



INTERVIEW WITH...

Engelbert Humperdinck

"I believe that singing is really talking in tempo."

*Arnold George Dorsey is renowned around the world under his nom de plume **ENGELBERT HUMPERDINCK**. For over 65 years, he has delighted and entertained audiences. It has been our absolute pleasure and honour to be*

able to talk to this legendary entertainer. Without further ado, here's Keys and Chords' interview with Mr. Dorsey.



Julian De Backer: 'Hello sir. I'm very happy you're willing to talk to me for a few minutes. You were born in 1936, in Madras, British India. Do you remember the first song you ever heard? That would have been in 1940 or 1939, I'd guess.'

Arnold Dorsey: 'There were songs that my family used to sing. We lived in a house right in the harbour. We'd all climb on the roof and listen to music. Being a tropical country, there were many stars and a big moon, and we'd look out into the harbour, and we'd see the ships with their lights. The family would start singing songs like 'Harbour Lights' (starts singing) 'I saw the harbour lights, tadadadi ...' You know that one? Or 'Moonlight Bay' (starts singing) 'We were sitting along on a moonlight bay'. That sort of thing. Very old songs. A bit before my time, and your time.' (laughs)

Julian: 'Have you ever gone back to your birth country?'

Mr. Dorsey: 'Yes, I have. Do you remember when the tsunami came along?'

Julian: 'Sadly, I do remember.'

Mr. Dorsey: 'They asked me to go and do some concerts to help the people who suffered damages and losses. I went over and performed

in Mumbai and Calcutta. I did go to Madras, and I did see the house that I was born in. And it was still there! Amazing! Different colour now. It was red when we were living in it, and now it was a kind of grey, but nevertheless, it was still there. It was funny to see the house after so many years. It was a huge house to accommodate our big family, so therefore it was very impressive. I've had some big houses in my life, but THAT was a big one.' (laughs)

Julian: 'Does it have a plaque saying 'ENGELBERT HUMPERDINCK WAS BORN HERE?'

Mr. Dorsey: 'Oh no, no, it does not. But I wish it did, haha.'

Julian: 'You've recorded hundreds upon hundreds of songs. Looking back, is there a song you wish you didn't record? Or one that you initially disliked but grew to love?'

Mr. Dorsey: 'Not since I'm 'Engelbert Humperdinck'. When you've had a hit record, you have people around you with knowledge of music. We (the manager, the producer and myself) choose the songs, prior to recording. All the songs I picked, I wanted to record. But back when I was 'Gerry Dorsey', and I had to record some songs, well in those days, I had no choice. So, they gave me some songs I didn't particularly like. They were never hits anyway. There were songs in the early days that I didn't appreciate, but fortunately for me, I've been successful enough in my recording career. I've had 65 golden albums and 23 platinum albums, and I've sold 150 million records around the world.'

Julian: 'Amazing. I always go to record stores, whenever I visit a city or a foreign country. I have never NOT found one of your records. You're always there, it seems.'

(Mr. Dorsey laughs)

Julian: 'It's true! There are three artists I always find, without fault. Nana Mouskouri, Julio Iglesias, and you, sir.'

Mr. Dorsey: 'That's fantastic. I've had the pleasure of meeting both Nana and Julio. I'm glad to be associated with them.'

Julian: 'What people don't know – because you're such a great performer – is that you have written quite a few of your own songs. 'A Good Thing Going', 'Stay', 'This and That'. How do you compose a song? Do you start with an idea, a phrase, a sentence, a lyric, a melody?'

Mr. Dorsey: 'Actually, I get a title first. I wrote a song called 'Totally Amazing' with my daughter, you know that one?'

Julian: 'No, sorry, sir, I don't.'

Mr. Dorsey: 'There's also a song I will be performing when I come to Belgium, a tribute to my late wife, whom I recently lost. I wrote it for her, over thirty years ago, and the lyrics are very poignant, so I thought I would dedicate it to her. I sing it everywhere I go, and the song is also called 'Everywhere I Go'. It's very apropos. I normally put that in the show, and people seem to love it. And I do. I'm glad there's an appreciation on both sides.'

Julian: 'I hope you're doing relatively okay today, sir, since the loss of your spouse.'

Mr. Dorsey: 'It's made my performances a little different. I read my lyrics differently than before. They have more meaning to me now. The songs have soul, you know? I think it's better that way, yeah.'

Julian: 'Your voice has aged like fine wine. It keeps getting better. You've been singing for 70+ years now. You can hold your high and long notes.'

Mr. Dorsey: 'Yeah. It's amazing. As you get older, your vibrato gets slower. But mine hasn't. It hasn't disappeared. It's like I have a new career going on,

because I'm singing in a more contemporary way. It's unbelievable. I'm recording a new concept album with Cleopatra Records. It's a little different to what I've done before. I want to show the people what I'm recording now, at the moment, in my live shows. I'll be doing that too, when I come to Belgium.'

Julian: 'That's great. You're still looking for ways to improve your show. You're never playing it safe. You want to give the audience something to look forward to.'

Mr. Dorsey: 'I've just come off a big tour in Australia. Sold-out audiences everywhere, and wonderful comments by the critics. Very rewarding to read. People still care and love my music, and write nice things about me.'

Julian: 'Have you ever played or recorded something with a Belgian artist?'

Mr. Dorsey: 'No, I haven't, no. The only time I ever did record something in Belgium, was 'Dommage, Dommage', back when I was Gerry Dorsey. I had a number one hit in Belgium, but I never had another number one in Belgium after that.' (laughs)

Julian: 'For shame!'

Mr. Dorsey: 'Yeah, haha, I should have followed it up. But the management didn't. They should have!'

Julian: 'Do you have a favourite venue for performing, like Neil Diamond had THE GREEK?'

Mr. Dorsey: 'I love The Greek Theatre, too. When I was there, the producers who were making the movie 'Beavis and Butthead Do America' liked my performance and my sense of humour. They approached me backstage and said: 'We have a song we'd like you to do. It's a little strange, but think about it.' I said 'Well, send it to me, I'll have a listen, and perhaps I'll record it.' That was the song 'Lesbian Seagull'. Bingo, a platinum record for me. It was a hit.'

Julian: 'Have you ever seen the movie?'

Mr. Dorsey: 'No, I haven't.'

Julian: 'Wonderful song, you did a great job.'

Mr. Dorsey: 'Well, thank you.'

Julian: 'Perhaps you can play it in Belgium, that would be awesome.'

Mr. Dorsey: 'I have never sung it live on stage.'

Julian: 'I'm going to finish with a final question, because I don't want to take up too much of your precious time.'

Mr. Dorsey: 'You're quite all right, you're welcome, anytime.'

Julian: 'Do you remember your first music teacher, or are you self-taught? Did you have classical training?'

Mr. Dorsey: 'I've never had a singing lesson in my life.'

Julian: 'Wow.'

Mr. Dorsey: 'But I did have a teacher that taught me how to play the saxophone. I learned breathing from playing the saxophone, what we call 'diaphragm breathing'. I found that it helped me with my singing. I sing like an instrument now. It



was very instrumental in my early career, and it gave me a chance to utilize what I was taught by a saxophone teacher. How to breathe, and everything like that. It was good for my singing career.'

Julian: 'Do you still have performance anxiety?'

Mr. Dorsey: 'Yes. I don't think you ever lose that. Before I walk on stage, my hands get cold. I'm pacing back and forth. I hit some high notes backstage. Fortunately, we have a curtain, so the audience doesn't see me. Yes, I still get nerves before I walk on stage.'

Julian: 'Do you have a ritual prior to performing? Eat, drink, read something?'

Mr. Dorsey: 'I make sure to have a warm drink backstage. I warm my vocal chords before I go on with a hot sip of something. Because your throat gets dry when you're nervous, so you have to lubricate it.'

Julian: 'I can imagine. You have to take care of your vocal chords.'

Mr. Dorsey: 'Most important.'

Julian: 'Do you still listen to contemporary music? Is there something you like?'

Mr. Dorsey: 'You know what, I watch the talent shows, like 'The Voice'. A person like me needs to keep learning. You can always learn from a non-professional. They might have something nice, an idea I can steal. Sometimes I could give advice to them, and tell them what they should do in order to enlighten their vocal performance. But I do that silently in my chair. I'm the judge at home (laughs). For instance, I believe that singing is really talking in tempo. The way you express yourself with your hands, it's the same

thing when you're singing. The lyrics need your hands at that particular point, and you use them in that particular way. A lot of people just hang on to the microphone and don't use their hands at all. To which I would say: don't do THAT, do THIS. The way you talk, is the way you sing.'

Julian: 'Suppose you were starting out right now. Young Mr. Dorsey. Is there any advice you wish you would have gotten back in the day?'

Mr. Dorsey: 'There was nobody to guide me in those days. You just taught yourself as you went along, and hoped you were doing the right thing. Fortunately for me, I was doing the right thing. My early performances, I was not happy with. I look back at some of the records I made as 'Gerry Dorsey', and think: 'Oh God, what did I do there?' But all that comes with experience and knowledge of your craft. I've learned a lot. I'm happy to say it's given me the chance to keep working, carrying on, taking my show all over the world and showing people what I'm doing and how I'm doing it.'

Julian: 'Few people have had (or are still having) the career you've had and are having. Does anyone still call you 'Arnold'? Close friends? Family?'

Mr. Dorsey: 'When I decided to change my name from 'Arnold' to 'Gerry', the family went along with 'Gerry'. When I changed to 'Engelbert', they went along with 'Engelbert'. My mum and dad used to call me 'Engel', which of course means 'angel', which I'm not (laughs). 'Engel' is a very nice name, I'd say. I went to hell with my name. People would call me 'Pumpernickel'. Dean Martin always called me 'Humpy Bumpy Lumpy Dumpy).'

Julian: 'Thank you for your stories and your music. I wish you all the best with your two upcoming shows in Belgium. Feel welcome anytime in Belgium. Thank you for this interview.'

Mr. Dorsey: 'You're very welcome, sir. God bless you.'

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