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From The Times

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# Come on, aisle-een: Andy Leek has played weddings for over a decade

**Andy Leek, formerly of Dexy's Midnight Runners, talks about the highs and lows of life as an in-demand wedding singer**



Andy Leek says that he has done so many parties on the circuit that he has become a bit of a legend

As told to Phoebe Greenwood

There are two sides to my life. I made an album with George Martin and was in Dexy's Midnight Runners, and I've now played weddings for more than a decade. People ask me why I don't do another album. I've been too busy having a great time.

I've done so many parties – more than 1,000 – on the circuit that I am a bit of a legend. Some acts may say that the band doesn't matter because everyone is drunk, but it is really important. Love is dying out, weddings are dying out, it's special when people dare to take the jump. They want the day to come to a fantastic finale. You want them to have a good start in life. The responsibility is immense. I put myself on the line for these people. Walked the last mile for them.

Of course I play *Come On Eileen*. I'm not annoyed about it; it's a blessing. You might resent something like that when you're 21 but when you are 44 you are really glad of it. That song has helped me to make a lot of weddings fantastic. Having said that, I was in the Canaries recently and this woman came over and asked me if I remembered her wedding. I said, "Of course. Was it the night I played *Come On Eileen*?" And she said, "Yes!", with a totally straight face. Can you imagine?

I've seen a lot from my keyboard over the years. We've had people fall into our equipment, knock over speakers. There's always a bridesmaid who falls over. It's the new shoes. Once a bloke got so drunk he ended up taking off his trousers. Another time an old chap had a heart attack on the dancefloor.

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The funniest thing I've ever witnessed was during a best man's speech. It's traditional that people say sarcastic things, but the father of the bride, who was very drunk, didn't like what was being said and just got up and punched him right in the mouth. I couldn't help admiring his direct approach. The first dance is often the hardest thing to watch.

The groom's mates are all there, they all know him as Jack the Lad and then he's got to do a delicate dance to *Wonderful Tonight*. You can see they feel like a berk. So we'll play a short version. Save them from the misery. There are lot's of tricks like that, such as you've got to play all the songs fast, quicker than normal and a key down, so that everyone can sing along to them.

The oddest thing that happened was only a few weeks ago. A

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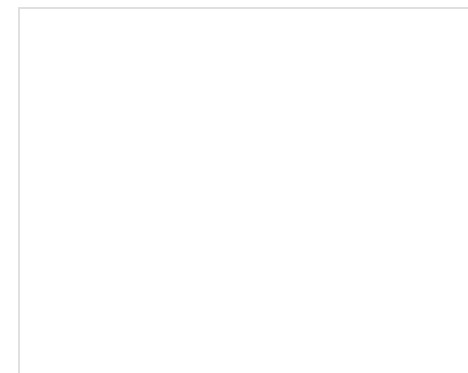
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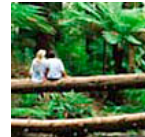
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woman was getting married in the same church her mother married in. Vandals broke in and burnt it down; she's taken it as an omen and has called it off. Every year one or two people cancel. People split up just before or get cold feet.

Weirdly, it always happens in April. It all began in 1996 for me. I was playing piano in a jazz bar and a guy came up and asked if I'd play at his wedding. I hadn't got a deal at the time, so I said yes and told him I had a band even though I didn't. The wedding wasn't for three months, so it didn't matter. I found a drummer and guitarist and even though we couldn't play the songs all that well it was such good fun. If we didn't know the verse, we did the chorus a few more times.

There's a certain beautiful spirit at a wedding, a magical decorum. Everyone wants it to be a great day, if the band do too, you've got it made. Sometimes I see it like a rhythmic mating dance to get them ready for their first night. Everyone's had sex before these days, but it's still the first time when they're married. You want to build them up. She's been hot and he's strutted his stuff.

I do feel like a bit of an anthropologist. What I notice, and this may just be a male point of view, is that the most beautiful women never marry good-looking guys. You see amazing brides and along comes some guy who looks like a bozo and you wonder is it because they feel safe?

Some brides have gone over the top flirting with me. Brides often get quite pissed and if they're flirtatious who else are they going to do it with than the leader of band? She knows you can't do anything, her husband's there, you are a safe bet. I do flirt back – you only live once.

The thing you dread most is the bride's mother. They want everything to be perfect for their daughter, so nothing is ever good enough. Having said that, they are always the ones to thank you afterwards.

I've had some years where I've done 75 weddings a year and I've been a bit partied out. Once gone, I can't even remember a bride's name. The really scary thing is if you do three in a row, when you come to announce them you get really nervous that you'll get it wrong, you know: "Here's Jane and Bob, oh no, sorry, Claire and . . ."

It makes me sound jaded but I love it all. You've got such a power over people. When you can get an entire crowd singing every word of *Bohemian Rhapsody* it's quite a thing. It's really moving. We've collapsed in tears onstage watching everyone go bananas.

My advice to a bride and groom is invite your real friends, not people you think you should. You can always spot the people who are there only to drink the dad's bank account and who are, not to put too fine a word for it, a\*\*\*holes. They are the people who inevitably try and grab the mike. You must never let them. They'll clear the dancefloor. Only their ten best friends stay at the front, everyone else will go home.

Equally you'll always get someone who wants you to play Robbie Williams. My tactic is never to say no but "OK, in a minute", then when they come back after a few drinks you say you've played it and they were probably in the loo. They can't argue with that. If I've learnt one thing, it's that the best way for a couple to have fun is to keep it simple, no themes, no comedian, just let everyone do their own thing.

The bloody wedding day itself is a marathon. Couples start at 7am, by the time the band starts they are knackered. I played one for a lovely girl recently, she'd got 400 guests there. It was amazingly lavish. I was talking to her on the day and said, "God, what a lot of friends you have" and she said, "You're joking, I don't know anyone!"

Sometimes I do think I can't do this again. Leave me alone. Usually after a late night drive home. But by Friday I'm rearing to go again. I've already got bookings in 2010. I daren't look that far ahead. It makes me feel tired. It is odd, I've been to all these weddings and yet I am the eternal bachelor. I wouldn't play, I'd be too worried. But you know what? I don't think I'll get married. It's too expensive. I'd rather go to Barbados with the girl I love and have a great time.

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