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Park the Van Records
 from left: Oliver New ell, Robert and Rachel Kolar, Aaron Robinson, and Lauren Brown are He's My Brother She's My Sister.

He's My Brother She's My Sister Explores the Other Side of Folk

L.A.'s Rising Fringe Folkies Prep New Record, Return to Santa Barbara

Thursday, September 13, 2012

By [Aly Comingore](#) ([Contact](#))

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There's something inherently precious about bands made up of siblings, something that sparks memories of childhood and conjures images of family-style sing-alongs. For the L.A.-based band He's My Brother She's My Sister, though, that cutesiness is only half the equation. Formed and fronted by real-life bro and sis Robert and Rachel Kolar, He's My Brother She's My Sister boasts a vibrant mix of harmonized campfire folk, vaudeville-style rockabilly, and a sprinkling of steampunk theatrics. Their live shows are infectious, high-energy affairs. Their songs beg to be stomped along to. And their percussionist takes the form of lithe tap dancer Lauren Brown, who can simultaneously play the kit and cut a rug. This winter, the band releases *Nobody Dances in This Town*, their debut full-length album and inaugural release with Park the Van Records. Unlike many acts, He's My Brother She's My Sister has cut its teeth on the road (the band played more than 150 shows in 2011), and *Nobody*

Dances is a solid testament to the live set.

This Saturday, the band returns to SOhO Restaurant & Music Club for a show in support of their forthcoming album. Below, I caught up with Robert and Rachel to talk music scenes, recording techniques, and family dynamics.

You guys seem to balance the whole brother/sister thing pretty nicely. How do the rest of band members fit into the He's My Brother She's My Sister equation?

Robert: We all kind of balance each other out. We have a lot of philosophical debates. Oftentimes Rachel and I take a more esoteric, spiritual approach to seeing the world. [Bassist] Oliver [Newell] and [guitarist] Aaron [Robinson] are very rooted in factual, scientific thinking.

Rachel: And Lauren is amazing. She's always reading biographies of musicians or actors, so she has these really wonderful contributions that stem from what she knows about these people who have lived through and seen greatness. It's a really wonderful melting pot. I feel like I've become a much more intelligent person just by being able to have these discussions.

Later this year you guys are releasing *Nobody Dances in This Town*. Can you tell me a bit about how the record came together?

Robert: We spent a ton of time in our studio just rehearsing the songs. Then we went in to Henson Recording Studios, and we had three days to track as much as we could. We knocked out about 12 songs, all live. We wanted the record to sound and feel like a live show, so we all got in the same room facing each other and started playing in unison. Some of the vocal tracks on the record are live takes from the floor. Almost all the guitars are like that, and all the drums and all the bass and a lot of Aaron's slide were done with one take. We took it kinda Dylan style; you just capture that moment and you go with it, and even if there are a couple flaws, you learn to embrace them.

How did you guys come up with the album title?

Robert: It came from our fans. After our shows we kept hearing people saying, "God, nobody dances in this town. Nobody dances in this city. But when I come to your guys' shows, people end up dancing." We like to think that we bring a vibe that lets people loosen up. They don't feel self-conscious; they feel like they can just let go and have a good time and get a little bit freaky.

Rachel: And the other side of the coin is that we're based in Los Angeles and *nobody* dances in that town. Everybody is pretty concerned with their looks. It's a little bit of a nod to our hometown in that way.

How does He's My Brother She's My Sister fit into the L.A. folk music scene?

Rachel: [By virtue of touring] I feel like what we've become is really an American band. We go to all these places, and we're embraced in all these cities like we're from there. Because of that, I kind of find myself identifying less and less with the L.A. scene.

Robert: I also feel like we're a little bit more akin to what I've started calling the "bizarre-o folk scene," where you have bands like Amanda Jo Williams, RT N the 44s, Tommy Santee Klaws, Restavant, Spindrift. It's all this weird innovation, like a science experiment mixed with folk. It's a scene that's still kind of underground, and we're hoping to represent it on a more mainstream level and give it a little more exposure.

Rachel: What I love so much about our band is that I feel like we're all really sincere people. Oliver and I have this joke that we're like the new punks, and the new punks are totally sweet and sincere, which sometimes doesn't fit in in L.A.

Robert: It's like genuine is the new counterculture. And I love being a part of that.

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He's My Brother She's My Sister play SOhO Restaurant & Music Club (1221 State St.) on Saturday, September 15, at 8 p.m. Call 962-7776, or visit clubmercy.com for tickets and info.

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