

Tiaras - from Queen Victoria to Victoria Beckham

Contributed by Zinnia Silver
Monday, 11 February 2008

Why have tiaras become so popular in the last ten years? Is it a desire for "bling" or is it every girl's desire to be a "princess" on her special day? Look on Google and you will find 4.2 million references for the word "tiara"

alone. Each website for tiaras has as many as 100 different designs of all shapes and sizes, materials and colours, adorned with crystals, pearls, feathers etc. There seems to be a bewildering choice - almost everything apart from edible tiaras - but then I didn't look on too many American sites.

The current exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London pays testimony to the increasing popularity of the tiara. With over 200 scintillating gem-set head ornaments on display, the exhibition is proving a huge hit. Thousands of fine diamonds worn by the likes of Victoria Beckham - and the Queen - are on display including the Oriental Circlet tiara designed by Prince Albert and worn by Queen Victoria, and more recently, the Queen Mother.

Taking pride of place at the exhibition is the Diamond Tiara Russe that the Queen wore on her wedding day in 1947, a tribute to her reign. Only a few years ago, tiaras would have been considered "posh" - something worn only by the Royal family on state occasions - encrusted with diamonds, costing thousands of pounds, probably made in Bond Street by the Royal jewellers.

Today's tiaras are less formal and less rigid in design, complimenting the hair and dress, rather than dominating like the old, heavy models worn by the crowned heads of Europe. Now, tiaras seem so commonplace and so cheap that there must be factories in China churning out mass-produced tiaras because some of the leading websites are selling tiaras, allegedly silver, at £10 - £15.

On the other hand, London wedding shops stock tiaras with their prices starting at £200. I spoke to several designers at a recent wedding fair in London who said there was no way they could make a silver tiara for as little as £10. Their prices started at £40 for a simple basic model.

Mostly the designers seemed to be concentrating on the "bespoke" end of the market for the more fussy brides-to-be who want something totally different for their wedding. So will the fashion for tiaras last? I guess it will depend on hairstyles. Can you imagine tiaras in the sixties with beehive hairstyles? You'd never find them!

"I was 'coiffée' before dinner, with a lovely Diadem of diamonds and emeralds designed by my beloved Albert" Queen Victoria's journal, 25 April 1845

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