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Cincinnati's version of 'The Wedding Singer'

Column by *The Post's David Wecker*

It's a strenuous business, marrying off a daughter - or rather, seeing to all the details that immediately precede and follow the actual betrothal. This is what Claudia Harrod is telling me, and she speaks from experience. She is delighted she has but one girl child to give to the wedding industry.

Claudia is in her early 50s and looks 10 years younger. She's marketing director for the Cincinnati division of the American Heart Association and has spent 30-odd years in public relations and special events planning. She says she's used to dealing with last-minute crises, like feeding 500 people with a moment's notice.

"But this wedding was one of the hardest things I've ever done," she says.

"Those wedding magazines? They're responsible for a lot of it. They plant all these ideas into the bride's head that you've got to have this and you've got to buy that. It's a whole industry. Pretty soon, it's spend, spend, spend ..."

Claudia's daughter's name is Amy. Three years ago, Amy was living in Columbus, attending Ohio State, dating a guy named Antonio Smyth, with a "Y." Antonio was nice enough, Claudia says. But in her opinion, he wasn't right for Amy.

Then one day in July, Claudia got a phone call from a long-time friend, Gordon Strauss, an assistant in the Hamilton County prosecutor's office.

"He said he'd found the perfect guy for Amy," Claudia says.

"He told me his name, Scott Rubenstein, and that he working as a clerk in the prosecutor's office for the summer.

"Gordon steered the conversation to football, then to Ohio State football. Scott said he'd never been to an OSU game. At which point, Gordon said, 'Well, I know this girl at Ohio State ...'"

And so it was that the four of them agreed to meet for dinner at Arthur's in Hyde Park. Scott was half an hour late: he'd been waiting at Arnold's. He showed up just as Amy was about to leave. They struggled at polite conversation. Eventually, they exchanged phone numbers.

"On the way home that night, I mentioned to Gordon that I didn't think they hit it off," Claudia recalls.

"Gordon says, 'Hit it off? I know just the toast I'm going to say at their wedding.'"

Claudia monitored the situation closely, but not much seemed to be happening. It was three weeks before Scott called. Amy suggested they go to J Arthur's in Montgomery to enjoy the vocal stylings of the one, the only Mickey Esposito. She figured a bunch of her friends would be there, you know, in case Scott turned out to be a schmo.

What she didn't reckon on was the raw power of Mickey Esposito's performance. Mickey Esposito is a human avalanche of entertainment. From "Midnight Hour" to "Georgia" to "It's Not Unusual," he never stops moving. He has a move for every syllable of every song. Even when there isn't all that much emotion going on in a song, he puts emotion in there anyway. He's the only guy I've ever seen who looks cool even when he's breaking a sweat.

It would be hard to say exactly when Scott and Amy fell in love. But it was probably one night when Mickey was singing "Copacabana," swinging his microphone around like a championship Duncan yo-yo.

About a year ago, Claudia mentioned to Gordon that, if those two ever get married, she'd have to figure a way to get Mickey Esposito to the reception, even if just to sing that song.

That November, Amy and Scott were engaged. By January, Claudia was planning a wedding.

The ceremony took place a few Saturdays ago at Rockdale Temple. Mickey Esposito was doing his regular gig at J Arthur's that night. Claudia arranged to have him whisked to the temple during one of his 20-minute breaks.

He exploded onto the stage like a one-man Mongol horde and launched into "Copa" in D. The bride and groomed were dazed, but Amy recovered first and pulled Scott onto the dance floor.

Minutes later, with the last chord still shimmering, Mickey Esposito left the building, having done his part to get the marriage of Amy and Scott Rubenstein off to an excellent beginning.

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