



You can find Derek on @letsdoubledutch on Instagram, TikTok and YouTube.

Everybody Loves Derek

Adored for his keenly observed sketches of Dutch culture, comedian Derek Mitchell has won over Amsterdam locals and internationals alike. Now he's got his sights set on everyone else.

Derek Mitchell (32) had an ordinary upbringing by his own account. Raised in the US in a family that didn't travel abroad, his life typified a good, happy suburban childhood. But Derek wanted more. Fast-forward two decades and Derek, an Amsterdammer for the past 13 years, has become something of a local name in comedy, thanks to his razor-sharp observational skits about Dutch life and the Brits and Americans who don't get it. He's become a massive success online, where he pokes fun at Dutch habits in short sketches,

and offline, with a sold-out Dutch tour and a UK tour this Spring. We sat down with him to chat all things comedy, identity and what he really thinks about the Dutch.

Let's put a rumour to rest – where are you actually from?

'The Midwest in the States. I genuinely had the most middle-American, midwestern, traditional white people, suburban upbringing you can possibly imagine. But I studied in the UK and I'm Dutch by passport.'

When did you first think you might like a life abroad?

'I was always hungry for more. I had this book of stories from places all over the world and there would always be a photo of a child from that place. I remember pouring over it as a kid in the Chicago suburbs, thinking, 'Imagine if that was your life'. There has to be more out there, more to my life. I've got to go see it. I was six years old at this point.'

Those are some big dreams for a 6-year-old. When did moving to Amsterdam happen?

'I had some hard stuff going on in my family throughout my childhood. I thought at some point, I just have to leave. I was 19 when I met someone who was visiting friends and they had been an au pair in Amsterdam. I thought, 'That place is cool'. So then I just bought a ticket and went.'

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When was the first time you knew you were funny?

'I was a very serious, pretentious and insufferable kid to be around, which was to be Susan Sontag. I was gay too, so I ticked multiple boxes where it's like, 'God, I hope I can be funny later on. That will be the thing that saves me in this society.' My dad, meanwhile, was very

funny but he was also chronically ill for most of my childhood. Then, the summer before eighth grade, I was with my friends Claire and Ben in the backyard and I said something in a way that my dad would say something and they laughed so much. I thought, 'This is the superpower that my dad has led his life with and now I can do that.'

On your channel LetsDoubleDutch, you poke fun at Dutch culture. Was there an experience that inspired your sketches?

'I was in this co-working space and the government had just announced the new lockdown, so everybody was really depressed. I was sat alone eating a sad Albert Heijn salad in the canteen area. Suddenly

'Comedy is more powerful than anything, even death'

I heard this disembodied Dutch voice say *et smakelijk* (literally 'eat tasty'). And I thought that's so funny because why are you wishing me that? And then I thought about how we don't have that in English. We imported bon appetit, but we say that slightly ironically. What's even more interesting is that we don't have the urge. Whereas in Dutch that impulse is something you must exercise. I was like, 'What a fun cultural collision'. Because that Dutch person is doing this in earnest and I so deeply don't need them to do it. And I never know how to respond. What do I say, 'Thanks? It'll be tasty?'. Also, it's not tasty because it's an Albert Heijn salad. That became the very first sketch I posted.'

Even when you're laughing about various cultural norms, your sketches always feel like they come from a place of love...

'Some people think I'm mocking Dutch culture, and I'm so sorry they think so. Because I love Dutch stuff. I've dedicated my life to it. If anything, Dutch logic is the prevailing logic in my sketches over, say, American and British logic.'

Big question now. What could we all learn from the Dutch?

'To be more honest with ourselves. They have an evolved set of boundaries for themselves – they're more at peace.'

And what about the Dutch from everyone else?

'A bit of exaggeration never hurt anyone.'

Your accents are so good and you nail the typical Dutch habits. Do you think this explains your popularity?

'Language and ways of speaking, and accents and ways of being are things that people consider normal. They take the differences for granted. But for me, these differences are the most interesting part. An understanding of how imperfect cultural stereotypes and nationalities actually are for capturing who you are is one of the reasons why those things make us laugh too. Because there's so much about these stereotypes that's simultaneously recognisable and felt, and also completely ridiculous.'

What does comedy mean to you?

'When I was 19, my dad died. When that happened, I discovered how finding the funny in deep darkness and the world falling apart was a survival skill. I could be





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funny and make my mum and my brother laugh. It made me realise that comedy was the only thing I wanted to do for the rest of my life because it's more powerful than anything, even death.'

People know you from your online sketches, but when did you start doing comedy?

'I was in the Oxford Review, the very sad equivalent of the renowned sketch comedy troupe Cambridge Footlights. Plus, I worked at the bar in BoomChicago here in Amsterdam and that's where I thought, 'I really want to go for this and become a comedian'. I owe so much to that institution and the people who run it.'

So you've been performing for some time – but what's it like having your own live show?

'It's really important to me that it's live. I would never show you a video from the internet in my live show. In fact I don't even really do those characters in the live show because it's its own thing. Because frankly, video and online content are radically different art forms and media.'

It seems like you're living your dream.

'It feels incredible. I'm grateful for every day and it's the most wonderful gift I've

ever received. It definitely feels surreal. And I want to keep doing this forever so I take the responsibility I have to make people laugh seriously. To show them something new, to continually reinvent myself and push myself to go deeper and further.'

Any comedy idols?

'I always wanted to be Emma Thompson. But don't we all?'

Acting or comedy – which do you love most?

'I feel like an actor as much a comedian. I've done a lot of stage plays and I like to play serious and dramatic roles too. But it feels like it's the same thing. If I'm playing a character in a sketch, depending on the brief, depending on

what the writing is asking you to do, it's actually a similar muscle. It's asking you to empathise and to connect with an audience that's either real or imagined.'

You've been on stage touring and even featured in the American comedy show 'Ted Lasso' – what's next?

'Honestly: you blink and you miss me in *Ted Lasso*, but it was a great experience. It was my first TV job and I'm very grateful for it. And I'm definitely hoping to do more.'

You've lived and travelled to a lot of places. Where's home?

'Amsterdam is my home. And, I think, probably always will be.'

YOU CAN FIND DEREK ON TOUR AT:

13 MAY, MEERVAART THEATRE

11 JUNE, THE ROYAL CONCERTGEBOUW

Derek's favourite...

...neighbourhood in Amsterdam?

'Oost. I lived on the Balistraat with some Erasmus students who taught me Polish tongue twisters. That was fun.'

...place in Amsterdam?

'My friend's houseboat in the Westerdok. It feels like it harks back to a part of Amsterdam that almost no longer exists.'

...café or bar?

'De Engelbewaarder, especially in the summer if you can get a spot on the terrace. Or Café Fonteyn – unless you're over 30 like me because everyone there is so young. The last time I was there, I thought, 'OK, why does it feel like I'm about to decay in front of you?'

...restaurant?

'I like Pastis. They have a beautiful, perfectly limited menu that still has new and interesting things on it and a great wine selection. It's very intimate.'

...comedy place?

'Vice Versa on Overtoom, Mezrab's alt comedy night and Clink hostel, which has a queer night called Serve.'

If someone was visiting Amsterdam, what's the one thing you'd do?

'I'd say, have a picnic in Vondelpark. Albert Heijn is just made for snacks – no supermarket does picnic snacks like they do.'