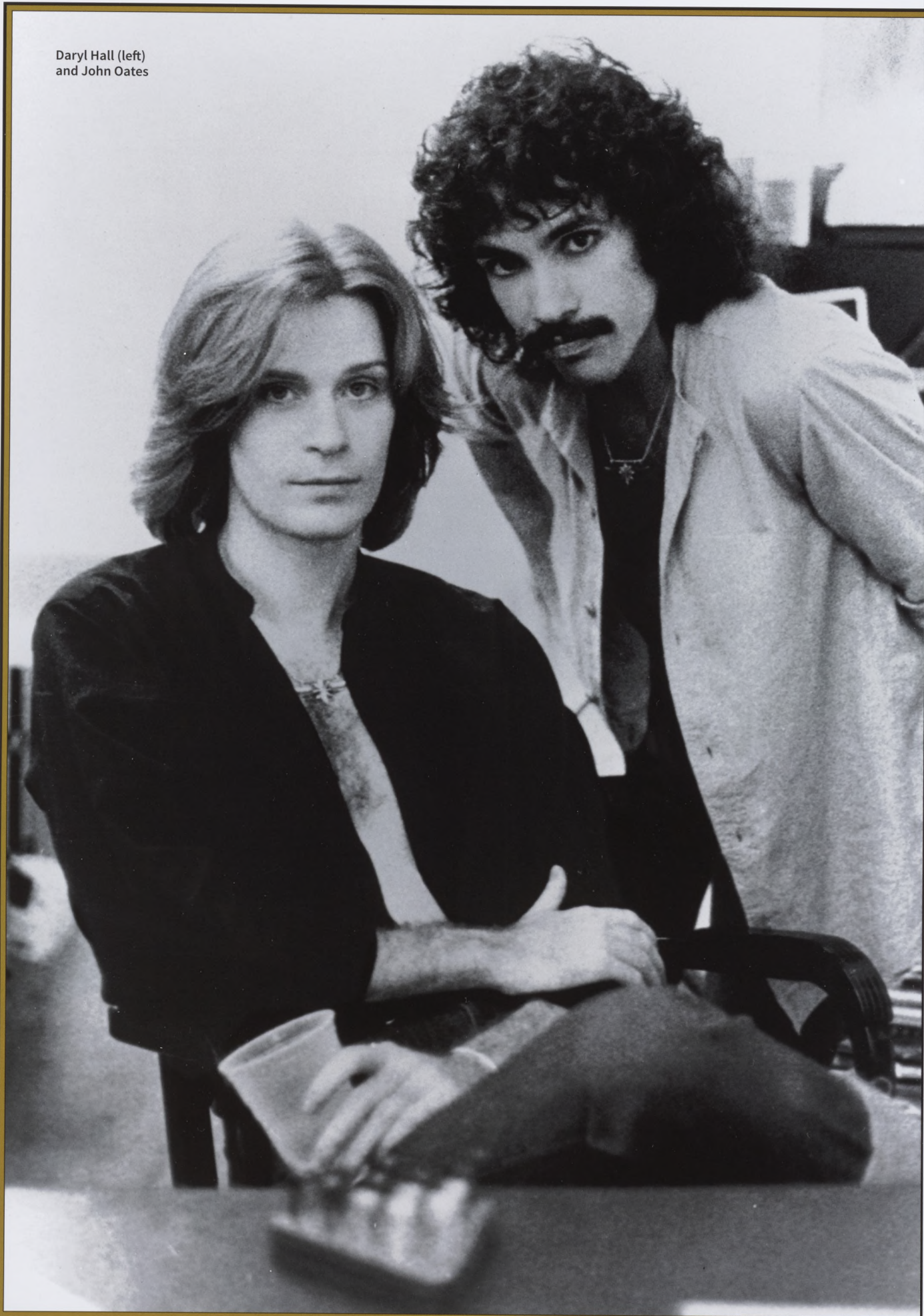


Daryl Hall (left)  
and John Oates

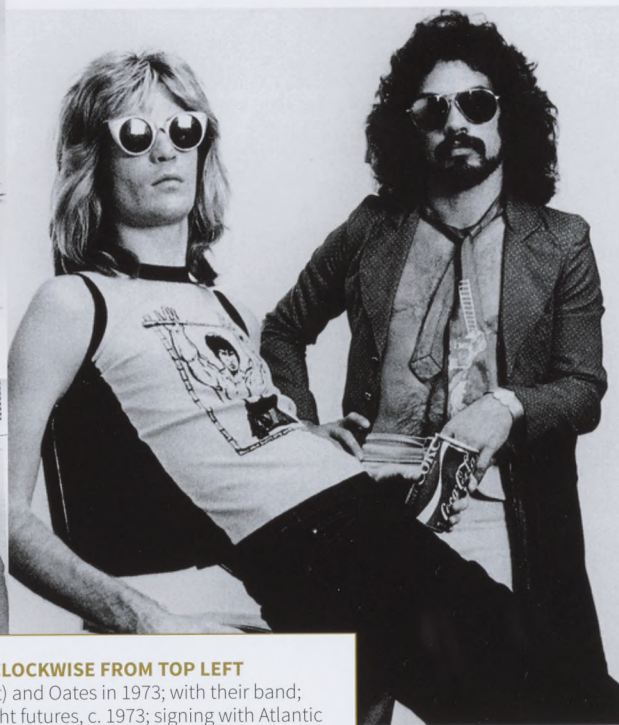


# Daryl Hall and John Oates

BY PARKE PUTERBAUGH

The Philadelphia duo's plethora of soulful hits spans four decades.

BACK IN 1984, THE RIAA DECLARED THAT DARYL HALL and John Oates were the most successful duo in rock history. Statistically, they had surpassed such dynamic duos as the Everly Brothers and the Righteous Brothers. They've held onto this title over the ensuing thirty years. But that is just one element in a much deeper, richer tale of triumphs (and occasional travails) for this pair from Philadelphia. For starters, they rank among the most long-lived acts of the rock era. Their friendship dates back to 1967, and initial stabs at collaboration began shortly thereafter, although their first album wouldn't appear until 1972. Their recording career encompasses eighteen studio albums, plus concert sets, compilations, and solo work. Throughout the decades, their most notable musical achievement – one that is as momentous as it is underappreciated – has been a consistent ability to find the sweet spot between rock, soul, and pop. ✨ Their success has largely been driven by their voices. Hall's supple, rangy tenor is among the most soulful sounds in the pop pantheon. Oates' duskier lower register offers its own complementary delights. When they harmonize, out come angelic echoes of doo-wop, Philly soul, and Motown – three defining influences on the duo from early boyhood to the present day. During the course of a lengthy, episodic career, they have kept faith with the music that initially turned them on, while also bringing their own creativity and drive to the mix. The result is a hit-filled, yet enticingly eclectic, experimental life in music. ✨ Make no mistake: Daryl Hall and John Oates recorded and reaped bushels of hit singles: twenty-nine



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT**

Hall (left) and Oates in 1973; with their band, facing bright futures, c. 1973; signing with Atlantic Records in 1972, with Ahmet Ertegun (second from right) and manager Tommy Mottola (far right).

Top Forty hits from 1976 to 1990. Most made the Top Ten, and a half-dozen reached Number One. If you were there, you'll recall that Hall and Oates were virtually always within earshot on the radio (AM or FM), jukebox, or dance floor. Even though those years are behind them, their songs continue to linger in whatever region of the brain processes and stores musical hooks. Their most indelible ear-wigs include the ethereal chorus of "I Can't Go for That (No Can Do)"; the percolating beat and chiming harmonies of "Kiss on My List"; the weightless rhythmic flow and play of voices in "Maneater"; and the plangent, soul-searing refrain of "She's Gone."

The last of these is one of the ultimate breakup songs of all time. It encapsulates the duo's musical strengths, from its compelling delivery to its crescendoing arrangement. "We were both going through similar situations with women," noted Hall. "We pooled our experiences and made [them.] into one." Added Oates, "We literally wrote the song in the space of time it took to get from the beginning to the end." In its vocal exchanges, you can hear the pair's intuitive chemistry, and obvious echoes of their mu-

sical upbringing in Philadelphia.

No doubt some Hall and Oates tune is specially hardwired into your own neural circuitry. A personal favorite is "Do What You Want, Be What You Are." Although it barely cracked the Top Forty in 1976, the song captures Hall's most impassioned lead vocal, bolstered by formidable harmonies. Listen to Hall's compelling melisma as he stretches the word *are* into a rainbow of syllables. Lyrically, it's a straightforward statement of self-reliance on how to approach music and life. It's no surprise the duo selected the song's title as the name of their career-spanning 2009 box set. In a way, those words say it all.

Like the title of their third album, Hall and Oates were "war babies." Hall was born Daryl Hohl in Cedarville, Pennsylvania, in 1946, while Oates, born in New York City in 1948, arrived in the Philly suburbs as a kid. Both gravitated to music early in their lives. By their high school years, each was fronting a band: Hall was in the Temptones, and Oates was in the Masters. These were vocal-oriented soul/R&B groups, taking their musical cues from a hometown scene in which the Temptations were, according to

the duo, "our Beatles." Hall, in fact, befriended the Temptations, ingratiating himself to the point where he became an eager pupil and gofer whenever the Motown superstars played Philly's legendary Uptown Theater. He also gravitated to the scene that was then coalescing around Kenny Gamble, Leon Huff, and Thom Bell, and which would achieve fruition as that distinctive subgenre known as Philadelphia soul. The schoolmates and contemporaries of Hall and Oates included future members of the Delfonics, the Intruders, the Trammps, and the Stylistics. One night in 1967, the Temptones and the Masters were on a bill headlined by the Five Stairsteps at Philadelphia's Adelphi Ballroom. Gunfire broke out, and, while fleeing the melee that ensued, Hall and Oates made each other's acquaintance. Hall subsequently impressed Oates by introducing him to members of the Temptations at an Uptown Theater show. Both would operate in and around the nascent Philly soul scene during the mid-to-late sixties, all the while nurturing their friendship and collaborating casually.

"We gravitated toward each other," Oates told writer Gillian Gaar in 2005. "We had a lot of similarities in the kind of music we liked. We had a lot of similarities in our talent. And we were both wanting to go somewhere."

In addition to that foundation of influences – doo-wop, Motown, Curtis Mayfield, and homegrown Philly soul – the duo drew from other musical forms as they forged their own direction. Oates had one foot in the folk and bluegrass scene, while Hall studied classical forms as a music student at Temple University. They found common ground in the burgeoning singer/songwriter scene of the early seventies. Initially calling themselves Whole Oats, a play on their surnames, they were signed to Atlantic Records after a November 1971 audition before producer Arif Mardin and others at the label. Their first batch of albums, commencing with *Whole Oats* in 1972, reflected a mercurial musical temperament, variously incorporating elements of acoustic music, progressive rock, forward-thinking pop soul, and even knowing glances at glam, punk, and disco. Being both eclectic and colorblind, they sometimes bristled when the term "blue-eyed soul" was applied to their music. "The essence of soul transcends blackness or whiteness," Hall noted in a 1977 *Rolling Stone* interview.

**F**ROM THE BEGINNING, HALL WAS PRINCIPALLY a keyboardist and Oates a guitarist, though each is a multi-instrumentalist. As songwriters, they have worked alone, with each other, and with outside collaborators. Hall assumes the majority of lead vocals, although Oates has claimed his share; both provide everpresent harmonies and background parts. Something about the two of them together yields a logic-defying magic, though it's not easy to pinpoint just why their chemistry works so well. "It's the sound that we create, however we create it, through singing, through playing," Hall vouched to *Goldmine* interviewer Ken Sharp in 1998.

Daryl Hall and John Oates' seventies output yielded some sizable hits as well as some inexplicable misses. Everything changed with the recording of their ninth studio album, *Voices*. Released in 1980, it was notable for being their first self-production. That's not to diminish the work of their prior producers, by any means. Atlantic's great Arif Mardin set them on their path and clarified their strengths with his work on their much-admired second album, 1973's *Abandoned Luncheonette*. Todd Rundgren supervised 1974's *War Babies*, which exhibited a fearless artistry they'd draw

## SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY



**ABANDONED LUNCHEONETTE**  
Atlantic 1973



**DARYL HALL AND JOHN OATES**  
RCA 1975



**BIGGER THAN BOTH OF US**  
RCA 1976



**VOICES**  
RCA 1980



**PRIVATE EYES**  
RCA 1981



**H2O**  
RCA 1982

### BELOW

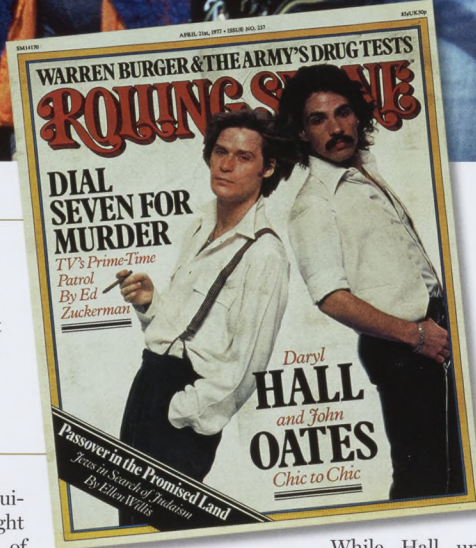
Lean on me: Live in 1977.





**ABOVE, FROM LEFT**

The duo with Cyndi Lauper and Billy Joel at a benefit concert for New York City's Police Athletic League, at Radio City Music Hall, New York, 1988; live at the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival, 2013.



from throughout their career. Guitarist/producer Chris Bond brought Hall and Oates their first taste of pop-charting stardom with "Sara Smile" (Number Seven) and "Rich Girl" (Number One), along with the popular albums – *Daryl Hall and John Oates* (1975) and *Bigger Than Both of Us* (1976) – they came from. Early in his career, David Foster oversaw two of Hall and Oates' most adventurous recordings: 1978's *Along the Red Ledge* (a hard-core fan's favorite) and 1979's urban-minded *X-Static* (whose edgy dance-rock symbiosis was ahead of its time).

By the time they convened to make *Voices*, the hits had slowed to a relative trickle. Hall and Oates had nothing to lose by doing it their way, and felt ready and capable of assuming the creative reins. The duo returned their focus to the sound of singing. They acknowledged as much by writing "Diddy Doo Wop (I Hear the Voices)," an affectionate nod to their roots, and by reprising "You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin,'" originally a vocal tour de force for the Righteous Brothers. *Voices* yielded three self-penned hits on the pop charts: "Kiss on My List" (Number One), "You Make My Dreams" (Number Five), and "How Does It Feel to Be Back" (Number Thirty). Their version of "Lovin' Feelin'" made it to Number Twelve.

"It was the easiest record, the most positive record we ever made," Hall told biographer Nick Tosches in 1984. He further hailed it as "the beginning of the real Hall and Oates. Everything before this was just practice. This was where we figured out how to put rock and soul together."

While Hall underestimated the hybrid vigor of the duo's previous work, his point was well taken. The pivotal success of *Voices* returned them to the top. Only this time, they'd stay there, experiencing a half-decade of what can only be called sustained pop chart domination.

Building on *Voices'* groundwork, Hall and Oates' career shifted into overdrive. Subsequent recordings evinced a stylistic savvy that was well-synchronized to the zestful, rhythmic blueprint of the new-wave-slanted eighties. Ironically, in both sound and spirit, this Brave New World of danceable eighties pop really wasn't so far removed from the Motown and Philly soul milieu on which they'd cut their teeth. Still, there were obvious differences between the sixties (in which R&B acts played for smartly dressed dancing teens) and the eighties. Tapping into the huge demographic opened up by MTV, Hall and Oates maneuvered adroitly in the video realm. Technology brought synthesizers and contemporary production approaches to their recordings. Hall and Oates were also now playing arenas and stadiums around the world.

The numbers tell the story. From 1980 to 1985, they enjoyed a steady run of seventeen Top Forty



hits, five of which topped the charts. Four consecutive albums, from *Voices* through 1984's *Big Bam Boom*, would be certified platinum or multiplatinum. During this period, the Hall and Oates band – consisting of guitarist G.E. Smith, bassist T-Bone Wolk, saxophonist Charlie DeChant, and drummer Mickey Curry – gelled into a definitively tight live unit. Wolk served as the glue that held it all together, and he continued to work with Hall and Oates until his untimely death from a heart attack in 2010.

In 1985, Hall and Oates' fame and popularity peaked. Several events stamped a glittering exclamation point on a remarkable run. In January, Hall and Oates won as "Favorite Band" at the American Music Awards for the third consecutive year. Also in January, they participated in the recording of "We Are the World," the star-studded charity single credited to USA for Africa. They were asked to perform at the May 1985 reopening of Harlem's legendary Apollo Theatre. The duo opted to make the evening even more special by recruiting their friends and former Temptations David Ruffin and Eddie Kendrick to join them onstage. The Temps medley they performed became a Top Twenty single. Hall subsequently described that night as the "most defining moment in my musical career." On July 13, they appeared on the televised Live Aid concert, viewed worldwide by a billion people, and also backed Mick Jagger.

---

---

**"We gravitated toward each other. . . . And we were both wanting to go somewhere."**

---

---

After all that, Hall and Oates took a well-earned hiatus. Reemerging in 1988, they finished the decade with two albums, *ooh yeah!* (1988) and *Change of Season* (1990). The former included "Everything Your Heart Desires," a Number Three pop hit, and their last to make the Top Ten. Thereafter, the pace slowed considerably, though the albums that periodically surfaced – notably, *Marigold Sky* (1997) and *Do It for Love* (2003) – never failed to rekindle the old magic.

Meanwhile, both men focused on family life and individual projects. In 2007, Hall launched the popular monthly Web show, *Live From Daryl's House*, which finds him sitting in with a variety of guests ranging from classic rockers to indie acts. Oates has blossomed into a prolific solo artist, often harking back to his roots in folk and blues. The two still tour and record together, as there's an undiminished demand for their songs and those voices. Break up? No can do.

One final point. The proper name of the act is Daryl Hall and John Oates. You'd actually be more correct inserting a slash in place of the "and," or omitting the punctuation entirely, like this: Daryl Hall John Oates. Check out their records; you won't find "Hall & Oates" listed as such. The moniker may be a convenient shorthand and popular perception, but is technically incorrect. The way they prefer to present their names stresses the unique nature of their partnership: two individuals. Daryl Hall. John Oates. In business for going on fifty years. 🐦