

# LIFE Music, April 2018: The Philadelphia story of Hall and Oates, a wrong-turn tale

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By Peter Jones

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When my son and I took a wrong turn, via train, into North Philadelphia last summer, we had no idea that the culture shock of a sketchy neighborhood had anything to do with the Philly sound.

“I used to go to Temple University and that’s where I got off. It’s a different world up there, man,” said musician Daryl Hall, who grew up in the metro’s Pottstown borough.

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## Hall & Oates

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**One on one: Daryl Hall and John Oates front the band that bears their names May 10 at the Pepsi Center. Courtesy photo via Wolfson Entertainment, by Stuart Berg.**

It is hard to tell whether it was two white tourists, aimlessly on their way to the Old City, who made the station staff less friendly, but there was certainly no brotherly love.

What was strange was our trip back that night to our bed and breakfast, a Victorian house in Germantown—this time on the bus. As we got closer, we could not help but notice the neighborhoods were not getting particularly nicer.

Were we on the right route? Had we found the correct stop?

We walked, apprehensively, wherever GPS led us.

Then, as if we had crossed an invisible line without transition, we were suddenly in the much plusher and historic Germantown, the site of a Revolutionary War battle and the birthplace of the anti-slavery movement.

“That’s part of the vitality of Philadelphia,” Hall explained. “That is why it is truly an integrated city because you’re in it, man. It doesn’t matter what kind of person you are. Everybody’s thrown together in the same ultimate Philadelphia experience. It shows in the Philadelphia music. It shows in my music. There’s no separation of the people.”

Since the mid-'70s, Philly’s Hall and his longtime partner John Oates, now both 68, have exemplified “blue-eyed soul,” while simultaneously proving the silliness of the term, at least in a city where two lily-white kids from the suburbs could get as soulful as the best of them.

“It’s what I grew up with. I mean, I am a soul singer,” Hall said. “Soul is an emotion without intellect involved, straight from the heart and the soul, right out of the mouth and into the world.”

Hall and Oates will bring it to Denver’s Pepsi Center, Thursday, May 10, in a double bill with Train.

It sounds apocryphal, but is true that Hall [born Daryl Hohl] and Oates met in that thrown-together Philly culture, quite literally, in 1967, when the future partners happened to escape into the same freight elevator during a gang fight at the Adelphi Ballroom.

“Some things haven’t changed much,” Hall said.

The two would perform together in different bands before settling in as a twosome, though as Hall stresses, the so-named Daryl Hall and John Oates were never a duo in the traditional sense.

“We could have called ourselves the Muttonheads,” said Hall, a keyboardist who handles most lead vocals. “We’re two songwriters who have two very distinct agendas and we share the stage. We’re a band. It isn’t two guys up there.”

Under the tutelage of disparate producers Arif Mardin and Todd Rundgren, the partners would eventually perfect their mix of Philly soul, pop and rock in a way that melded well with the era’s singer-songwriter movement.

After a rocky start commercially, Hall and Oates scored their first major success in 1976 with “Sara Smile” and its follow-up “She’s Gone,” belatedly pulled as a single from the otherwise ignored Abandoned Luncheonette album issued three years earlier. 1977’s “Rich Girl” was their first No. 1 hit.

After a brief lull, the act saw its most popular acclaim in the ‘80s with a largely new audience and a flashier style. But while hook-laden hits—and MTV videos—like “Kiss on My List,” “Maneater” and “Private Eyes” were popular on the post-new wave dancefloor, many existing Hall and Oates fans took a break, patiently waiting for the ‘80s to get over with.

Hall stands by the period, though he thinks his singing went awry for a while.

“I got into this phrasing thing and I don’t know what it was,” he said. “I can’t remember what was in my head. It was very staccato. I don’t sing those songs the same way anymore. I’m more fluid—if you want to say it—more like the ‘70s.”

Hall and Oates—inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2014—are the rare “duo” to last so long for a number of reasons.

“We respect each other and we give each other a great amount of space,” Hall said. “We have worked out our own little personal hierarchy, who does what, and it just works. There’s no conflict because we’ve known each other since we were kids.”

For more information, visit [livenation.com](http://livenation.com) or [hallandoates.com](http://hallandoates.com). Contact Peter Jones at [pjoneslifemusic@aol.com](mailto:pjoneslifemusic@aol.com).

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