

Not always a bridesmaid: Pippa Middleton steps to forefront

8.8.11

The minute Philippa Charlotte Middleton stepped onto the red carpet at her sister's royal wedding, she became a star.

"There was almost a gasp across the world," says Ashley Pearson, royal watcher and journalist quoted in Tuesday's TLC cable special, *Crazy About Pippa* (9 ET/PT). The phrase on everyone's lips, says Pearson: "Who's that girl?"

It's Kate Middleton's younger sister, Pippa, 27. Or Pip, as her family calls her. With her winsome smile and demure but sexy Alexander McQueen dress, Pippa catapulted into pop-culture fame, stealing a slice of the spotlight at Kate's April 29 wedding to Prince William.

"The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge are jolly and popular," writes journalist Annabel Rivkin in the August issue of *Tatler* magazine, which has Pippa on the cover, but Kate's lil' sis "has gone global."

Almost instantly, a Facebook page went up devoted to the appreciation of her backside, and plastic surgeons are reporting that clients are clamoring to emulate everything from her rear to her nose. The name Pippa has zoomed up in popularity for 2011 baby names, now occupying the No. 1 spot on Nameberry.com, a baby website. Her "Royal Mocha" tanned skin tone topped a survey of most desirable skin tones last week for Realize, a new British TV channel. Porn mogul Steve Hirsch of Vivid Entertainment has a standing offer out to her: \$5 million to do one scene in a movie. England's *Daily Mail* has declared her the "world's most eligible woman." Rarely a day goes by that she doesn't pop up on a celebrity website, even when she's doing nothing more than walking down the street.

So far this year, she ranks No. 35 overall on USA TODAY's Celebrity Heat Index, which measures media exposure, and has received more attention in tabloids, TV newsmagazines and on celebrity websites than Lady Gaga, Oprah Winfrey, Gwyneth Paltrow and George Clooney. It's no surprise that 72% of readers casting votes on the Heat Index want to know more about her.

"There is no question that everyone in the world is crazy about Pippa Middleton," says Amy Winter, general manager of TLC, explaining the documentary. "We went through a number of different titles. This one captured the tone of the show. It's very much how our audience feels."

As for what it is exactly about the youngest Middleton that is so appealing, Winter says, "I just think she's a sophisticated breath of fresh air. I think Kate is as well, but Pippa's the sporty, young sister."

She has been "a paparazzi favorite" since the wedding, says Jared Eng, founder of the celebrity website JustJared.com. He has posted at least 25 stories featuring Pippa in the three months since the wedding. "While her stories don't get as much traffic as Kate's, (Pippa) gets tons more than a lot of other well-established actors and musicians," says Eng. "Pippa seems to be a little less austere than Kate and has a bit more spunk."

But the wedding was only the beginning. Says Eng, "Pippa's time to shine has yet to come."

The British press seems to think that time is here: "Perfect Pippa" is even one of its nicknames for her.

It's a reference that has cropped up, especially after photos of her and Kate in bikinis during a 2006 family vacation to Ibiza popped up two weeks after the royal wedding. Pippa has attributed her slim shape to Pilates, and she recently competed in a triathlon. But it was the dress she wore to the wedding and its perfect fit that really captured imaginations — particularly that of Mike Bandur.

A recent university grad, he was watching the wedding with pals. "I didn't even know Pippa existed. As soon as she stepped out of the car, we all went, 'Wow, she is stunning.' Turns out the rest of the world thought so, too."

Bandur quickly created a Facebook page devoted to Pippa's backside. By the end of the first day, he had 40,000 "likes" from folks who had a similar appreciation.

The plastic surgery industry "likes" her, too.

"She has exploded in the last two months," says **Brian Glatt, a board-certified plastic surgeon in Morrisston, N.J.** "She's slim with fantastic curves." While Miami plastic surgeon Constantine Mendieta told Fox News that the Pippa Butt Lift has become more requested than a Jennifer Lopez or Kim Kardashian derriere, Glatt says he gets more requests for her nose. "They'll say, 'I want my nose to look natural and cute, like Pippa's.' They used to say Ashlee Simpson." He adds that Pippa's "cheeks are common" requests, too. "Pippa and Kate both have cute cheeks."

Annie Scudder, editor of *TresSugar.com*, the sex and culture site on the PopSugar Network, says that since the royal wedding, the PopSugar Network has run countless stories about Pippa.

Scudder says that occasionally, readers will post comments saying, "She's not a celebrity" or "I could care less," but judging by the popularity of the stories, the majority of the readers are curious about her. "And since we've never really heard from Pippa herself, the public can practically make her whoever they want her to be."

She adds, "Compared to Kate, Pippa is a young professional who we see heading to work with her laptop bag, instead of posing for perfectly coordinated photo ops. She has the royal aura that fascinates people without the restrictions."

Scudder points out that Pippa's silence, whether it's a mandate from the royal family, a public-relations strategy or simply a reluctance to step into the spotlight, has only helped build Pippa buzz.

"Keeping quiet in the press so far has increased the mystique around her while also preventing her from ruffling any feathers at Buckingham Palace. An interview with Pippa is a big score, as I'm sure the public is eager to put some personality behind the pictures."

Like professional celebrities, Pippa also keeps people guessing about her love life, contributing to the allure.

At the end of June, she was spotted in the crowd watching Wimbledon tennis with cricket player and businessman Alex Loudon, 30, her on-again, off-again beau.

She has been also been pictured with George Percy, son of the Duke of Northumberland, whom she has known since her days at Edinburgh University. And she and Prince Harry seemed to share conspiratorial smiles throughout the royal wedding and balcony appearance, prompting hope that the two would provide the next fairy-tale romance and the next royal wedding. But no such luck, so far.

"Ha!" Harry told reporters in June. "I'm 100% single."

Dancing With the Stars pro Mark Ballas told AOL celebrity writer Rob Shuter last week that he's a "huge fan" and would love to see her on the show. "My first choice of celebrity dance partner next season would be Pippa Middleton."

Meanwhile, Bandur, whose Facebook page now has more than 200,000 "likes," says he has turned down offers to buy the page. He says he has respect for Pippa beyond her body.

"She's absolutely stunning. I think there's more to Pippa than meets the eye. She has a certain allure about her. And her allure is what motivates people to take more of an interest in her."

