

Speeding Bullets: He's My Brother She's My

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by [ALLYSON SHIFFMAN](#)

Los Angeles-based musicians [He's My Brother She's My Sister](#) are more like a travelling troop of musically inclined gypsies than your run-of-the-mill indie band. Consisting of brother and sister Rob and Rachel Kolar splitting vocals (bet you didn't see *that* coming), a tap dancing drummer, a bassist with a flare for showmanship, and a masterful slide guitarist, the band of misfits look like they walked straight off the set of a Terry Gilliam film. With their charming aesthetic and catchy sound that Rob has poetically described as "vaudeville pop," "psyche-acoustic," and "flamboyant folk," it's no wonder HMBSMS are getting attention, particularly after an explosive performance at Austin City Limits. With their debut full-length album, *Nobody Dances in this Town*, out later this month and a slew of shows to follow, we reckon these eccentric vagabonds are ones to watch. We caught up with siblings Rob and Rachel to chat about the record, life on the road, and brotherly sisterly love.

What's it like spending so much time with your sibling? Do you ever get into any good brother/sister brawls?

Rob: Sure. The cops had to come and break up our fight in our hotel parking lot the night before our big ACL show in Austin. It never got physical but there was a lot of very loud yelling and some of the guests were a little concerned. The cops took their report and calmed things down, made sure no one was bruised or bleeding and went on their way. As a kid, Rach once scratched my back so hard that it left marks for over a month...But generally we get along pretty well.

Tell me how you guys got started. Where did you find your other band members?

Rob: It was a side band at first, a chance to have fun and mess around with new musical genres. Rach was much more into theater and I was doing my band Lemon Sun. This was a chance to escape our usual work and explore something new with a sense of freedom and no limitations. Fortunately we discovered the wonderful and talented Oliver and Aaron just a couple years back, who have helped elevate the sound. Oliver is a vibrant performer and talented upright bassist who painted his bass himself and plays it with a lot of panache. Aaron is more understated in his performance but makes up for it with swirling slide guitar that can only be played by someone beyond proficiency with his instrument. And there is Lauren of course who has developed the incredible talent of simultaneously drumming and tap dancing, giving us a punching beat that has an alleyway rattle.

I've heard you describe your sound as vaudeville-pop, burlesque blues, glam-a-billy... the list goes on. You've got a knack for describing your sound with catchy terms. Got any new ones? And who is the mastermind behind these?

Rob: I've come up with a fair amount, so thank you. We just find it fun to create these terms because writers are always trying to pigeonhole bands into a particular sound or genre. And I 'spose it makes sense because they want their readers to understand the sound legibly. But music is so abstract, it's hard to describe with

words, so we decided to create some relatively abstract or bizarre terms to identify our sound. How about countredelic? A fan came up with that.

Tell me more about your tap dancing drummer.

Rob: Initially, we tried drummers but found that a traditional kit took away from the uniqueness of what we were trying to express. Lauren and Rach were roommates, and I remember one day Rach and I were working on the song *Tales That I Tell* in the carpeted living room while Lauren was hanging out in the adjacent hardwood dining room. Lauren slipped on her shoes and tapped a rhythm to go with the song on the floor. It seemed to add an extra dimension to the song. We asked her to join us for the next show, and she has played every one since. In last year or so she has added drums into the equation and taken her talents into a whole new and uncharted realm, which is really exciting to witness.

Rachel, you have quite a flare for fashion and I've heard you've worked as a stylist for some big names. What influences your style?

Rachel: Street fashion above all else. When I lived in Barcelona I would see the most colorful, imaginative outfits walking down those cobblestone streets. I think fashion is really amazing when it's an extension of the individual. Trends are really boring. Fashion should enhance a person's essence. I think I am most inspired by the clothes in Fellini and Kubrick films, The Ziegfeld Follies, early Lanvin & Miuccia Prada.

You guys have played some incredible shows with big, big names. What has been a standout show for you so far?

Rob: It was really fantastic to see all our Austin and Texas fans rally for us at ACL. We were on the first day and super early but had thousands of people lined up in front of the stage showing their love and support. Playing the High Sierra festival with Dr. Dog and My Morning Jacket was a real treat and exposed us to so many new and interesting fans. There was a festival show in Tampa where the crowd was so excited and loud that I could literally feel their energy hit me in the gut. It was a powerful and surreal experience I will never forget. I was overcome by noise, cheers, and exuberance. It was pumping through my veins and ringing in my bones. Simultaneously overwhelming and thrilling. I remember looking over at Rachel and could tell she felt the same way. At the risk of sounding overly sentimental, it was quite a magical moment to be on stage. Often times it's the smaller shows with less people that are most powerful and memorable because it is so intimate and there is nothing to lose.

Tell me about *Nobody Dances In This Town*. What can someone who hasn't heard your music before expect from this album?

Rob: Rachel explained it well in an interview today where she compared it to a novel. Unlike some books, which focus on a particular time or place, this novel is quite vast and varied. It has some unexpected turns and moods, which develop and pass and some return again. There is the dryness of desert and the swampy America's south living in some of these songs, hints of blues and early rock & roll roots. Some soul rhythms, gypsy-like sing a longs, clacking rhythms, raw rock and roll energy, yearning for love, dancing with lust,

unifying qualities, death and despair, social critique, and hopefulness, and lots of fun. We believe there is something for everyone.

If you weren't making music, what would you be doing?

Rob: That's tough. One day I'd love to be an author. I'm working on a book idea now. I've always had a weird fantasy of doing stand up comedy but I can't get the nerve to actually do it. But really, I'd really love to be a bird. I can imagine flying around through the breeze, singing in the trees, and swooping down to catch food. Sounds pretty wonderful.

What do you do with your free time in LA?

Rob: I play hockey on a team called The Flying Elbows. Been a Kings fan since I was a kid so it was incredible to see them win the Stanley Cup last year. I have been working on a novel and solo album lately and also writing new music for HMBSMS. It's always great to see live music and support other artists. Recently I saw The Growlers, who we share a booking agent with and it was interesting to see a slow motion mosh pit happening in the crowd. A giant wave of people washing and swirling from one end of the room to the other and back.

What's next for you guys?

Rob: We have been talking a lot about transcending the idea of simply being a touring rock and roll or pop band. We'd like to explore the other mediums of art and how to combine them with our music. Maybe a musical one day. We also want to get over to Europe, Japan, and Australia. See the world while we perform our songs for audiences with unique and intriguing cultural identities.

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