

## MEET LOUIS

I was born in Amsterdam, the Netherlands on Friday morning June, 23<sup>rd</sup> 1972. Even though I was born in the city I lived my childhood in a very small town outside of Amsterdam.

My dance life started at the age of 10 after my family decided it was important for my social skills to learn ballroom dancing. My grandparents were competitive ballroom dancers so it didn't come as a surprise to many that I should follow in their footsteps.

I learned to love competitive ballroom dancing because winning competitions gave me confidence, and I realized how competitive I actually was.

Dancing gave me the opportunity to express feelings without saying a word and I also experienced it as therapy to deal with many emotional obstacles throughout my childhood.

From the age of 15 I was traveling abroad representing my country in major dance competitions in both Ballroom and latin. Those early international years gave me a lot of experience and the realization that if I wanted to make it big I needed to take risks and make major life altering decisions. I had to get an international partner, move to England and therefore stop traditional school. My mentor/coach, Ruud Vermey PhD and I convinced my parents (not sure if I didn't want to finish school because of my career or just the excitement of not having to go anymore..lol) to permit me to terminate high school at 16 to pursue my dance career. My parents were torn, because they wanted me to finish my education. I totally agree now as an adult, but in hindsight I thank them and my school principal on my knees that they let me go. I took a huge risk by supporting my decision, because I was still under age. When I became world champion in 1994 that school principal who supported my decision was invited to the celebration party and in his speech he said 'I could have lost my job over the decision to let you leave high school early, but now I'm so happy I did knowing you reached your dream. Your country is proud of you'.

During the summer of 1989 I started a whole new rollercoaster in my life with my beloved British dance partner, Julie Fryer. It started as a crazy fast career boost. We learned, laughed, triumphed, lost, gained, cried, split up, got together again. Doors opened and closed, but with blood, sweat, and tears I found my intuition was my life saver on many occasions. Sometimes following your gut is more important than listening to others. I did and it helped me make life changing decisions when times got rough. With intuition I felt my passion and love for dance made me happy and I became more sincere in my expression in dance and life.

After three world Latin Dance championship gold medals in 1994, 1995 and 1996 I fulfilled more than one dream and was so appreciative for all of my blessings. I still felt an urge to do more. From my earliest age I was always been cross trained in many forms of dance and was educated in choreography as well , by my mentor, Ruud Vermey.

I wanted to explore the world of bringing Ballroom Dance mixed with other forms of dance to the theater world. When I first came to NYC in 1991 I fell in love with the city. I told my friends that when I

retired from competitive dancing in my late thirties I wanted to move to New York City. Well, as fate would have it I stopped competing at 26 and moved to New York City in June of 1997. I took the risk and followed my intuition once more. I packed my two suitcases, bought a ticket and moved to the Big Apple leaving my home country. A new chapter of my life had begun, and I had no idea what was in store for me.

In that summer I had the pleasure of working with many amazingly talented dancers many of whom are now known to you as my colleagues on DWTS. Not only was I coaching Tony Dovolani, Karina Smirnoff, Maksim Chmerkovskiy and his brother Val since my early days in NYC, but we became close friends. Now working on DWTS together is amazing, especially since we have all known each other for so long.

In 1998 I decided I wanted to immigrate to the United States officially so I went back to the Netherlands to apply for my immigration papers. I decided it was best to apply at the American consulate, because the process would go much faster than applying in NYC. In July 1999 my passport was stamped and I received my green card within weeks of my return to in the United States.

Once I arrived back in NYC I started to compete with Karina Smirnoff, since I had realized earlier I missed competing. There was one big difference, I was going to represent the United States. For so long I had danced for one country, so you can imagine how weird that felt at first. After a while I absolutely loved it and was so proud when Karina and I won the United States national championship in 2000 while hearing the American national anthem being played for me. Tears rolled. Isn't it funny when a national anthem is being played, I always reflect back on all the blood, sweat and tears that went into achieving a dream, then I get emotional in the realization that it's all worth the blood, sweat and tears, cause after all is said and done the national anthem is being played just for you and to top it off, I am wearing the gold medal.

In 2001 I decided to go nuts, in many eyes. Upon moving to NYC in 1997 I thought 'Broadway' was what I really wanted, so I went for an audition for 'Saturday Night Fever'. I thought it was so political, I hated it. I had enough with all the politics in my own dance world, I wasn't ready to step into another one where it was all about anything, but dance and art. I realized if I wanted to go on 'Broadway' I would have to create my own show. God knows what got into me, but I decided to just rent a Broadway theater myself and create my own show. I gave myself nine months to create 'Latin Fusion', a ballroom dance extravaganza fused with other forms of dance. I asked about 28 dancers of which 6 were current or past world champions to jump onboard with me and most volunteered their time and gave me their absolute best effort to make this show a success. All of them knew what my overhead was and how big the 'City Center Theater on 56<sup>th</sup> Street is. After some grueling hard working months of collaboration with some amazing people and dear friends I can proudly say that two weeks before the show I was told by the theater I had reached my breakeven point in sales so I didn't have to worry about the financial side anymore.

You can imagine how emotional I was when I got the news and again it was one of those moments where I flashed back and realized once more that if I worked hard enough, put my mind to it and never lost my passion I can do anything I want. You have no idea how many people told me I was nuts and arrogant for thinking that I could create my own show on 'Broadway'. Well, I would rather be nuts and

take risks then sit around and do nothing. To give you a better idea of how close our cast was, they threw me a huge surprise birthday party after the conclusion of the last show. As a side note I chose June 22<sup>nd</sup> 2002 as the date for the first show, because I wanted to be able to say I was a Broadway producer before I turned 30. How childish, right? lol...I didn't think so.

In 2004 not only did I buy a house in Utah, I also produced another show in Salt Lake City called 'Latin Revolution' in September of that year.

While traveling to NYC for work in early 2005 I received a call from the BBC in London to ask if I was interested in auditioning for this new dance show called 'Dancing with the Stars' that was going to be launched that summer. I said yes right away, because for me it was another way of exploring ballroom dancing and this was the golden opportunity to bring ballroom dancing to the masses. I flew to LA for my audition and by the end of April I received the news I was going to be cast for season 1.

From that very first phone call I believed DWTS was going to be a success, because there is so much to like about dancing, the joy, the partnering, the costumes, the judging etc.

At the same time I was coaching Jonathan Roberts, Anna Trebunskaya, Alec Mazo and Edyta Sliwinska. I told them this was an opportunity for them to seriously consider auditioning for the show as well. Thank goodness they did!

While coaching Maksim Chmerkovskiy and his pro dance partner Elena Grinenko in March of 2005 I shared with them this opportunity to audition for DWTS, but they were not interested in give up their competitive dance career to dance on this new, unproven and unknown show. I really think that they made the right choice at the time for them, because they were getting ready for a major competition in which they were expected to do extremely well. Maksim has been part of DWTS since season 2 and Elena did season 4.

In April of 2005 the BBC called me again to ask if I knew more dancers. I was teaching at 'Center Stage' in Orem Utah at the time and picked up the phone while I was teaching. While the person was asking me the question, I turned to face Ashley Delgrosso, who was teaching next to me in the same room and while I said 'yes, I do know someone' I passed the phone to Ashley. The rest is history!

After season 1 I was teaching in NYC again over the summer when I talked with Cheryl Burke about her being approached for season 2 of DWTS. 6 months earlier I had started coaching Cheryl and her pro partner, so I was supposed to push her to keep competing, because that's the right thing to do as a coach. I didn't. I actually told Cheryl that I thought the show would be great for her and to explore different options. Am I happy I did, you bet, because look at what happened to Cheryl's life.

After season 2, ABC and the BBC decided to create a national tour with DWTS and with big promoter AEG. I was asked to choreograph the first tour and co direct. It was an amazing experience to tour the entire country with sometimes over 10,000 people in the audience, traveling on rock star tour buses and to stay in 5 star hotels. It was an incredible and fulfilling experience. If it was possible to top this great experience, during the summer tour I found out that I was nominated for an Emmy award for my group

paso doble "Carmina Burana". The first call I received to congratulate me was actually Carrie Ann Inaba. The DWTS 38 city winter tour started in December of 2006, and was followed by another summer tour and a 3<sup>rd</sup> winter tour in 2007/2008. I was asked to reprise my roles as choreographer, co director and dance captain in those summer and winter tours.

Even though I didn't have a celebrity partner in seasons 4, 5, 7, 8 nor was I asked back to choreograph another DWTS tour, it made me realize that nothing lasts forever and that you have to constantly reinvent yourself by opening new doors, even though it might be scary and exhausting.

One of the things I did was set up a not-for-profit dance company called 'Visionworx Dance Theater' which is the first of its kind, because it combines all four major dance forms. I felt a need for such a company, since there are so many brilliant dancers on this other great dance show 'So You Think You Can Dance' and they are easily forgotten right after the tv show ends. Many people agreed with me and supported the company. Unfortunately the recession hasn't helped raise funding, but I'm very hopeful that soon you will hear more about VWDT.

In the in between seasons of DWTS I was asked to choreograph and appear on numerous TV shows like 'The Suite Life of Zack and Cody', 'Hanna Montana' and 'All My Children'. Right after I heard I wasn't going to have a celebrity partner on season 7 I got a call from a producer to create and choreograph a show called 'Ballroom With A Twist' which is currently touring in theaters around the country. I also had the pleasure of choreographing seven dances on season 5 of "So you think you can dance". Three of the seven dances made it to the grand finale and were mentioned as the "judge's favorite picks" at the Kodak theater in Hollywood.

The time off from DWTS gave me plenty of time to rethink my values and decide what I think is important in my life. One very important lesson my mom taught me and for which I will always be thankful is 'the more you give, the more you get'. I became very interested in exploring which organizations I'd like to support. When I realized the Heart Association addressed obesity I wanted to support them, because unfortunately obesity is the world's number one epidemic. Being a dancer and part of the number one dance show on TV, I thought what better way to fight obesity, to be more active, and to become healthy, in a fun way, then to dance. I truly hope my dance program LOUIS' DANCE BLAST will contribute to people becoming healthier and to enjoy the process along the way. It's the journey that creates happiness and a healthy lifestyle.

That's one of the big reasons I developed my dance program, LOUIS' DANCE BLAST. I wanted to create a program that was accessible for everybody, regardless of dance ability, financial situation or the need of a dance partner. After an amazing season with Kelly Osbourne in season 9, I decided to franchise my program and make it available for any dance or fitness studio worldwide, so everybody can enjoy the fun of ballroom dancing fitness.

In the past two years I have discovered a passion for hosting, which made me realize how powerful a host can be. You can influence audiences by your choice of words, make them think about important issues while not losing the fun of it all.

Hosting also made me more vocal about important issues like discrimination, equality and bullying. That is why I have joined organizations like the Human Rights Campaign, the NOH8 campaign and recently GLSEN. What they stand for is equal rights, end of discrimination and safer school environments for children. Sometimes these organizations seem to focus more on just the GLBT community, therefore I want to be more active and to share my point of view. I truly believe if we stop labeling people or communities, we will be able to have better dialogue, followed by mutual understanding and respect. With integrity and thoughtful communication we will end all minorities and enjoy the fact we are all part of the majority, mankind. We all live under the rainbow with all it's beautiful colors, which in my opinion represents all races, all nationalities, all religions, all countries, all ages, people of all physical appearances, all sexual orientations, both sexes, all everything.

As you read you might think there is no time for anything other than work. Well, honestly sometimes it's very difficult, but I have some amazing friends that are always there for me when I need them and help to support me in succeeding with my causes. Also, when things are close to your heart or important you make time to make things happen. I've learned that lesson as a young man and the further I go on my journey, I realize more and more that everything is possible, you just have to have faith, believe and go and get what you want!

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