

THE ROYAL FAMILY

A tale of two royal weddings

Thirty years ago, the marriage of Prince Charles to a young Lady Diana Spencer captivated the world. The same doesn't seem to hold true for William and Kate, despite what the memorabilia suggests

BY DENISE RYAN
VANCOUVER SUN

How do Canadians feel about the coming royal wedding? Apparently, we really don't care that much.

A recent poll showed that seven out of 10 report feeling indifferent about the nuptials of Prince William and Kate Middleton.

Maybe it was that first (and much criticized) Will and Kate commemorative coin, which featured Kate looking puffy and blank-eyed; maybe it's the memorabilia that reeks of cynicism, the Kate and Will "sick bags;" or maybe it's the fact that at 29, Kate is the oldest royal bride in history.

Or perhaps it's just that with Kate and Will, there doesn't seem to be any room for surprises.

They've been together for a decade; they are like an old married couple for whom the wedding is a mere technicality.

Unlike Diana, it's impossible to imagine Kate peering doe-like through her misty, virginal veil, or stumbling charmingly over her husband's name during her vows. Kate is far too polished and mature for anything like that.

Nonetheless, networks around the 24-hour news and entertainment world are betting on a blockbuster story, even if the fairy-tale narrative might seem manufactured.

The British Culture secretary said on Wednesday that a quarter of the world's population will be watching the events unfold on television.

The day is a national holiday in England, and no doubt the streets will be lined with enthusiastic throngs, but even the Brits are measured in their enthusiasm.

For Sarika Bose, a professor of Victorian history at the University of B.C., the most telling message from the media was this month's cover of *BBC Good Food*.

"The wedding didn't even make the cover," said Bose. "All they included were recipes for a tea."

'Middleton No Diana'

Some blame the interest, or lack thereof, on the "unique, complex, extraordinary and beautiful" Diana, to whom so many lost their hearts and heads.

"Middleton No Diana," trumpeted a London headline on Thursday — as if that were a bad thing.

"Unlike Diana, there is nothing young or vulnerable or in need of protection about Kate," said Bose.

The criticism of Kate in the British press has focused on her remoteness, a kind of polished professionalism.

"That criticism comes from her self-control, that Diana, ironically was criticized for not having," said Bose.

"In some ways she seems both too perfect and too ordinary."

Kate is not unpopular, said Bose, but perhaps she is simply uninteresting.

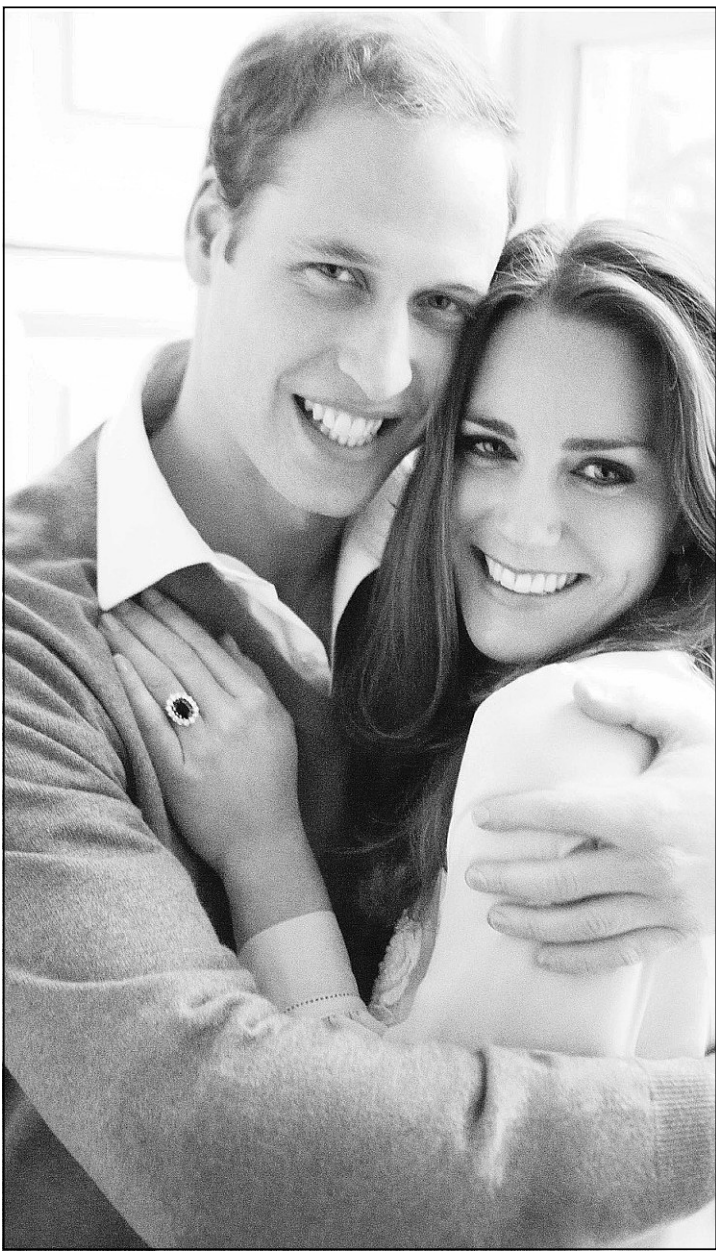
She was raised by solid middle-class parents who made a fortune with a party favours company and sent her to St. Andrew's College, where she roomed with Will in a shared house.

Kate is described as "stable"



PNG FILES

Compare the relatively natural engagement photo of Prince Charles and his then bride-to-be Lady Diana Spencer, age 19, posing in the grounds of Buckingham Palace, with William and Kate's magazine-ready engagement shot done by celebrity photographer Mario Testino.



MARIO TESTINO/REUTERS



SUZANNE PLUNKETT/REUTERS

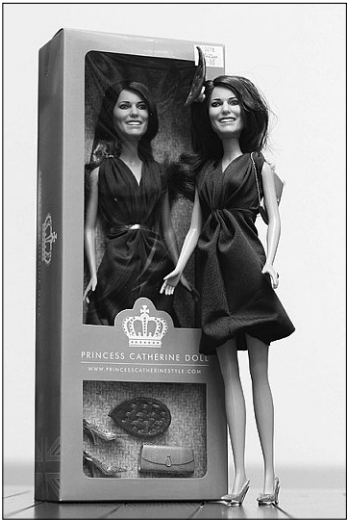
The upcoming royal wedding has kicked off a frenzy of memorabilia making. There are souvenir tea bags, Pez dispensers, comic books and even a Kate Middleton doll. The couple's big day is slated for April 29.



HERWIG PRAMMER/REUTERS



CARL COURT/AFP/G ETTY IMAGES



LUKE MACGREGOR/REUTERS

and "well-grounded."

With Diana, it seemed like the fairy tale really was a possibility.

"There is a magical story in Diana's case; the sad childhood, and the narrative that followed it, and ended the way so many fairy tales do. We saw that dream die."

Then there was divorce, and the long, drawn-out alienation of Diana, Princess of Wales — a particularly cruel take on the exile or execution of a princess motif, something that has a deep history among English royal marriages.

What is similar between the marriage of Kate and William and that of Diana and Prince Charles is that both are occurring in difficult economic times.

"I think William and Kate are trying to be responsible about spending, but ironically that takes away the glamour," said Bose.

"Without excess, what is there to gawk at?"

Limited attentions spans

Sue Seminev, a high-end matchmaker in Vancouver, and owner of Divine Intervention, believes the changed media landscape has influenced how the public responds to major events like this one.

"We really digest information differently today. Our attention spans are limited."

"The way people monitor media these days, we are a very immediate society. Thinking about something that is happening on April 29 is still very far away."

Other events in the 24-hour news cycle are top of mind from day to day.

"I guarantee you that on the day, the media frenzy will take over and we're all going to turn it on. Curiosity will take over."

Ultimately, Seminev believes that although some of the mystery and magic that swathed Diana as a princess bride is missing, this is a love story with the kind of appeal that reaches

deep.

Love, romance, family, friends and relationships are anchors, she said. They are what make life special.

"I see it in my business. Women still have this fairy princess mentality. We love romance. This just happens to be a long, drawn-out love story."

The historical aspect is as deserving of attention as the love story, said John Craig, dean of the faculty of arts and social sciences at Simon Fraser University, but the lack of public interest doesn't surprise him.

"This is a grandchild of a reigning monarch," said Craig. "This is historically significant."

However, William is three steps removed from the crown.

"Most wish these young people well, but they are more interested in how the Canucks are going to do in the playoffs," said Craig.

In 1981, when Craig was "young and geeky," he got up in

the dark of night and watched coverage of Diana's wedding to Prince Charles.

He can't imagine either of his teenage sons doing anything so strange.

"I remember in 1981, it had a lot to do with notions of a legitimate union, and the next heir to the throne, so it resonated in terms of the passage of the crown from one to the other."

Diana was the first British citizen to marry an heir to the throne in three centuries.

The trend lately, Craig points out, remarking on the Oscar-winning film *The King's Speech*, has been to demystify and humanize the monarchy.

"In a way, a generation ago it would have been inconceivable to bring them down to the level of ordinary human beings; people know now that they no longer have any real power and they are still searching for a role."

The role that the media are working so hard to produce is part celebrity, part reality.

Media spectacle

Martin Laba, a communications professor at SFU, is among the majority who are not interested in either the royals or the wedding.

What does fascinate him, however, is the manufacturing of celebrity culture and media spectacle.

"This is the perfect celebrity media event," said Laba, "particularly those media that have been given over almost entirely to the support and manufacture of celebrity."

Young people don't watch television or listen to radio, preferring other more interactive forms of media, he said.

But the spectacle will be hard to avoid.

"If various media organizations do their job and manufacture this as a spectacle, it will deliver major audiences to advertisers," said Laba.

Sarika Bose said she doesn't plan on getting up at 3 a.m. to watch live coverage, but various friends of hers have organized viewing parties, and with tape-delayed coverage blanketing the networks all day on April 29, she's pretty sure she won't miss it.

"There is a mystique to the royals, something that is unattainable. Like it or not, many of us are attracted to that which is unattainable."

Ultimately, said Seminev, "it's still a fairy tale, and it's going to be the wedding of the century."

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ROYAL WEDDING
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YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE A PRINCESS TO FEEL LIKE ONE ON APRIL 29 — ROYAL PACKAGES

If you really want to wake up at 2 a.m. to doll yourself up and watch the Royal Wedding live, Vancouver's uber-luxe Shangri-La Hotel is offering a \$355 Princess package aimed at mothers and daughters (perhaps they're assuming no princes would be interested in this sort of thing). The package includes check-in on April 28, a 2 a.m. wake-up

call, live viewing of the royal wedding in the Blue Moon theatre and a complimentary morning high tea.

The Fairmont Hotel Vancouver will feature a special Royal Wedding Afternoon Tea for the month of April, themed around everything royal (\$36 per person; 2 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. weekdays, noon to 4:30 p.m. weekends; reservations essen-

tial). On April 29, afternoon tea will be served early starting from 11 a.m. with a replay of the royal wedding shown on a big screen and televisions around the lounge. Guests named William or Kate will also receive 50-per-cent off afternoon tea (April 29 only, alcohol excluded). On the big day, guests will also receive a special castle wedding bell to com-

memorate the occasion.

The Empress Hotel in Victoria is going all out for guests who want to don their tiaras and indulge on April 29. They can check in on the 28th (the hotel offers a variety of royal wedding room packages), then Rise and Shine With the Royals for a middle-of-the night live screening of the nuptials in the Empress's Tea Lobby. Guests are

encouraged to wear their robes or pyjamas, and from 3 a.m. to 11 a.m. an English breakfast will be served that includes Kippers, eggs cooked to order, fruit and pastries.

In the afternoon on April 29, the hotel will host an all-welcome bring-your-own picnic blanket afternoon tea picnic on the front lawn of the hotel from noon to 3 p.m. Participants are

encouraged to wear fancy hats, and for \$20, participants can purchase a tea-to-go box that includes tea, scones, cream jam and sandwiches, as well as a small flag to wave. The event includes a best-dressed doggie contest, so bring your royal pooch. For more information go to www.fairmont.com/empress/vanity/royalty

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