

The Spanish heart of Julio Iglesias

He's reportedly the best-selling Latino artist ever, and he plays in Dubai next week. *Rob Garratt* quizzes the 69-year-old about his family, women and son Enrique

Taking a call from Julio Iglesias is one of the more surreal experiences one can have. The 69-year-old Spanish singer's lothario reputation looms large, and we're not sure whether to expect the suave tones of a star or the eccentricity of a long-lost uncle. When the phone does ring, it's a surprise. Used to being left waiting by rock stars and rap divas on a regular basis, the 'unknown number' is nearly ten minutes early.

'Hello, its Julio,' booms a warm, flamboyant voice, sounding as though it's arriving direct from the past via some technological marvel. 'Tell me: How's the weather in Dubai?' he asks before we have a chance to put a question to him, launching a charm offensive that's equal parts distinguished after-dinner speaker and Mediterranean used car salesman. He's talking to us from the Caribbean, he tells us, where it's beautiful.

In fact, everything is beautiful in Julio's world right now: the place, the day, life itself. Next he's off to Russia, then Ukraine, Russia again, and then Armenia before touching down in Dubai. A gruelling schedule of international travel for a man preparing to celebrate his 70th birthday this year, we observe. 'My life has given me two wings, and I can fly,' he says, like a walking caricature. 'The people make me fly with love.'

Dubai is a subject about which Julio is passionate: he tells us he owns a house and has several friends in the emirate. 'I will be having fun in Dubai, going to beautiful places. It's a very exciting place and you're very lucky to be there.' In between his calendar of social engagements, Julio will be performing at Dubai World Trade Centre on Thursday March 21. He's touring his latest release, *Numero 1*, a collection of re-recordings of his best-known hits – work he says could have been done better the first time



round. 'I used to be a very bad singer,' he explains. 'I wanted to show my kids the standard could be better.'

Hold on. This guy has reportedly sold 300 million records. He's billed as the best-selling Spanish singer ever, and one of the top five acts in history. How did he manage this if he can't hold a tune?

'You don't need to be first in school to be the president of a country,' he reasons. He puts his success down to the great musicians he's had the

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chance to work with – names such as Frank Sinatra, Stevie Wonder and Sting. 'I had the opportunity to sing with the best singers in the world, so I learned to sing. Diana Ross, Dolly Parton, Willie Nelson, Sinatra – all these beautiful singers. I learn, I learn, I learn.'

Julio is renowned for romance. Born in Madrid 1943, he was a goalkeeper for Spanish football team Real Madrid Castilla before a car accident landed him in hospital, and a nurse gave him a guitar to keep him busy. After launching a singing career in the late '60s, he recorded songs in English, Portuguese, French, German, Filipino and Indonesian, although it's silky-smooth Spanish for which he's best known.

Yet his romantic crooner reputation feels rather antiquated in today's world, where it's far from fashionable for rugged men to serenade beautiful



maidens. 'To be a romantic singer isn't very difficult,' he argues, 'If someone calls me romantic, it means to love life. Being romantic means you can talk to girls everyday.'

Talking to girls is something Julio is said to be rather good at. He's renowned for his relations with women, which allegedly number into four figures, and apparently continued throughout his 20-year relationship with wife Miranda prior to their marriage in 2010. 'My family is really easy through the years. People appreciate life,' he says cryptically. 'There's something different between my family [life] and performing [life].'

Despite all the noticeable affection he holds for the five children he and Miranda share, Julio is seemingly not keen to talk about his famous son Enrique, one of three children he had from an earlier marriage. Before the interview we were briefed not to ask after the Latino heartthrob – or his celebrity wife Anna Kournikova –

but when the subject of Julio's magnificent genes come up, we can't help but ask if his genes are in some way responsible for Enrique's own vocal cords. Perhaps something was lost in translation. 'My father had incredible genes,' he answers. 'I'm very grateful to my father and my mother for my genes, they allowed me to be strong in life.'

And then after asking us what we 'really want to know' in a whirl of charm he's gone. It has been a bizarre encounter. Met with an onslaught of Mediterranean magnetism at every turn, it's hard to tell if this charisma is a protective layer, the result of more than four decades in the business, or if this surface is all there is to Julio: a charming, famous womaniser who claims to have a mediocre voice, but has sold a tonne of records anyway. *Julio Iglesias plays Dubai World Trade Centre on Thursday March 21 at 8pm; tickets Dhs320-1,300.*

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