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- ↗ Courtney Love accused of probation violation
- ↗ Disturbed tapped to head up Jagermeister Music Tour
- ↗ CBGB wins one court battle, faces more hurdles
- ↗ Album Review: Black Mountain, "Black Mountain" (Jagjaguwar)
- ↗ Fourth L.A. show added to Neil Diamond's itinerary
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- ↗ Billy Idol makes the road his 'Playground'

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- ↗ The Killers
- ↗ Engelbert Humperdinck
- ↗ Kelly Clarkson
- ↗ Doobie Brothers
- ↗ Gaither Homecoming Celebration
- ↗ Bill Gaither and Friends
- ↗ System of a Down
- ↗ Donna Summer
- ↗ Lucinda Williams

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INTERVIEWS

liveDaily Interview: John Oates of Hall and Oates



December 21, 2004 01:18 PM
by [Christina Fuoco](#)
liveDaily Contributor

For Daryl Hall and John Oates, the best plan is to have no plan. The Philadelphia-bred duo--which has a history of hits like "Maneater," "Private Eyes" and "Rich Girl"--does not stick to a specific songwriting process. Instead, they keep it open-ended.

"The best way to describe it is that it has no rules," Oates said. "We collaborate together. We work with other people. We work by ourselves."

The no-rules theory applied on their latest album, "Our Kind of Soul," which was released on Hall & Oates ([music](#))' own label, U-Watch/DKE records, and features covers of 14 soul classics and three originals.

"Daryl wrote 'Soul Violins' by himself. 'Let Love Take Control' was written with Billy Mann, a guy from Philadelphia who is an old friend and an old collaborator; we've always had good success writing with him.

"Sometimes, it's just great to bring new people into the mix," Oates said. "They bring a new attitude, a new approach and a new point of view to the music. It keeps it fresh."

Oates talked with liveDaily about choosing songs for "Our Kind of Soul," keeping his career "fresh" and his duo's success.

liveDaily: There's such a vast collection of great soul songs--how did you choose the songs for the new album?

John Oates: With a million songs to choose from, it was not easy. But then again, once we realized the idea we were trying to do, it was a lot easier. All the songs have a connection to us in one way or another. Every song on the album, except for one, is contemporary with our career. Unlike a lot of records where artists do retrospective or roots albums--they usually do albums of their childhood or songs that maybe influenced them or artists that were important to them growing up--this album wasn't really that sort of thing. [This] was an album that was really contemporary with our career. In fact, some of the songs we were competing with on the charts at the same time. What we wanted to do is kind of redefine the music of Hall & Oates through the contemporary songs of the time. Also, we wanted to pick songs of a timeless quality, songs that would sound good today regardless when they were written. The idea was to take these great songs, take them out of their production style and their dated recording style, and show them for the songs that they are--as if you had just played them on an acoustic guitar. It's all about timeless songwriting, really.

How long did it take you to complete the project?

We started in the spring and it was pretty much done in a couple months.

Throughout your career, you have managed to maintain your fan base despite the ups and downs of the music business. How do you think you have accomplished that?

Brains. [laughs] I'm joking. You have to think about it; you have to be very sensitive to what's going on. Swimming upstream in the music business is a hard thing to do. It's really frustrating, and it does not lead to success. You have to know when to strike and when to retreat. I think we've been pretty good at that over the years. There's been periods of times when the world of music and the world in general was not into the kind of stuff we were doing. Take the early '90s, for instance, when grunge ruled the airwaves. To me, that was kind of like anti-music. It wasn't our period of time. It wasn't the period of time for songwriters and things like that. We kind of disappeared there. We were still around; we were still doing our thing on a very low-key basis. But we did a lot of solo work and a lot of other stuff.

But, all of a sudden, it seemed like there was a time when people wanted to hear the songs again--especially about two or three years ago, at the end of the boy-band era. I think people were just starving for good material because they just weren't getting it on the radio. We had such a tremendous success with our "Do It for Love" album (in 2003). I think we realized this is a good time now because people really do want to hear some realistic songs, something that has some substance to it. We geared it up a notch because of that. All through all that, regardless of what was going on, we had a great fan base that was loyal to us. We would just go out and play to the fans. If we didn't play to anyone else, it was still OK.

What do you think it is about your music that is appealing to fans?

The thing is, we've changed our style but we've never changed the actual roots of what we've done. If you look over the years, the styles have changed--the clothes, the hair, the production, the approach to the songs. The icing to the cake has changed flavors. But if you really look at the cake itself, it's really the same. All our songs have always had the same chord changes, the same approach, the same juxtaposition of harmonies to melody, [and] rhythmically we've approached it the same way. They're really not that different.

Whenever we do unplugged sets, we take songs that people would never expect--"Maneater," "Out of Touch," songs that really reek of the '80s and all that '80s production sound--and we'll play them on acoustic guitars. They sound great. To me, that's always the acid test of a song. That just shows us that the songs that we've written can stand the test of time and they can just be played.

Many of your songs have been covered or sampled. What do you think about other people's take on your music?

"I Can't Go for That" is one of the most sampled songs from our catalogue, maybe ever for all we know. It's been sampled on so many songs. I can name five or six versions of it. Just last year Simply Red did a song called "Sunshine," which was basically "I Can't Go for That." The entire song. It wasn't a sample, it was the actual track. He just wrote a different verse over it. Puff Daddy sampled it, De La Soul sampled it. I like it [when our music is sampled]. I like when people have a different take on what you do. That's quite a compliment.

What do you have planned for 2005?

We're going to promote "Our Kind of Soul." We will do that after the first of the year. We're going to Japan in March. We're already figuring out what we're going to do next summer; who we're going to tour with.

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