional he is today.

Excluding the temporary challenges of Covid-19, André is "living in a dream" and says "I always wanted to have my own orchestra and travel the world, making music for people and that's what I do. I am every night in heaven, when I am on stage". So too is his audience.

André Rieu is dancing through life, choosing to waltz rather than wallow. And he invites you to waltz too! His DVD "Shall we Dance: The Maastricht Concert" is available in-store and online.

ABOUT /

Imogen A. Rose

Imogen A. Rose is a writer based in Brisbane. She works across a broad spectrum of genres and is a Director of Rose Media.

Website / www.rosemedia.com.au

