

SOUTHERN WITH A GAY TWIST

# FENUXE

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**DJ ESCAPE**  
THE MAN BEHIND THE BOOTH

**+ MICHAEL RUSSO  
SAVES THE DATE**

**PHYSICAL  
FITNESS**  
*by JR WEST*



# MICHAEL RUSSO: SAVES THE DATE

**M**ichael Russo is as adorable on the phone as he is on his new FYI Network show, *Mikie Saves the Date*. Founder of Michael Russo Events, Mikie knows how to keep busy. His event planning company provides full-services with branches located in California, Florida and even New York City. Mikie's keen eye and undeniable talent has scored him a star-studded list of celebrity clients, including Kevin Jonas, Joey Fatone, Kathy Griffin & even Shaq himself. The illustrious designer was also enlisted to share his formidable skills and help couples plan every detail for their own weddings on national TV. We caught up with Mikie to discuss his fast-paced life, his thoughts on his self-hosted show and the true love of his life.

**FENUXE:** How did your segment on *The View* go this morning?

**MIKIE:** It was great! It was really nice!

**FENUXE:** Oh, I bet! I love me some Rosie O'Donnell.

**MIKIE:** Oh yeah, well, she wasn't part of the segment, only because it's airing Friday, so her last day is Thursday.

**FENUXE:** That's right. She's leaving. I forgot

about that. Such a whirlwind. So tell me a little more about yourself.

**MIKIE:** I'm so happy! My background is obviously wedding planning and design, flowers and all of that. I've been doing it for about 15 years. It wasn't until I did Joey Fatone's wedding from *NSYNC*, that I was on the map in terms of celebrity weddings. That was 10 years ago. Then I planned Kevin Jonas' wedding, Sherri Shepard of *The View*, I've worked with Kathy Griffin, and Shaquille O'Neal, so my clientele has a very wide range and I don't only do weddings, you know. I do a lot of decorating for the holidays and other special events, so yeah, it's pretty fun.

**FENUXE:** Do you have a favorite celebrity client? Do you like to work with celebrities, or non-famous couples? Or are they kind of the same?

**MIKIE:** You know what? I know it sounds crazy and it sounds corny, but working with celebrities is just like working with everyday people. There really, there is no difference on my end of it. Obviously on their end, they're a celebrity, so they deal with it, but I honestly treat all of my clients the same. They all get the same amount of time and respect and energy and focus and creativity, so it's not like I focus solely on the celebrities. Everyone is the same, in my eyes.

**FENUXE:** Well that's nice to hear. I've spoken to people in the past and they usually prefer one or the other. Some can handle the spotlight or others can't. How did the idea for your show come about?

**MIKIE:** The production company, High Noon Productions reached out to me. They were working on this project and you know, I've turned down TV quite a bit, because it just didn't fit. Like, just didn't fit my brand and it just wasn't the right time for me, because like you saw, the show has heart to it. We're not just after drama then sensationalizing the drama and building the drama. It's kind of the opposite, you know, like I come in and I figure out what's going on and then I defuse the drama so everyone can have a beautiful day. Some couples are easier than others, but I do it with a smile and I do it with humor and I just make the clients and make their families see things in ways they typically wouldn't see them before.

**FENUXE:** Can you take me a little bit behind the production of this show? Does it take longer to say, film a show and plan this wedding as opposed to just a normal wedding you're doing?

**MIKIE:** Well, it's definitely a shorter amount of time, because we have to film a whole season in three to four months. In this case we did eight episodes, including



Michael Russo





my own wedding, the season finale. I marry my partner, well my now husband, Richie, of thirteen years. I planned seven weddings in three months, as well as my own, so it's a little stressful. So, we did all of the planning and all of the preparation in the first two months of the show and then the last month and a half is when the weddings actually occurred.

**FENUXE:** Can you tell me what that was like, planning your wedding while you're also working so much?

**MIKIE:** Oh my God, yeah. It was a little chaotic, I almost was treating it as like a business transaction and not planning my own wedding. Once I figured out that I was planning my wedding, I just literally had to stop and figure out what it was that I wanted and what Richie wanted as well. It was a little difficult because this is what I do for a living, so the wedding world was watching to see oh, what is Mikie going to do that he

hasn't done before? The pressure was on, for sure.

**FENUXE:** I can't even imagine. Did you have to share planning responsibility with your partner?

and then when it came time for me to do the stuff and pick the invitations and the fonts and the colors, he literally wanted to oversee every single aspect of the wedding—He turned into probably one of my toughest

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**MIKIE:** I'm not a foodie, I'm a very simple eater. So, I said let's make a deal, you can do everything that has to do with the menu and the cocktail hour, but everything on a visual standpoint is my deal. Because that's what I do. We agreed upon that. I let him to pick the menu

clients to date....it was so crazy. Well, you know, I've known Richie for 13 years, so I know what he wanted, but he questioned me every single step of the way, which was a little stressful. But ultimately, he was beyond thrilled with everything.

**FENUXE:** I'm looking forward to seeing that episode then!

**MIKIE:** Yeah, it's actually quite comical, that's for sure. It airs Sunday, March 8th.

**FENUXE:** I'll keep an eye out for it. I'm sure you know all the activities surrounding marriage equality lately. Have you filmed an episode about gay weddings? Or have you worked with gay clients before, other than just planning your own gay wedding?

**MIKIE:** Yeah, I've planned gay weddings in the past. It won't be featured on this season, fingers crossed obviously for a season two, but I think they wanted our wedding to be the first gay wedding. Ours is the first gay wedding that's being televised on a cable network for a series. Lance Bass obviously had his, but that was for a one time special where this is a full series.

FENUXE.COM : 21



series. They show Richie and I each week, planning like simple and some elements of the wedding in each episode and then obviously, ours is the grand finale.

**FENUXE:** That is really nice. Did it take you awhile to get used to cameras around all the time, especially in such a stressful period?

**MIKIE:** Not really, because I've done a lot of TV in the past. It wasn't new to me, but the first day of shooting, obviously you're just very aware of everything, of like how you're standing, and then by the second day, it's like you almost forget the cameras are even there. Truly, that's how I approached each situation, whether it's TV or not, I really focus on what my clients want and what they're expressing to me. I really just focused on them and not the cameras and we really captured some amazing moments with the show.

**FENUXE:** I'm really excited to see it! Besides this show and I know your wedding's already passed, which congratulations, and so it will air, do you have anything big planned for 2015, besides the show?

**MIKIE:** Yes, I'm obviously working on like weddings and stuff, but I can't talk about them yet.

**FENUXE:** I understand.

**MIKIE:** That's just the nature of my business. I have to keep all of my celebrity client stuff quiet. Yeah, just focusing on, you know, still creating beautiful and magical weddings for everyone, but I'm definitely really excited about doing more gay weddings because Alabama just recently passed an amazing bill. It's like, we're making such great headway and I'm just really excited to do more gay weddings.

**FENUXE:** I know, Alabama's my home state, so I'm just through the roof that it's actually getting there and happening. I thought we'd be the last state in the nation.

**MIKIE:** You know it's kind of sad that in 2015 that it's like still an issue, because I don't know, it's just mind blowing, to be honest.

**FENUXE:** It really is. I've been getting phone calls and stuff from friends back home and there's just constant back and forth bickering over whether this should be allowed or not and it's 2015, let's just get with it.

**MIKIE:** I know, it's like, it's crazy. It's absolutely crazy.

**FENUXE:** Is there anything else you'd like to specifically plug or maybe something for your local Atlanta fans that are just now tuning in to your show, or your work?

**MIKIE:** Honestly I think just the overall message of the show and, you've seen it, so you get what I'm about. I'm truly in it for my clients. I give them the wedding that they want, not the wedding that I think they should have. I think that's really my biggest message for everyone that hasn't seen the show, because there's a lot of shows out there that, they come in and they change everything about someone's wedding. That's completely the opposite

of what I do. I give them their dream wedding and stay true to who they are as a couple, because that's truly what makes the most memorable and personal and magical moments. When they focus on them vs trying to create an event that they think their friends and family would be impressed with.

**FENUXE:** All right, one last question, for a non-famous couple, what's the best way to try to get in contact with you, as far as wedding planning and things like that?

**MIKIE:** Oh so, my website is [mikierusso.com](http://mikierusso.com) and then same thing for my social media, like Instagram, Twitter, it's all [mikie@mikierusso](mailto:mikie@mikierusso).

**FENUXE:** I might just hit you up one day when I get ready to take that step.

**MIKIE:** I love it.

*Again, the season finale of Mikie Saves The Date featuring a star-studded guest-list including Sheri Shepard, Kevin Jonas and his groomsman Joey Fatone from N\*SYNC, will air Sunday, March 8th at 12pm EST on the FYI Network.*

