

PITTSBURGH TRIBUNE-REVIEW

Royal wedding expected to send Americans into a tizzy

By Tom Fontaine
PITTSBURGH TRIBUNE-REVIEW
Wednesday, November 17, 2010

Brit Mark Williams isn't hyperventilating over the announced engagement of Prince William to Kate Middleton.

"I like Wills and I wish them the best, but it really has no impact on my life," said Williams, 38, of Bethel Park.

Yet Williams, who has lived in the United States for two decades, concedes he differs from many Brits.

"I'm not a royal worshiper," he said.

You don't have to be British to be excited about the royal wedding planned for sometime next spring or summer at a site to be determined. Some predict the event's cost will exceed \$40 million. Former first daughter Chelsea Clinton's recent wedding, by comparison, cost at least \$2 million.

"Americans are going to eat this up," said pop culture expert Elayne Rapping, professor emerita of sociology at the State University of New York at Buffalo. She taught at Robert Morris University and earned a master's degree and doctorate from the University of Pittsburgh.

Rapping said movie stars are the closest celebrities Americans have to royalty - and they tend to hold private ceremonies.

"Weddings in America are tried to be kept private. Funerals seem to be bigger events in this country," Rapping said.

Still, Rapping said Americans "love a good Cinderella story," alluding to Middleton's middle-class roots. She will be in line to become the first commoner to marry an heir to the British throne since 1660. It doesn't hurt that Prince William and Middleton are attractive and personable, Rapping said.

Natalie Rotman, a fashion and pop culture expert with The Associated Press, agreed.

"Americans are fascinated by royal blood, and the entertaining dramatic stories that accompany them. Everyone still has etched in their mind the moment that Princess Diana took that same walk that Kate Middleton is now poised to experience," Rotman said.

Nearly 1 billion people watched Prince Charles marry Diana in St. Paul's Cathedral in 1981. BBC is predicting that more people will watch their son, William, wed Middleton. William gave Middleton his mother's engagement ring, an 18-carat sapphire and diamond ring.

Millions of tourists are expected to flock to London for the wedding and related festivities. Travel agents said they hadn't received inquiries, but guessed they might after a date is announced.

Bookies made Aug. 13 the early favorite, with the ceremony likely to take place in Westminster Abbey, the Daily Mail in London reported.

Rapping said coverage by websites and 24-hour news and entertainment networks could give some people royal fatigue.

The attention could influence fashion, hairstyling and wedding planning in a big way, experts said.

"I can't wait to see what they do, how they handle the wedding. Many things will be too lavish or extravagant for our brides, but I can find a way to (imitate them) in a more reasonably priced manner," said Ashley Moss, an event coordinator for Hello Productions in the South Side.

"Future brides will definitely be watching," said Ansley Esterline, president and event director for Bliss Events on Mt. Washington.

Rotman predicted Middleton's gown would be "conservative, and little skin will be shown."

"Chances it will be copied by everyday women are minimal, but anything is possible when it comes to what's in fashion," Rotman said.

Middleton's hairstyles probably will be copied by women in salons around the world, said Glenn Rengers, a partner in Pittsburgh area salons who worked on the Duchess of York's hair when she visited in the late 1990s.

"You will definitely have people asking for (the more formal wedding-day styles) next year for New Year's, homecoming dances and formals," Rengers said.

People in the wedding-service industry said they'd hightail it to London if a royal wedding planner requested assistance.

Brit Dan Grant, co-owner of Gaynor's School of Cooking in the South Side, said the school might offer a special class on English high tea to mark the occasion.

Grant and his wife, Gaynor, attended a fireworks display in London the night before Prince Charles and Diana's wedding, which occurred a week before the Grants wed. He said the atmosphere was electric.

"It's almost like Steelers fever, times 100. Like the Olympics, the World Cup and

the Super Bowl rolled into one," Grant said. "Us Brits love our monarchy."

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