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WHEN THE STAR DIES  
IT TURNS INTO AN ANGEL

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THE BRIGHTEST STAR IN FOCUS.  
**PRINCE DIMITRI**

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## THE BRIGHTEST STAR IN FOCUS:



## INTERVIEW WITH PRINCE DIMITRI

by Sam Bell

Photo by SquareMoose Photography NY

*The Explosion of Color Necklace. The center amethyst of 42.44 carats, originating from the Russian imperial mines, was part of a collection given by Tsar Alexander III to Queen Elena of Italy. Next to it is a collection of multicolor gems. Created by Prince Dimitri*



Photo by SquareMoose Photography NY

**P**rince Dimitri, thank you so much for taking the time to answer some questions. You're obviously a busy man and we really appreciate it.

I'd like to start with your heritage if that's alright? As one of the few true royals left in our modern world, 1st in line to the Russian throne...

**PD:** that is debatable because there are other pretenders although there are arguments to say they are disqualified. In my case there is the Salic Law that Tsar Paul reinstated because he hated his mother. My great grandmother Grand Duchess Elena would have been the pretender in her days...today some say the Salic Law is illegitimate so you can't say I'm first in line.

...and 1375th in line to the British, you must have a unique perspective on the current influencer sphere. You have spoken before about the harshness of royal training historically. From deliberately cold showers to infinite training, the children of royalty were conditioned from birth to be the perfect role models for their subjects.

**PD:** yes, when we were naughty, nanny would say don't forget who you are! We were always expected to be better behaved than other children and set an example.

The idea being that the king and queen would be seen as the mother and father of the country itself.

**PD:** Yes, in psychology, the mother and father of the nation who we the people can look up to and be proud of. People need public figures to look up to hence the attraction of royalty and celebrity. In Russia, for example, the tsar and tsarina were referred to as *Batiushka* and *Matushka*, the benevolent father and mother of Russia.

How do you think the current line of royals compare to the historical ones and do you think that they hold themselves to the same standards?

**PD:** I think most of them do a great job. Public opinion tends to be more critical today and that is because technology makes their lives totally transparent. In the old days you knew relatively little about their private lives.

The changing times have also seen a change in how royalty is perceived. While the royals have always been a family like any other, with nicknames, inside jokes and family squabbles, to the masses they have always been seen as untouchable paragons of virtue and dignity. Compared to today when few people understand their own heritage and the importance royalty has had on human history.

**PD:** ...and their fundamental influence as patron of the arts since the days of the Roman Empire. The Renaissance and the 17th, 18th, 19th and 20th centuries being prime examples of that.

I understand that you personally receive marriage proposals from all sorts, and from people of all sexes and genders.

**PD:** I don't know where you got that from but it's not true.

Do you think it is harder to be a member of a royal family today than it was in years past?



Tutti frutti car pendants:  
amethyst & ruby,  
blue topaz & emerald,  
peridot & sapphire, and  
citrine & diamond center.  
Created by Prince Dimitri



Photo by Mark Roskams

**PD:** What is harder is the lack of privacy compared to the past.

And if so, what are some of the greatest struggles you face that your ancestors would never have dreamed of?

**PD:** again the lack of privacy but also the fact that royals are only seen as privileged and not so much as hard working.

Your family has been responsible for some incredible things. While it would take too long to discuss everything your relatives have been responsible for, you recently discussed how it was Elisabeth of Bavaria who secured Albert Einstein passage out of Nazi Germany and was responsible for changing the world of physics forever. Off the top of your head, what would you say has been your family's greatest contribution to the world, and history at large?

**PD:** Elizabeth of Bavaria was the Queen of Belgium (she was my great grandmother and I met her when I was seven years old and went to stay with her for a few days). One of my family's greatest contributions was the creation in 1350, of Chivalric Orders that protected widows and orphans as well as the acquisition in 1453 of the Holy Shroud of Turin that stayed in the family until 1983 when my grandfather died and donated it to the church in his will. My family and I were received in private audience by Pope John Paul II on that occasion. Their other great contribution was support for the ideas of the Renaissance that was a major turning point in history. Before that we were stuck in a unidimensional way of thinking during the Middle Ages. The Renaissance opened Europe to a universal and multi-cultural way of thinking when the Greek and Roman philosophers were rediscovered with the fundamental idea that one should always question and analyze rather than blindly accept what the church was telling people to believe. They also were great supporters of the philosophers of the Enlightenment in the 18th century. The best example for that is Catherine the Great and King Frederic II of Prussia who actively corresponded with them.

On a more personal note, I'd like to ask you about your physical connections to the past.



Once Upon A Diamond book cover.  
Book by Prince Dimitri

I understand you recently found one of the amethysts belonging to Czar Alexander the third in a drawer. It raises the question of what other historical artifacts are floating around in your life waiting to be rediscovered. Putting aside any financial value, what object or piece in your possession do you think has the most historical significance?

**PD:** Tsar Alexander III gave Queen Elena, who was his goddaughter a large collection of Amethysts when she got married. She had a parure made by the court jeweler Musy in Torino and there were some left. They were inherited by my grandfather who gave them to my mother who then gave them to me. I didn't just find one in a draw. I've had them for many years and I use them regularly. I have two other things of historical significance. One is a box with glass replicas of the most famous diamonds in the world that was made for King Umberto I who loved gems and the other one is the wedding contract of my great-grandmother Grand Duchess Helen of Russia signed by Nicholas II.



Given people often misunderstand the practicalities of jewelry, with many pieces designed to be deconstructed and rebuilt accordingly. Tiaras transforming to necklaces and brooches etc. What is it, do you think that allows some pieces to last the test of time while others are lost?

**PD:** Their beauty, quality and rarity.

Why do we have some samples of intact jewelry from hundreds of years ago, while others we have only drawings and descriptions?

**PD:** The same happens with everything else in life. Wars, revolutions and all sorts of ups and downs people experience during their lifetimes. Jewelry is also a kind of insurance if things go wrong. They are easy to take with you and easy to sell if you end up in exile and need money.

Is there something about these pieces that makes them worthy of remaining intact, or is it just luck?

**PD:** I think both. Unfortunately, there are many examples of fabulous Russian jewelry ending up broken apart and the stones sold left and right.

Likewise, could you explain the fashion cycles of jewellery? From historical styles to modern offerings, are there trends that come and go, such as in fashion?

**PD:** There certainly are cycles of fashion in jewelry but they last longer than in fashion. Everything evolves and changes but jewelry tends to be more lasting. Today you still see people wearing 19th century jewels but not clothes.

Or is it a constant shift towards something? How do you keep on top of the shifting landscape?

**PD:** You have to know what's out there, what's been done already, otherwise you risk making things that are not original or new.

Particularly in today's world of global connection. When a viral picture can send people after a specific necklace, or a celebrity's fashion choices can suddenly increase the demand for a certain

stone. Is there any way to predict which way the market will go?

**PD:** Not really, certainly influencers of all kinds play an important role but there are more of them today and with a greater diversity of tastes and style than before. However, when something is new, of top quality and beauty it is always a success.

With your incredible heritage, experience as a jewellery designer, training as a gemologist, literal decades of appraisal, on top of your training as a lawyer; you are likely one of the most highly accredited people on the planet to speak to every single aspect of jewellery. With that in mind I'd like to ask you about your own personal creations. Many people, myself included, are fascinated by the engineering that goes into jewellery. I understand you often give your teams "Impossible designs" and ask them to figure it out.

**PD:** I do but the key word here is "team" and as such I also figure out how to make my designs work and many times jewelers tell me I gave them ideas they had not thought about.

When you are thinking about a new piece, and considering the Gem architecture, do you focus more on the technical aspect, or aesthetics? Or do you consider the two interchangeable?

**PD:** they are not interchangeable, they are complementary. I start with esthetics and originality and then comes the technical aspect because you first need a new idea and then you must think of how you are going to make it work.

You've described the Russian Rivière Diamond Necklace as the most beautiful necklace to ever exist, I'd like to ask you, what is about that piece that speaks to you so fondly.

**PD:** I think it was the most fabulous diamond necklace to exist because it was composed entirely of Golconda diamonds of huge sizes and amazing quality. The Russian Rivière Diamond Necklace was a set of 21 large cushion shaped diamonds and 15 pear-shaped diamond drops that weighed a total of 475 carats; the center cushion cut diamond was 32 carats while the center pear shape was



Medieval-style cross in 20k yellow gold and oxidized bronze. In the center is a 6.29 carats peridot surrounded by blue topaz, moonstones, diamonds, tsavorites, green spinels and pink sapphires. The back of the cross has the initials of the client and his sons in diamonds and gold, and an image of William the Conqueror from the Bayeux tapestry. Created by Prince Dimitri

Photo by Mark Roskams



26 carats. This necklace was once part of the Russian Imperial Crown Jewels. Only the Empress was allowed to wear it or the grand duchesses but just the day of their wedding. My great grandmother Grand Duchess Helen was one of the last to wear it at her wedding in 1902. During the time of the Russian Revolution the necklace was sold to an unknown buyer and has since disappeared. You must remember that the mines of Golconda produced the finest diamonds in history and ceased to produce in the late 18th century...

Are there any modern pieces that can measure up to it?

PD: no, this is unique because of the object itself but also because it had been commissioned by Catherine the Great and worn by every empress and grand duchess until the revolution.

I'd also like to ask you about research. Is there a particular methodology you use when researching your pieces? Particularly for someone whose love of unusual things is rivaled only by your love of playing with geometry. How do you balance realism vs. imagination? You've spoken before about the strict standards that jewelers often hold themselves to when recreating nature, ensuring each turtle has 13 hexagonal sections etc. How do you get around that and create something truly new?

PD: It depends...I do research in decorative arts a lot and because I've seen so many things during my life and I have a very good visual memory, I know where to look. I love the Divine Proportion also known as the Golden Ratio of the ancient Greeks illustrated amongst other things by the volumes of Plato and Archimedes and in Italian architecture and drawings of Leonardo da Vinci. I love paisley, I love crosses, I love Islamic geometry, I love medieval ornamentation, I love Chinese decorative arts and shapes especially in porcelain and of course all things Renaissance and French 18th century and I know exactly where to look for certain shapes and details I have in mind.

No method is perfect and I understand your recent book very nearly contained some urban

myths before you caught them at the last second. Having to cancel attributing to Cartier the diamond kokoshnik that was made for Grand Duchess Vladimir when you discovered that it was not a Cartier at all. Was this the only drama involved in researching your book, or were there any other topics that made learning about them difficult?

PD: No, that was it...the gentleman in charge of the archives at Cartier in Paris was so wonderful! I really insisted and he was so kind to do extensive research! It took him two months to find out that the Grand Duchess Vladimir in 1901 was at Cartier ordering things for her daughter's wedding and asked if they could fix this tiara that needed repair and that is how we found out it had been made by Chaumet. By then we were in print and could not add anything, only delete the word Cartier next to it.

If you don't mind, I'd like to get personal now. As a man with family all over Europe and influences from around the globe it can be difficult as an outsider to pinpoint your inspirations. Your work has shown elements reminiscent of India and Persian works, you've clearly shown an understanding of Scottish and Celtic artistry and of course Italy has its place. I'd like to ask you about your Parisian influences. You were born in Paris and your love of the city is plain to see. From your love of French Bordeaux to your frequency at La Grenouille, even your Parisian tailor is likely responsible for your place on the International Best Dressed Hall of Fame List as Best Dressed Man. How much of that love do you think comes through in your work? Would you consider much of your work French inspired or possessing much Parisian influence? Or do you keep your love and work separate?

PD: I guess it's a mix of it all, an alchemy of the soul where esthetics and memories interact to produce my style as it is.

You've spoken in the past about how it was your mother's emerald that first inspired your love of gems. How has that love lasted the years? Have the decades and your vast array of experiences lessened your love of that stone? Or has the nostalgia only accentuated its beauty in your mind?

PD: Once I see a beautiful stone it remains in my heart forever. I don't think nostalgia accentuated its beauty in my mind.

Is there a piece you can think of that you would most love to own? Past or present?

PD: The earrings of Helen of Troy and the pearls of Cleopatra!

You've compared wearing fine jewellery outside of white tie events, now black tie, to wearing a tuxedo in the kitchen.

PD: When did I say that??

Does this hold true of all jewellery, or is there some jewellery that you wear whenever, wherever, just because?

PD: I think that today anything goes. We are freer than ever from the constraints of fashion and you can certainly create your own style. I quite like a fabulous jewel worn with a white t-shirt and jeans. I remember many years ago at Sotheby's this most amazing beauty walked into the exhibition room in Geneva, she looked like a movie star, tall, brunette, exotic, jeans and white t-shirt and on one of her pinkies she had stacked two rings, what looked like a 30carat Golconda diamond and maybe a 20 carat Kashmir sapphire ring... that was Ljuba Rizzoli one of the most beautiful women of her days. Of course, I asked her and she kindly showed me the rings.



Queen Margherita's Musy Tiara



The portrait of Tsarina Alexandra Feodorovna, Tsar Nicholas II wife

Finally, I'd like to ask you about symbolism in your work. You've spoken before about how you strive for symbolism, but I'd like to ask you why that is. What is it about jewellery and the language of gems that allows you to put so much meaning into your work?

PD: That is the way I like it but you can do that with any artistic creation.

They say, for those who can listen, even the stones speak, it has been a pleasure to listen, and we're deeply grateful to you for speaking to us. Readers who are at all interested in history, gemology, or just want to lose themselves in a great story, prince Dimitris' book *Once Upon a Diamond* is available now, through his website

[www.prncedimitri.com](http://www.prncedimitri.com) or Amazon

if you want to read amazing stories about royalty in general follow him on Instagram at @prince.dimitri

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JEWELLERY  
DESIGNER:  
*Prince Dimitri*

PHOTOGRAPHY:  
*Mark Roskams*

*Tiara topped with  
aigrette feathers with  
18k yellow gold,  
citrine, green quartz,  
diamonds, and  
Tahitian pearls.*

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