

# Derek Hough returns to SLC to dance up a TV special — and his wife is back onstage with him

Hayley Erbert Hough, who had emergency brain surgery in December, is back in action.

By SCOTT D. PIERCE  
The Salt Lake Tribune

Utah native Derek Hough is bringing his "Symphony of Dance" tour to Salt Lake City for the second time, and the big news is what won't be different.

The performance — set for Wednesday at 7 p.m. at the Eccles Theater, 131 S. Main, Salt Lake City — is the same show that last played to a sold-out Eccles Theater last October. And, to the surprise of many, Hough will once again be joined on stage by his wife, Hayley Erbert Hough, just five months after she underwent emergency brain surgery.

"It's been amazing, man," Hough said in a phone interview with The Salt Lake Tribune. "She's doing fantastic. It's incredible to see her progress."

During a stop in Washington, D.C., on Dec. 6, the 29-year-old Erbert Hough became disoriented and was taken to a hospital. She was quickly taken into surgery, and a piece of her skull was removed so doctors could repair an intracranial hematoma — blood vessels that had burst inside her brain. She later needed follow-up surgery to repair her skull.

"It was unfathomable," Hough said. "It just didn't feel real. But it's the new reality. We're just focusing on what's good. That's it."

And the news about Erbert Hough has been surprisingly good. In April, doctors cleared her to return to performing. She'll be dancing when the tour returns to the Eccles on Wednesday. "We couldn't be more thrilled with the way her recovery has gone," Hough said. "We're very blessed."

It's not standard procedure for any sort of tour to return to a venue it's already played. But Hough has reasons for the return — and it's not just that this is his hometown, and the place where his father and many family members live. It's also "the culture of dance" in Utah. "It's a really great place to showcase this show," he said.

His tour had to reboot dates because shows were canceled when his wife was hospitalized, "and I just said, 'Hey, I'd love to go back to Salt Lake.' And so we're going back with the same show and we're very excited about it."

There will be something decidedly different than when the tour played the Eccles last October. This new date will be filmed for an upcoming TV special "so the audience is not just going to watch, they're going to be a part of the show." (When and where that special will air has not been announced.)

"I was like, 'This is a theater to do it.' It's so beautiful. The audiences are amazing. It's my hometown. It's a great, great place. So we're



Hayley Erbert Hough and Derek Hough at a recent Hulu on Disney+ event.

very excited about it."

He said performing in Utah is special to him.

"Whenever I go there, it's a reminder to me of where I came from, when I first went to dance." He remembers himself as "this kid from South Jordan, Utah," who went to dance class in Orem "and then I moved to England at 12 years old and trained and competed all around the world and won competitions. And then doing West End" shows in London. And Utah "definitely" remains "a place that makes me reflect a lot about my journey."

Dance was not his dream, at least not to begin with. Like a lot of kids, he harbored notions of becoming a pro athlete or a rock star. "And it's kind of funny, because I feel like I'm fulfilling both of those childhood dreams with dance," Hough said. "I'm able to play music and sing on stage and rock out with the audience. But I'm also able to be a professional athlete, which is a dancer."

## Salt Lake City and Idaho Falls?

Hough has set aside tickets for family members for his Salt Lake City performance — and

he set aside even more for a May 14 performance in Idaho Falls because, he said, "pretty much all of my family on my mom's side lives there." They told him there was a new arena in town and urged him to schedule a show there. (That would be the Mountain America Center, which is home to the Spud Kings, a minor league hockey team.)

Hough called up his bookers and told them he wanted to schedule a show in Idaho Falls. Their response: "Oh, we've never really done that before." But they scheduled it, and the show is close to a sell-out.

Which, apparently, came as a surprise to bookers who had never heard of Idaho Falls. They know about it now, Hough said with a laugh. "They're, like, 'Wow, this is a great market!'"

## Just keep dancing

Hough is sort of a latter-day Fred Astaire — a dancer who became a star. Astaire kept dancing into his 70s, so how long does 38-year-old Hough think he can keep it going?

"There's no end in sight," said Hough, who feels "so fortunate" to live in a time when so

much "health information is out there to create longevity. And I know for me, I've certainly added years to my career just based off of my habits I've created the past couple of years."

That regimen includes "diet, body work, hyperbaric chambers, ice baths, IV treatments, supplements — all of these different things to really change my bio age," he said. "I'm 38 now, but my bio age is 30... And you can actually bring that down. Without getting too much into the science and all these different things, that's the goal — to almost reverse your bio age and keep the longevity going."

"Who knows? I'll do it as long as they'll have me."

## Still 'Dancing with the Stars'

Hough remains as enthusiastic about his judging gig on "Dancing With the Stars" as he is about dancing himself.

"It's a show I love so much," he said. "There's a reason why it's been around for so long. It always feels new and refreshed each season. And it's a pleasure to be a part of it."

He's glad that the "experience" of moving "DWTS" from ABC to streaming only on Disney+ resulted in the show airing on both platforms. "We're very, very happy to be back on ABC and Disney+ networks," he said.

And, as far as he's concerned, Alfonso Ribeiro and Hough's sister, Julianne, are doing a "phenomenal job" as the show's hosts. "I think last year, we still felt very much like, 'OK, we're back to, like, the heart and feeling of what 'Dancing with the Stars' has always been.'"

And he's having "so much fun" on the show. "It's such a blast. Being a part of it for 17 seasons as a pro, I understand how challenging it is. How difficult it is. But how rewarding and fulfilling it is. It's wonderful to see these new dancers and new pros on the show and just, like, the excitement and the energy and just, like, the bright-eyedness of it."

Although he's been struck by the fact that their show has been on the air since 2005, and that some of the new dancers were just children when he joined the show.

Hough's first appearance was in 2007, when he was just 21. He was guest instructor for Julianne and Olympic speed skating gold medalist Apolo Anton Oros, the eventual winners of Season 4. Derek Hough became one of the main dancers in Season 5, and went on to win the minor ball trophy. "I've learned more than any other professional dancer, and twice as many anyone else."

Still, it's a bit startling when he realizes that some of the new dancers "were, like, 5 years old" when he joined the series. They grew up watching the show, and now they're a part of it. It's pretty incredible," Hough said.

"And it cracks me up every time somebody says, 'I used to watch you when I was a kid.' I'm, like, 'How old are you?'" he said, laughing.

was three.

Braufman said that when he was working on that album, he was 23, and the music got by on "youthful exuberance." At the time, he said, he was living in a building at 501 Canal Street — in the neighborhood now known as Tribeca.

"It was early enough that I wouldn't even call [it] that yet. There was just nothing there. It was wonderful before it got all gentrified," he said. "We had a storefront in the first floor where we used to have concerts on the weekends and then go down there, practice, 24/7, and that's where we recorded the album."

In 2016, Ayers said he got to see his uncle perform with one of his original collaborators on that album, the pianist Cooper-Moore. They were performing at a music school in East Harlem.

"It was the first time I'd seen the two of [them] play together, probably since I was five years old," Ayers said. "When I just posted a couple clips on Facebook, just for fun, a couple of people that I knew posted comments like, 'Whoa, Cooper-Moore' and I didn't realize Alan Braufman was your uncle."

Ayers said the original album was like a private press record, something that "only a handful of people know about." He began looking around and found a YouTube rip-off of the album with 10,000 plays. The audio database Discogs had a copy of it for sale for \$100.

"I had no idea that this has become this sort of like legendary, sought-after record," Ayers said.

Since he worked at a record company, Ayers thought it would be a good idea to reissue the album and give listeners a better version. The re-release received widespread acclaim — such as Rolling Stone's David Fricke naming it one of the best "under-the-radar reissues" of that year.

The resurgence of interest also inspired Braufman to record a new album, "The Fire Still Burns," in 2020, which featured a reunion with Cooper-Moore. More rare versions followed. Pitchfork's Marc Masters called the tracks on it "a sturdy suite that nods vigorously toward jazz history while sounding as fresh and immediate as a concert happening right in front of you."

With "Infinite Love Infinite Tears," from the album because it's a very mature album, which a lot of jazz is not," he said. "I'm proud of all the writing on the album."

## Braufman

★ Contributed by DP

Braufman said the album process officially started in May 2023, but he had been thinking about it long before that. The group, a combo that included Patricia Braufman on vibraphone, Ben Filiano on bass, James Brandon Lewis on tenor sax, Chad Taylor on drums and Michael Wimberly on percussion) didn't get together to record until November, and during that time, Braufman said he thought about it for a while and wrote some new stuff.

"To me, it feels fresh and alive, and that's what I was going for," he said.

Early reviews have been positive. DownBeat magazine's Veronique Demers wrote that the album "highlights [Braufman's] commanding attention once again through slick improvisation and harmonically pleasing phrases."

And a review in the British music magazine Mojo said that "with subtle nods to John Coltrane and Don Cherry, Braufman's spiraling, uplifting compositions occupy an evolving space where jazz's past and future collide."

## Rediscovery and new inspirations

Braufman was born in Brooklyn in 1951, and attended the Berklee College of Music in Boston. There he met musicians he would perform with in New York in the 1970s, forming what was called the "free jazz community" there. Over his career, he's recorded with such artists as saxophonist Richard Landry, bassist Cecil McBee, avant-garde composer Philip Glass and the post-punk band The Psychedelic Furs.

He moved to Utah in the 1990s, after meeting his wife, Shannon, here. The couple lived in New York for a while, then decided to move back to Salt Lake City.

Braufman has a close relationship with his nephew, Nabil Ayers, who works in the music industry; he held a prominent job for several years with the British music label 4AD. The two men share a bond of family ties and music.

Braufman got Ayers a drum set when he was 2½ years old and they played duets together, with Braufman on saxophone. There's even a cassette tape, with a "Sesame Street" theme, of the two of them playing together from 1975, when Ayers was three.

"He taught me, 'Well, this is a piano,' Ayers said. "He would teach students all day sometimes in New York when I was a kid, and I would sit there and listen to six lessons in a

row, so it was just always around. And then when I was older, Alan would take me to concerts, and buy me records." (Today, Ayers has a sprawling record collection in his office.)

Ayers also exposed his uncle to a lot of

music, Braufman said, because he's a rock music guy.

In 2018, Ayers re-released Braufman's 1975 debut album, "Valley of Search" — an album that originally came out when Ayers



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