



## A royal wedding Coronation style



David Neilson and Julie Hesmondhalgh play Roy and Hayley Cropper on Coronation Street.  
HANDOUT PHOTO

By Linda Barnard  
Apr 18, 2011

Move over William and Kate. The real royal wedding happens in May, when Canadians finally get to see *Coronation Street's* beloved couple, Roy and Hayley Cropper, legally tie the knot.

Sure, Hayley used to be a man (named Harold) and Roy is an eccentric train nut who never leaves the house without his shopping bag. And like every second person on the 50-year-old British drama, Hayley has spent time in jail. But fans can't get enough of the beloved characters and have been waiting a long time to hear them say, "I do."

They'll get the inside scoop on the nuptials Thursday when actors David Neilson and Julie Hesmondhalgh, who play the pair who run Roy's Rolls in the fictional town of Weatherfield, host *An Audience with the Croppers* at the Mississauga Living Arts Centre.

"It's wonderful episode and it's very beautiful with lots and lots of lovely English countryside and, suffice to say, all does not go smoothly," said Hesmondhalgh, 41, about Roy's and Hayley's walk down the aisle from Halifax, where the pair were about to host *An Audience with the Croppers* before heading to Ottawa for a show Tuesday and then on to Toronto.

"We try to do better than the royals," quipped Neilson, 62.

Because we are about nine months behind the British air dates for episodes, Canadians will see Roy and Hayley exchange vows in about three weeks. They married on the show last August.

Nerdy Roy and Hayley may be cocoa-drinking homebodies, but they had one of the edgier storylines on *Corrie*, Britain's longest-running TV drama and a must-see for millions of Canadian fans each week. As a transsexual, Hayley wasn't legally able to marry Roy. Until now.

"That's what we love about it really, that despite that edginess they are a very conservative couple," says Hesmondhalgh of the onscreen romance, which has gone on for 13 years. "We are very faithful and gentle, and people respond to that."

In fact, both were thrilled with the rock star-like welcome they got at a St. John's, Nfld., show earlier this week.

"We did feel very, very welcome and the really interesting thing was the age of the fans was significantly younger that we'd expected if we did a show like this in the U.K.," says Hesmondhalgh, adding she was also surprised as the number of men in the crowd. There's no shame among guys admitting they have a passion for a long-running soap in the Great White North.

"Men are very open about loving the show," Hesmondhalgh points out. "That's the Canadian way."

Hesmondhalgh and Neilson ditch their characters' cardies and sensible shoes for the show, hosting the event as themselves. The first half is a Q&A with a moderator; the second half is questions from the audience. Doesn't it sound a bit like Charlie Sheen's *Torpedo of Truth* tour?

"Please don't put that in. I can't promise that level of rock 'n' roll," Hesmondhalgh said with a laugh.

Fans will recognize Neilson, who looks much like his character — minus the ever-present shopping bag and worn anorak. But blond Hesmondhalgh, 41, bears little resemblance to her TV alter ego's padded sweaters and "clippie-cloppy shoes" that give her a very distinctive, tripping gait.

"I'm a bit of a second glance; they recognize David immediately," Hesmondhalgh says.

As for Roy's shopping bag, "it is his life, apart from Hayley," says Neilson. "In real life, it belonged to my mother. She loved the show and is now very much in it. Roy takes it to weddings and funerals. He's always got the bag."

Fans want to know if a new baddie is coming on the show to replace Tony Gordon, who was recently killed off, to which Hesmondhalgh says no comment. *Corrie* fans hate spoilers and there's a constant risk from the web and British papers, where the show is often front-page news, as well as friends and family in the U.K. who may be tempted to blab. But she did confirm that just like many marrieds, Hayley is about to have some mother-in-law trouble.

Not that Kate Middleton will face anything of the kind if she insists on watching *Coronation Street*: not only was her father-in-law to be, Prince Charles, a guest on the show 10 years ago for its 40th anniversary, the Queen is also said to be a big fan.

"I don't know if that's true," says Neilson with typical dry Brit humour. "I've never asked her."

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