

Blog

Review: He's My Brother She's My Sister - Nobody Dances in this Town

"Whoa, this band has a tap dancing drummer!?!?" you might hear from your dear, dear friends on your social media platform of choice if they happen to catch He's My Brother She's My Sister on their latest tour. Yes, its true: in addition to having one of the best band names in recent memory, they also have a tap dancing drummer; however—

What? Yes, I'm serious—

Uh-huh, she wears tap shoes—

Jesus, would you compose yourself? You're really gumming up any momentum this piece had... Now, where was I?

Right. Thanks.

However, they are more than just a quirky name and a percussion gimmick.

L.A.-based He's My Brother She's My Sister is fronted by siblings Robert (guitar/kick-drum/vocals) and Rachel Kolar (vocals/tamborine) and rounded out by Oliver Newell (stand-up bass), Aaron Robinson (lead/slide guitar) and Laruen Brown (tap dancing/drumming)—one of those glorious few whose mother was actually correct when she told her how special and unique she was. They are an amalgamation of sounds, but have a bluesy-rock, soul-infused feel with some dirty, alt-country twang and possess a glam-rock, cabaret bent. This last aspect—their theatricality—has enamored crowds and contributed to their reputation as an entertaining and memorable live band. And they have certainly been doing the rounds.

Currently on a seven-week tour, which included a stop at Austin City Limits, to promote their debut LP, *Nobody Dances in this Town*, they've put on a hundred and fifty plus shows this past year. Since the band is known for its performance, I was interested to see what sort of product their biggest studio effort to date would yield.

With all the touring they've been doing, its not surprising that the tour mood permeates the album: songs about roaming, getting up to no good in bars, etc. The album opens up with "Tales that I Tell," with Rachel, her voice a bit husky, singing rakishly of flings, alcohol-aided adventures, and the eventual clarity of distance and sobriety: "My luck shot to shit but I've still got my wit / So I quit the drinking, my heart's opened a bit."

Its a solid opener and sets the mood well for the rest of the album. "Let It Live Free" follows along admirably, but the album really kicks in with "Let's Go." The chorus is simple but driving—the call-to-action of, "Let's go!" repeated and becoming an invocation—and is accentuated well with some great heel-toe tapping. The bridge shows off some slick, twangy guitar that kicks you in the butt and really makes you want to move. In addition, the call and responses between Rachel and Robert are fun and add some depth to the lyrics.

Rachel and Robert trade off vocal duties throughout the album. Both have strong voices, but its in the tracks where they share the load (such as the aforementioned "Let's Go") that He's My Brother She's My Sister really shine. I particularly love how their voices work together on "Touch the Lightning," with Robert taking the lead and Rachel's voice trailing behind like a shadow.

Brother and Sister would be nothing without the whole family, though, and one must give some love to the rest of the band. Robinson can make the slide guitar whine like a hound dog or trill like a moonshine-drunk jaybird—for reference, check out the psychedelic "Electric Love"—and Newell's bass provides the solid sternum for the skeleton of a band with a divided percussion section (Robert with the kick-drum, Rachel tamborine'ing, Laruen Brown doing her thing, etc.). Brown's tap dancing is an interesting touch, the heel-toe rhythm is fun and blends nicely with the rest of the band, and, most of the time, you might forget the sound is coming from two-feet. Even in a song like "Clackin' Heels," which threatens to be a bit heavy-handed (heavy-footed?), the tapping doesn't become (too) gimmicky and the way the vocals and rest of the instrumentals work with the cadence of the tap-shoes is clever and expertly executed.



Lykke Li
Time Flies

Nobody dances in this town only if He's My Brother She's My Sister don't have something to say about it. While they might be a band you'd prefer to catch live, their debut LP is a damn good listen. Whether you throw it on the jukebox at the ol' dive bar or crank it up while rolling through the countryside, their sound will have city rats and country mice alike tapping their feet.

Check out my favorite tracks: "Same Old Ground," a nostalgia-fueled blues-rock anthem sure to please any self-aware being with a conception of itself through time; "Electric Love," a trippy little number that will have you grooving; and, my favorite track off the whole piece, "Can't See the Stars." If you're not hooked from the start with Rachel's patient delivery paired with Robert's slow-pulsing kick-drum, you've got no heart. And if you're not singing along with the chorus by the end, well, you have no damn soul either, and I pity you.

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By [Zach Bain](#)

Posted 06 November by alex

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