

THE NEW AVENGERS' ACTOR

GARETH HUNT

ORGANISES A SURPRISE WEDDING FOR HIS LOVE OF TEN YEARS, AMANDA, ON PARADISE ISLAND IN THE BAHAMAS



Gareth Hunt's face is known to millions of TV fans from the cult classic *The New Avengers*, as well as the long-running Nescafé ads. Recently, he whisked his partner of ten years, Amanda, 29, off to Paradise Island in the Bahamas, where he had arranged for them to have a very special marriage.

"I knew Amanda would prefer it to the strict formality of a traditional English wedding, so I planned for us to slip away quietly with our seven-year-old-son, Jason, and to tell our friends afterwards. Initially, I didn't want to tell Mandy about it either, but then I realised it would have been unfair to deny her the pleasure of choosing her dress and the ring.

"I did manage to keep a few secrets from her – like the blessing on the sixth hole of the hotel's golf course," laughs Gareth. "On the morning of the actual wedding, things got a bit hectic. But as soon as we met Pastor Davies, he just relaxed us all with his smile."

Gareth, 55, has had many varied acting roles. He recently completed a UK tour in *Outside Edge* with his best man Julian Holloway, son of the late Sir Stanley Holloway. Earlier this year, he toured in Alan Ayckbourn's *Time Of My Life*. He will also be remembered as Frederick in *Upstairs Downstairs* and has starred in countless other plays, films and pantomimes.

As they sipped cocktails and relaxed on a sun-drenched beach on Paradise Island, the happy newlyweds talked to **HELLO!**

Amanda, when did you find out about the wedding?

"Well, we had both been working very hard when Gareth announced he was taking us all to the Bahamas. Little did I know what he was planning. About two weeks beforehand, he decided it was best to tell me so I could prepare – and am I glad he did! There was so much to organise. Luckily I found my outfit and the ring in three days!"

How did you break the news to your parents and Jason?

Amanda: "We invited them for a drink that evening and broke the news, and they asked if they could come with us. But we didn't tell Jason until the day before the wedding. I explained that I'd be getting the same name as him and he said, 'Oh, that's nice – you're going to be called Jason!' Then he gave



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"I knew Amanda would not want the strict formality of a traditional English wedding, so I planned to slip away quietly with our son, Jason, and to tell her afterwards. Initially, I didn't tell Mandy about it either, but he realised it would have been a denial her the pleasure of choosing the dress and the ring.

"I did manage to keep a secret from her – like the blessing of the sixth hole of the hotel's golf course," laughs Gareth. "On the morning of the actual wedding, things got a bit chaotic. But as soon as we met Pastor Stanley, he just relaxed us all with his sense of humour."

Gareth, 55, has had many acting roles. He recently completed a UK tour in *Outside Edge* with his brother Julian Holloway, son of Stanley Holloway. Earlier this year, he toured in Alan Ayckbourn's *Life*. He will also be remembered for his role as Frederick in *Upstairs Downstairs*, which starred in countless other TV shows and pantomimes.

As they sipped cocktails on a sun-drenched beach on Paradise Island, the happy newlyweds said: **HELLO!**

Amanda, when did you find out about the wedding?

"Well, we had both been working hard when Gareth announced he was taking us all to the Bahamas. I knew what he was planning, but two weeks beforehand, he told me it was best to tell me so I could say 'yes' and am I glad he did! The wedding was so much to organise. Luckily, Gareth had the outfit and the ring in three weeks. **How did you break the news to your parents and Jason?**

Amanda: "We invited them to the wedding that evening and broke the news to them. They asked if they could come. But we didn't tell Jason until the day before the wedding. I explained to him I'd be getting the same name as he and he said, 'Oh, that's nice, I'm going to be called Jason!' Then Gareth gave me a big hug and I knew the news was official. He behaved like a proper groom."





A magical moment for Gareth and Amanda as they exchange vows (above). They travelled to the sixth hole of the hotel's golf course by buggy for the blessing (below), then were given a golf-club guard of honour (right)!



shaking the coffee beans!

just like a fairytale – so romantic. Gareth's best friend, Julian, flew in from New York to be best man. Pastor Davies performed a very simple ceremony."

So your holiday turned into your wedding and honeymoon!

A: "Yes, with an added bonus – we didn't have to travel after the wedding, as we were already in paradise!"

Gareth, how did you two first meet?

"I was living with a Rottweiler and a cat in Wimbledon. One evening I went to Stringfellows and was immediately attracted to Amanda and her gorgeous red hair. We danced and about a week later I took her out to dinner."

Was it love at first sight?

Gareth: "Was it love at first sight? We couldn't even see each other!"

You had been married previously?

G: "Yes, twice. I have three sons. My eldest, Gareth, is 28 and a concert pianist. Oliver-Leigh, by my second wife, Swedish model Annette Walter-Lax, is 16 and still at school in Sweden. And, of course, Amanda and I have little Jason who is seven."

What does Jason want to be when he's older?

G: "He keeps changing his mind, but right now it's Ace Ventura!"

When did you first realise you wanted to become an actor?

G: "I wanted to be one for as long as I can remember. I lived for the cinema, so acting has always been a passion. When I left school – I was born in Battersea – I joined the Merchant Navy for five years and saw much of the world. After living in New Zealand for a while, I returned to London and then went to drama school."

How did you land the part of Gambit in *The New Avengers*?

G: "One of the producers saw me in *Upstairs Downstairs* and asked me to audition."

So you went from downstairs to upstairs?

G: "Not quite upstairs – I just made it to the landing!"

What did you enjoy most about starring in *The New Avengers*?

G: "That I have stayed great mates with Patrick [MacNee] and Joanna [Lumley]. She is one of the most talented ladies about, and great fun. Patrick now lives in the States. I learned a great deal from them. It still gives me a kick to know that the series is screened around the world and has a cult following."

Did you enjoy doing the coffee ads?

G: "Yes, very much. They ran for ten years and even today people stop me in the street and ask if I'm still shaking the coffee beans!"

As well as acting, I gather you've gone into business. Can you tell us more?

G: "For a long time I've felt there must be a better way for actors to present themselves to producers and directors, so we have created ICU (I See You). The initials stand for Interactive Casting Universal Ltd. It's a new on-line casting system that allows actors to channel their past work directly into the offices of the decision makers. They can walk, talk, sing, whatever, via satellite directly on to computer screens around the world. If the casting director is looking for someone with green eyes who can ride a bike and juggle, he can find them on the screen. The possibilities are endless – stunt men, film locations, make-up artists..."

What will come next?

G: "I'm at a crossroads. I'm spending a lot of time getting ICU off the ground – but acting is in me and I will never refuse a good part, especially if it has humour. Who knows what's around the corner?"

How do you keep fit?

G: "I play a lot of golf – love the game – and Mandy is an excellent cook and seems to be feeding me all the healthy food she's into. But I still eat a lot of things I shouldn't."

So you're a contented man?

G: "Yes, I've had a very full life and have been very lucky. I have never made fortunes and don't suppose



Gareth, 55, and Amanda, 29, cut the cake at their champagne reception (above). With son Jason (below)

I will. I've known heights and depths. But since knowing Mandy I've probably been more content than I have ever been. Mandy is good for me. She never overreacts, but on the occasions when I have to be put in my place she does it well."

How do you put someone as strong as Gareth "in his place", Amanda?

A: "Gently!"

What are your interests?

A: "I'm a fitness freak, really. I like to work out at the

gym whenever I can, and Jason and the dogs and cats take a lot of looking after when I get home from work. I teach people to become driving instructors. It's hard work but I love it."

Do you think anything will change now you're married?

A: "No. It was lovely before."

G: "Now I guess I'll have to do the washing-up!" **H**

INTERVIEW & PHOTOS: TOM AND EVE DAVIES





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Gareth, 55, and Amanda, 29, cut the cake at their champagne reception (above). With son Jason (below)



PHOTOGRAPHED AT THE OCEAN CLUB ON PARADISE ISLAND, BAHAMAS, COURTESY OF THE BAHAMAS TOURIST BOARD, GUILDFORD