



# LET'S HEAR IT FOR THE GIRL

*Loose-limbed celebrity dancer-cum singer JULIANNE HOUGH  
talks to JOE YOGERST about her love of dance, her artistic  
aspirations, her English accent – and the uncanny omnipresence  
of the musical Footloose in her life*

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DRESS: PRADA

**J**ULIANNE HOUGH IS back home in Los Angeles, taking a well-deserved break from the worldwide publicity blitz that precedes the remake of *Footloose*, a movie about young people who would do just about anything to dance. That's pretty much been the story of Hough's life, too, a relentless and often exhausting endeavour to become one of the globe's leading dancers.

Once upon a time, it was ballet that launched dancers (such as Rudolf Nureyev and Mikhail Baryshnikov) into stardom beyond their immediate circle and to parallel careers in film. Nowadays it's a flashy television vehicle called *Dancing with the Stars*. Hough (pronounced "huff") has won the competition twice (once with Winter Olympic gold medallist Apolo Anton Ohno as her partner and the other time teamed with Brazilian racing driver Hélio Castroneves), and along the way become, arguably, the show's most beloved dancer. Craving more, Hough left the show that made her famous three years ago to pursue movies and music.

Nobody was all that surprised when Hough, a died-in-the-wool rural girl, launched a country-music career in 2008. What did surprise is how well she did: her self-titled debut album hit number one in the US country charts and number three overall. She went on tour with country icons George Strait, Brad Paisley and Toby Keith. And she's now polishing off a second country album, scheduled for release in 2012.

Hough's movie career got off to a slow (yet trivia-worthy) start with an uncredited role as a Hogwarts schoolgirl in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. It was nearly a decade before she was on the big screen again, in another minor role, this time in *Burlesque*. Hough finally hit pay dirt when she was cast as Ariel Moore in the *Footloose* reprise, a part that she seemed destined to snag, given her birthplace (Sandy, Utah, where much of the original *Footloose* was filmed on location), footwork and acting background. Not long afterwards, she nailed another huge role alongside Tom Cruise and Diego Boneta in

the film version of the hit Broadway musical *Rock of Ages*, due for release in June 2012.

Twenty or 30 years from now, some young ingénue is going to star as Julianne Hough in a biopic about the dancer's younger days, because her lead-up to fame and fortune reads like a real-life version of *Flashdance*, or one of those other small-town-girl-makes-good movies.

She was born and raised into a large (five kids) Mormon family on the edge of Salt Lake City. But unlike the movie story, these were small-town folks who loved to dance. Hough's parents met on their college ballroom dancing team and all four of her grandparents loved to trip the light fantastic. At nine years old she was dancing in local competitions. A year later – her parents in the throes of a divorce – she was living in London with her older brother Derek (another *Dancing with the Stars* regular) in the home of two British dancers, the young Americans getting their education and training at the renowned Italia Conti Academy of theatre arts.

From day one, everyone could tell the kid had incredible talent. And Julianne did not disappoint. In 2001, she won three major international dance competitions including the British National Junior Latin Championship at the prestigious Blackpool Dance Festival. She returned to the States, finished high school and shortly thereafter was chosen as one of the company dancers on a summer replacement television show called *Dancing with the Stars* that would soon become a pop-culture phenomenon. Hough could have easily remained in the background if not for a lucky break: one of the star dancers went down with an injury and Julianne – who already knew all the moves – was yanked off the "chorus line" and thrust into the limelight.

Hough made a guest appearance on the show shortly after our chat. But she made it crystal clear during the interview that while dance may have been her bread and butter in the past, movies and music are where she would like to expend the bulk of her considerable energy in the future.



DRESS: CHLOÉ  
TIGHTS: WOLFORD  
SHOES: LANVIN

“ON MY WAY TO DANCE CLASS I WOULD ALWAYS PASS THE PLACE WHERE KEVIN BACON DOES THE ANGRY DANCE”

**Footloose is one of those movies that a lot of people felt should have never been remade – an attitude that the first one was perfect. So why do it again?**

You know, you always go into shooting a movie with the best of intentions. But you never really know until you see it and see people’s reaction to it. Being on this tour and watching the screenings, you meet a lot of people who are like, “You touched my baby!” when they come into the movie. But they come out and say, “I’ve got to tell you, I was so sceptical about this movie. I thought it was going to be terrible. But you completely shocked me. I’m pleasantly surprised.” And some of them said, “I can’t believe it, but I liked it better than the original.”

**This was a long and winding road for you – a movie that almost didn’t get made.**

I was doing *Dancing with the Stars* and [High School Musical director] Kenny Ortega was supposed to do the movie and the original script was going to be like the stage production. So I went in and got the job and then a couple of other people started signing up – like Chace Crawford and Zac Efron. But then the studio went in another direction [and Ortega and Crawford parted ways with the production]. I was like, I don’t know. Maybe I shouldn’t do this movie. You know, it’s a classic. And *Footloose* is one of my all-time favourites too. Maybe it isn’t the right thing to do.

Then Craig Brewer got attached [as writer/director] and I read his script and I went, OK, this is what I have to be a part of. This is a movie that will really show my acting abilities and is not going to be based on my dancing or my singing. So I’m on board. But then Craig Brewer said “I kind of want to choose my own cast.” And I was like, “No! Wait!” And so I really had to fight for my role. I basically had to audition twice. I went in and fought for it and he saw something in me. I guess that’s why I am so passionate about it, this journey.

**So you were a fan of the 1984 version?**

It was absolutely one of my favourite movies, together with *Flashdance*, *Dirty Dancing* and

*Grease*, all of those dance movies back in the day. And it was shot in Utah, where I grew up. On my way to dance class I would always pass the place where Kevin Bacon does the angry dance. If you haven’t seen *Footloose*, you’re a disappointment to Utah.

**But there was no way to know that Footloose would have such a major impact on your life.**

No, but there was something about it. There were a lot of ironies and circumstances and coincidences with *Footloose*. One of them was growing up in the town where they shot the original. And then my first dance ever on *Dancing with the Stars* was to “Let’s Hear It for the Boy.” And before that, my brother was on the West End in London and played Ren [Kevin Bacon’s lead character] in *Footloose*. After my audition, I came out and called my mom. As she picked up the phone, she turned on the radio and *Footloose* was playing. All of this kind of happened and in the end I was like, “Wow, I just have to be a part of this movie.” Oh, and I didn’t even tell you this – I did a high school production of it.

**And next up is another high-profile music and dance movie – Rock of Ages. Are you still working on that?**

I finished it about a month ago. And immediately after I wrapped that, I started the tour for *Footloose*. So it’s been like one crazy thing to the next thing. I’m on cloud nine, I can’t even tell you.

**Rock of Ages was filmed down south, right?**

Right, Miami. Three months in Atlanta and then almost six months in Florida. So I kind of don’t know where I live right now. We really hope it’s a pretty epic movie. Every scene that we did was like, “Wow!” I didn’t know if I wanted to do another musical – I want to focus on dramatic and comedic movies. Then I was told that Tom Cruise was going to be in it and I was like, “OK, I can do one more!”

**What was it like working with Tom Cruise?**

Tom Cruise is the hardest-working person. I don’t think I’ve ever seen anybody commit



DRESS: STELLA MCCARTNEY  
SHOES: LANVIN



JACKET: GIVENCHY  
SHIRT: PRADA  
SHOES: LANVIN

to something the way that he does. Everyone knows Tom Cruise from *Top Gun* and Tom Cruise from *Mission Impossible*. But no action hero was present during the filming of this movie – he was legitimately a rock star. He took vocal lessons and trained and his voice was outstanding. I had such a great time and I remember our first scene together. We were sitting talking and Sherrie [Hough's character in the movie] is like a huge fan and she's completely star-struck over him, and basically I didn't have to act. I was looking at Tom Cruise! It was pretty amazing.

**Does dancing really run in your family, or is that just Hollywood hype?**

Yeah, my parents and my grandparents, they all danced. But not professional dancers. My favourite thing was to dance with them. They had the most charming way of dancing and such swagger. It was such fun.

**How did it evolve from family fun into a serious profession?**

My mom just started popping kids out right and left and so she had to put them in some sort of activity to keep track of them or keep them out of trouble, and so we all just went into dance and acting and singing and kung fu and bongos. You name it, we tried it. And we just sort of gravitated towards the music and acting and dancing. My sisters are so talented. One sister is a songwriter and my older sister Sharee is supermom – she has six kids and is pretty incredible.

**How did you and your brother end up in England at such young ages?**

The dance coaches that I lived with in London came to Utah, to this dance studio I went to, and they saw my brother and me dance. It was right around the time that my parents were getting divorced, so there was tension around the house as they were working out their deal. We expected to stay [in London] for a couple of months, and I ended up staying for five years and my brother stayed for eight.

**What was it like going straight from small-town Utah to living in a huge, foreign city?**

I was very disappointed when I got to London and there weren't people riding in horse-drawn carriages and wearing monocles. There were no queens and stuff like that [laughs]. Utah is a bubble. Definitely a bubble.

**How did the Londoners treat you?**

A little like we were aliens because of our accents. They would say "talk like us" when we were at school and then I would try and do this really bad English accent. My brother used to call me Madonna [because her English accent was so bad]. But now he can't say anything because now my accent is pretty good. We had a great time going to a dramatic-arts school called Italia Conti Academy and I really see that as the most amazing experience of my life. The kids in there...we were all competitive. But more so with ourselves, just trying to be better. It was a great learning experience, which helped me decide what I want to do with my life.

**Have you ever thought about making your London days into a movie?**

I absolutely have. But I want to tell the real story. I don't want to tell the commercial version. I want to tell the *Black Swan* version, so I have to wait a little bit longer. It doesn't have to be about me but just that world and the experience and the things that I've been through. I think there are things that people would be fascinated to hear even if it wasn't about me, but just to hear what does go on in that world.

**How did you make the leap from London to Dancing with the Stars?**

When I graduated from high school when I was 18, I packed up my car and moved to LA. I told my dad I had \$5,000 so that he would let me go – when I only really had \$2,000. And when I got here, I just auditioned for things and I wouldn't stop until I got jobs. I got commercial jobs and some dancing jobs. *Dancing with the Stars* was going on its first live tour and I went as a company dancer on

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the road. One of the dancers who was dancing with Joey McIntyre from New Kids on the Block got injured and I replaced her. So I got all the [group] dances on the show plus these ones. I think I was about 95 pounds because I was doing so much cardio. *Dancing with the Stars* saw me on the road and asked me to be a part of [the television show]. At first I hesitated. I really wanted to be a respected actress and singer and not on reality TV. But then I thought about it. The best thing about *this* reality show is that you have to be skilled, you have to be talented to be one of the dancers. So you’re not just coming in like someone who didn’t have any talent. I didn’t realise how well I was going to do. I had an amazing time on the show

***If someone said you had to choose between dancing and acting – one or the other for the rest of your life – what would you say?***

I would tell them screw you! [Laughs.] I get asked that question a lot and I honestly don’t know which one I would choose. Each fulfils something different inside of me. And if I was told that I couldn’t do something, then I would want to do it more. That would be a very hard decision for me. As of right now, I feel very rewarded by the work I did on *Footloose*. I’ve never felt so rewarded. And you know, I have won world championships [in dance] and my first album debuted at number one, which is fantastic. But I never really felt *this* rewarded. It makes me happy to express how proud I am of *Footloose*. So I don’t know...I want to continue on this path.

***What’s it like dating Ryan Seacrest – the busiest man in Hollywood?***

He has to keep up with *me!* You laugh, but it’s probably true. The good thing is that we both have the same personality. We’re both very driven. We’re very ambitious. We’re very career-oriented. We’re both in the entertainment world – “the industry” – but we have different jobs. So we get the work ethic and we get the commitment that we have towards it and we’re very supportive of

each other, yet we have no competition. It’s actually a very great situation that we’re in.

***When do you have time to see each other?***

We definitely schedule. Yeah, it’s pretty funny. We have assistants and people figuring out which city we are in and like when I will have a couple of hours to fly to see him and that kind of stuff. But you know, I’ve said this before – when it’s worth it, it’s worth it, and you just make it work.

***Any wedding bells in your immediate future?***

I think we’re really happy where we are at this moment and I don’t think there’s any kind of pressure to do that. We’re just going to keep going. But if that ever happened, I don’t think it would be a big deal. It would be something very low-key. Not quite Vegas. But that’s not on our minds right now. We’re very happy with where we’re at and what we’re doing. You might as well be happy with doing what you’re doing than try and force something.

***What’s something about you that people might be surprised to discover?***

I don’t think there’s a lot that people don’t know about me. I basically talk about myself 24/7. I’ve said in the past that I’m an adrenaline junkie and I like extreme sports and basically things that I think I may kill myself doing [she ponders the question in silence for a moment]. I really love food. I love to eat. I love to try new restaurants. I really love to cook. And I love the presentation. So I have to make the plate look amazing and sizzle the sauces. I like to bake as well. That’s one of my hidden things that I would eventually like to do. I think I would like to go and live in France or Italy for three weeks to a month and really learn to cook. But I would be extremely obese because I wouldn’t be able to cook and not eat everything that I make.

***Does it feel like you’ve already done an awful lot for someone who’s only 23?***

It’s so crazy. I feel like I’ve lived five different lives in my short life. ■



SWEATER: BALENCIAGA  
BOOTS: PRADA