

Newcastle's Dancing Priest Reaches National Audience

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NEWCASTLE, Neb. – Many times, the Rev. Andy Sohm feels so good about life that he needs to dance.

And now, he has reached a national audience.

The Catholic priest was chosen as the "trivia dancer" last week for the New York-based talk show "Live! With Kelly and Michael."

The show features co-hosts Kelly Ripa and Michael Strahan. They chat during the opening segment and then ask a call-in contestant a trivia question in order to win a trip. An audience member dances in the spotlight while the hosts spin the wheel to determine the vacation destination for the contestant.

Sohm serves two parishes, St. Peter at Newcastle, Neb., and St. Joseph in Ponca, Neb. He resides at the Newcastle rectory and was introduced on the "Live!" show as "Andrew from Newcastle, Nebraska."

"I gave them my last name, but they didn't use it," Sohm said with a chuckle.

He also didn't wear a priest's collar or clothes, and he didn't tell the show's producers beforehand of his heavenly calling.

"I didn't tell that that I'm a Catholic priest," he said. "It was a two-fold thing. It was like I was on vacation, so I wanted to relax and chill out. And I wanted them to choose me because of my dancing and not because I was a priest and they thought it was cool or something they needed to do."

In fact, Sohm shed the clerical garb the entire time he toured the Big Apple with friends.

"I wasn't hiding anything," he said. "I wasn't embarrassed or ashamed, but I thought it would be good to wear street clothes while on vacation in New York City."

Actually, Sohm was completing unfinished business just by getting into the "Live" studio audience.

"When I was in the seminary, one of my seminarian friends and I went to New York City," he said. "We were in line to see the (Live!) show when it was with Regis (Philbin) and Kelly. We were really excited because we had stand-by tickets and thought we were going to get in, but they cut the line right at us. That was about 15 or 16 years ago."

This time, Sohm wasn't going to be denied.

"This (show) was on my to-do list," he said. "This time, I made sure I had my own tickets in hand. I requested tickets and got them."

A DREAM COME TRUE

Sohm has regularly followed the long-running show, which has seen changes in the hosts during recent years. Strahan is the most recent addition, replacing long-time host Philbin who retired from the show.

"I'm a fan of the show and really like it a lot," the priest said. "I really didn't know Michael since he was all new to the scene (for me). I was watching when Regis (Philbin) was on the show, and he's a really cool guy. I wanted to meet Regis the first time we were in New York City, but it didn't work out."

This trip to NYC was special in a couple of ways, Sohm said.

"I had a long desire to go to New York City during Christmas. I went with three people – two parishioners from Ponca and one of their friends," he said. "I'm 39, and my friends were in their 70s. It's a really crazy thing. You think they wouldn't hang out with a priest, but we're good friends. It worked out beautifully. God really blessed us that week. The weather was perfect."

New York's normally brutal December weather instead produced balmy temperatures in the 60s. But the blessings continued in more ways than one.

Sohm and his friends attended the Wednesday (Dec. 16) live show, which featured actor and comedian Will Ferrell. The audience received a two-for-one special, as the live show was followed by a second show taped for later viewing.

The next blessing actually came from the misfortune of a woman in Sohm's group.



COURTESY PHOTO
Rev. Andy Sohm of Newcastle, Nebraska was chosen as the 'Trivia Dancer' last week on the New York-based talk show "Live! With Kelly and Michael."

"The studio had around 200 seats. They had steps leading to the top tier of the studio, but a woman in our group had difficulty walking. She was using a cane and couldn't go up the steps," he said. "They let us sit on the bottom level, close to the front. It was all random. Her cane turned into a real blessing."

Sohm's quartet was seated near the area where the show's guests enter the studio and give "high fives" to audience members. "We could see everything really well," he said.

LET'S DANCE!

The next blessing came when the show's producers asked if any audience members wanted to audition for the trivia dancer's spot in the program's opening segment.

Had Sohm ever aspired to becoming the trivia dancer?

"I knew about it and thought about it, just because it's really fun and really awesome," the priest said. "(Executive Producer Michael) Gelman selected three or four of us. We went down and did a dance-off. The audience voted, but Gelman holds the final word."

Sohm was selected as one of two finalists and then as the trivia dancer. He received a roar of approval from the two hosts – particularly Strahan – and the audience during his appearance.

"People were asking if I was doing the 'pogo stick' dance. No, I was just doing a total free-for-all," the priest said. "Once I was selected, we went backstage and then I came out to dance. While I was dancing, they gave me a selfie stick and one of those cameras that you hold."

Sohm tried to gauge the audience reaction.

"I could barely hear what they were saying back there (on the rear stage), but I saw Michael's head bob up and down, and I know he lost it. He was enjoying it. It was really neat to get energy from that (moment) and see it now," he said.

"I also saw the joy that everyone received (in the audience), and it was really cool. I didn't want it to be all about me. I wanted it to be about each of us being who we are, loving ourselves for who we are and receiving that joy. You can enjoy the wonderful things in life, even if you're a priest."

Sohm grew up on an Iowa farm, where his family enjoyed dancing as fun and stress relief. He has continued to "shake a leg" on a variety of occasions.

"I go to a lot of youth retreats, and I dance with the kids. They love it. We also have things like wedding dances. There are a lot of opportunities for (dancing)," he said. "For me, it's fun and brings a lot of joy and happiness. Right now, there is so much negative in the world."

Sohm takes the same approach to life as he takes to dancing.

"In life, you don't always get out and perform a set choreography. I just get out there for the joy and the fun," he said. "You enjoy the goodness that comes from being able to get up there and not be embarrassed. Sometimes, with the Lord, you just need to approach Him as you are and find joy in it." Then again, dancing on national television is a little different than "hoofing it" at a local event. He professed to nervousness but then went with the flow.

"I thought, 'Oh, my Lord, did I actually do that?'" he said of his post-show reaction. "But then I watched the video and was excited that I did it. I was just feeling all the joy of the Lord. I didn't know what I was doing. I had no clue, nothing planned out."

Sohm enjoyed meeting and taking pictures with Ripa and Strahan.

"It was cool meeting them. I talked to Michael Strahan, and I may have told him that I was a priest. We also took pictures (with the hosts) during the show. It was interesting, because they would come up to the audience during commercial breaks," the priest said.

"I'm a fan of the show. I really enjoy how

(the hosts) can talk on so many different topics and how they keep the show going. You have the trivia dancer, and you just laugh and have a good time. It's a positive show."

Sohm was amazed at the energy – and little room for error – on a live show.

"Kelly and Michael were so good at thinking on their feet. They had questions coming right at them, and they knew how to respond. They would bounce off each other," he said. "When I went into the back room, there was this constant movement where everything just flowed. Gelman was adding stuff, but it all came together and you could see how polished it was. Gelman kept things moving and flowing. He would give the clue for the things he wanted."

People back home knew Sohm held tickets to the "Live!" show, but they didn't know he was appearing on it. Because of the one-hour time difference, Sohm let some people back home know about his appearance as it aired in the Central time zone. Other people learned by the sheer luck of watching the show and witnessing the parish priest as the trivia dancer.

"They couldn't believe I was on, so they were a little bit surprised," he said.

MORE NYC FUN

The "Live" show wasn't the last time Sohm's group would see Strahan. They went the next day to ABC's "Good Morning America" where Strahan serves as one of the hosts.

Strahan came past Sohm, who was waiting in line by 6 a.m., and acknowledged him with a humorous look.

"Michael had his entourage and security guards, but he saw me and responded positively," the priest said. "I was impressed with Michael Strahan. He's cool and just lifted people's spirits."

Sohm and the other "GMA" audience members were escorted into the studio. Sohm met co-anchors Robin Roberts and Lara Spencer, and that day's show featured an ugly sweater contest.

"It was just amazing. It was really awesome," he said. "You see the show on TV, and then you go into the studio and it's such a different experience. You have the lights and all the action going on behind the scenes. It was great."

While in New York City, Sohm's group also visited the 9/11 memorial and museum, the Statue of Liberty, Ellis Island and the Freedom Tower. In addition, they attended performances of the Rockettes at Radio City Music Hall, Phantom of the Opera and another Broadway show.

When he returned home, Sohm was surprised to learn the impact of his national dance debut.

"Right now, I'm getting ready with a family for a funeral and wake. They told me they knew I was in New York, so they happened to turn on the show. They were grieving but then saw me on the show, and it brought such joy to them," he said.

"The other response and feedback has been positive. I have heard from a number of people, including priest friends. (The show) has been one of the most positive experiences of my life. A friend (recorded) it and put it on Facebook. It got 14,000 hits." Sohm knows the importance of maintaining a positive attitude for those facing life's difficulties. He served as a military chaplain for nearly two years at Holloman Air Force Base in New Mexico.

"It was a very heavy, intense time. I was dealing with a lot of suicides, broken lives and emptiness," he said. "The holidays were especially difficult for them. I would see a lot of struggles and challenges because people were away from their families."

In that respect, Sohm hoped to lift people's spirit with his nationwide dance moves on the "Live" show. The holidays, particularly Christmas, are about more than buying gifts, he said.

"It's about love and goodness, laughing at ourselves, moving our feet and finding joy and comfort," he said. "I think we've just got to be open and to experience the goodness in life. You've got to live life to the fullest."

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Christmas Comes Early At The Pump For U.S. Drivers – Gas Hits \$1.99

AAA reports the average U.S. gas price dropped below \$2 per gallon this morning for the first time since March 25, 2009. Today's national average price is \$1.998 per gallon. AAA estimates that cheaper gas prices have saved Americans more than \$115 billion on gasoline so far this year, which works out to more than \$550 per licensed driver.

More than 91 million

Americans plan to take advantage of cheaper gas prices to drive 50 miles or more during the upcoming holiday period. Travel by all modes of transportation should be a record, topping 100 million.

"It's all pretty simple," said Marilyn Buskohl, spokeswoman for AAA South Dakota. "Gas prices have dropped because there is more than enough oil and gasoline supplies around the world

to meet current demand. In addition, gas prices generally fall through early winter because people drive and use less fuel this time of year."

Gas prices already are much cheaper than \$2 per gallon in most parts of the country. The lowest one percent of U.S. stations is selling gas for an average of \$1.59 per gallon, and more than 13,000 stations are selling gas for less than \$1.75

per gallon. The states with the cheapest averages today include: Missouri (\$1.77), Oklahoma (\$1.78), South Carolina (\$1.78), Tennessee (\$1.79) and Kansas (\$1.79). Average state and metro prices can be found on AAA's Fuel Gauge Report website, updated daily: FuelGaugeReport.AAA.com.

AAA predicts gas prices likely will remain low through January, and could drop even

further if the cost of crude oil remains weak. By late winter, gas prices may rise 50 cents per gallon or more as refineries conduct maintenance in advance of the busy summer driving season.

Americans are on track this year to drive a record number of miles, largely due to lower gas prices and a stronger economy, based on early estimates.

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Happy 50th Anniversary
Tim and Suzanne Cusick



Tim and Suzanne will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary on December 28, 2015. Tim and Suzanne were born and raised in South Dakota, and attended the University of South Dakota where they met in choir. By the grace of God, and judicious servings of Chardonnay, they have maintained a beautiful marriage in which their abiding love and friendship is evident to all.

Mrs. Cusick is the former Suzanne Vanderpol of Corsica, South Dakota, and the daughter of Alvin and Viola Vanderpol. Mr. Cusick hails from a farm outside of Vermillion, and is the son of Harold and Joan Cusick. Under the spell of California dreamin', they relocated to San Jose, but ultimately found their true selves in Oregon, where they have remained since 1981.

Their children, Christine and Angus Nesbit, Colleen and Jay Jensen, Carrie Carlin and Clark Cusick, and grandchildren, Madeleine, Grace and Rachel, are grateful for the true love and example of Tim and Suzanne. Together, the family will celebrate this event at Disneyland.

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