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## He's My Brother, She's My Sister bends genres and our ears with their great new album



Los Angeles natives **He's My Brother, She's My Sister** have an exciting year ahead with a new album, full tour schedule and an ever-evolving sense of musicality. The band's sound draws on a wide array of influences—everything from folk to glam to Americana and blues—to create a rich sound uniquely their own.

Staff Writer Olivia Snider spoke with brother Robert Kolar and tap-dancing percussionist Lauren Brown to find out more about the band's origin, their upcoming release and tour, their perspective on music and songwriting process, and what lies ahead.

**Stereo Subversion: I know you guys have been pretty busy, debut album coming out, hard release coming**

**out on the 22nd of this month, tour starting next week. It's all very exciting. Are you guys excited to be getting back on the road?**

**Robert Kolar:** We are! We've got a lot planned for this year. We're doing a few shows leading up towards the album release party on the 19 at the Troubadour. That's the first time we're headlining that venue with this band so we're excited about that. Then we do a West Coast tour that takes us all the way up to Vancouver and back, so that's about two weeks.

We just finished a music video for one of our songs that's also going to be pushed as a single, so that'll go out. We shot that yesterday at Alex's Bar in Long Beach, which has a very cool, kind of slightly devilish and surreal atmosphere, which works well for the video and we did it for this song called the "Same Old Ground," which is on the new album.

And then we have a Southern tour that which will take us through SxSW. We were one of the early acceptances at South By, which is great because it'll be our second year back-to-back there. So we're really looking forward to that. We love Austin; they've been really great to us. We played ACL [Austin City Limits] last year, which was huge for us —playing with a lot of big acts like Jack White, Florence and the Machine, Black Keys.



We definitely, definitely would love to work on a musical and to incorporate the theatre elements into the band even more. Even from the beginning, our hope was to transcend the idea of being a touring rock band.

We're excited to go back to some of our favorite parts of the country, get some hush puppies and fried food on in the South in Louisiana, Alabama, and then we'll swing down through Florida and back up. We like Florida. A lot of bands don't up coming through Florida because it's like this extra limb of the United States, you know? The routing is tricky to get down there but we love it we'll end up doing at least five or six dates down in Florida, head out by the beach between shows, it's a lot of fun down there.

Then when we get back from that tour, that'll take us through Colorado as well. Then we have a little time off but then we're back to the East Coast and the Midwest. So we're trying to cover the whole country in three tours in something like four to five months.

**SSv: Wow! That's quite an extensive tour schedule.**

**Robert:** [Laughs] It's been our lives for the last couple of years or so. The exciting thing is that we're looking forward to going out to Europe. We're kind of still in the works, but the idea is to kind of head over to England in the

summertime.

**SSv: Do you have other countries planned that you're going to visit?**

**Robert:** Well, the England thing—I mean, we got an offer from a festival there called Secret Garden Party. So we haven't officially confirmed, but the idea, I know we all love. Our mother is English and our father is Czech so we're first generation Americans, Rachel and I, so we'd love to go back to England. As a kid, I went to boarding school there, so for elementary school I grew up in England; to go back and play there to me has been a dream for a long time. So it's not official but we're really trying to make it work.

The idea would be to go to Europe this summer and then, ideally, Australia in the winter when it's their summer. There's nothing official planned, but that's the hope and, now that we've toured the US a lot, I think we'd really love to explore other countries. I think the main ones for us are Australia, Japan and England—even beyond England, Europe. If we can get out to those places in the next two years, I think we'll really be fulfilled and feel like we've reached the goals that we've put ahead of us.

**SSv: Something for your international fans to watch for in the future, upcoming tour dates to be confirmed. Are you doing any festivals other than SXSW this year?**

**Robert:** Yes! We're playing—we were offered to do Hootenanny last year, so we'd like to do that again. We did ACL last year, so we don't know for sure, but we're hoping to get an offer to that again. It's definitely not confirmed. But there is a Midwest festival we're doing—I don't remember the name of it but I know it's in Ohio. Our booker's working on a few festival options for the summer but we're waiting to hear a few final answers. This will be one of our bigger festival summers, now that our band's a little more well known.

**SSv: Your sound itself is very unique, it's been described as everything from “psych-acoustic,” “flamboyant folk,” etc. but I've heard you guys have coined your own term—glamabilly?**

**Robert:** That's one term. We throw around a lot: there are a lot of genres that play into our music. We'll try to almost hybridize, mix genres. Glam—some people misconstrue it as like '80s glam rock, but what we're actually meaning is... there was a big movement in England in the early '70s with acts like David Bowie, T-Rex, Jerry Glitter, Sweet, bands like that, which were certainly influenced by rhythm. They had this big beat sound, very mixed '70s drums, and they were kind of about these sing-along chorus.

They were also playing with this androgynous feel, there was makeup used, theatrical performance aspects to the band. Our bass player often dresses in kind of an androgynous feel. Even I do with certain makeup sometimes like eyeliner and mascara, and Rachel will sometimes dress in a more masculine way; everyone has different visual elements that we incorporate. Especially acts like T-rex have influence on music and the visual.

We also have this kind of Americana, rockabilly sound that points back to Elvis and A. Cochran, also more of bluesy

artists like Bo Diddley and Howard Wolf. We try and find these mixture of genres, but we're also influenced by pop music and music from the '80s and '90s rock 'n' roll punk so we try to bring it all together. Each song embodies different influences, but glamabilly seems like a fun way to sort of identify the band, to sum up some of the parts.

**SSv: So the new album is called *Nobody Dances In This Town*—is that an actual critique of your hometown, or...?**

**Robert:** Some people say it is, and I suppose there is an element of that, although I think our L.A. fan base is really loving and supportive and we'd never want to knock it. But really, the initial reason for the album was that, every time we'd play a show in any town — whether it be Des Moines, Iowa, or Minneapolis or New York or Boston, anywhere we'd play in the country, across very different culture states — but we'd hear the same quote.

We'd have someone roll up to merch booth after the show, sweaty with their friends and say "NOBODY DANCES IN THIS TOWN! Thank you guys, we had so much fun!" We kept hearing that quote and it kind of stuck with us and we always kind of chuckle when we think about it, because we kept hearing it because everyone was still dancing and letting loose in these towns.

So it has a sort of double meaning. Like in a sense maybe they're right, there is maybe a kind of lack of dancing, especially for rock 'n' roll and folk. You have a lot of people dancing to club music—and club music is great for that—but there's a difference between dancing to club music and rock and roll. There's more of a community; you're singing along and you feel the people around you more. I mean, someone might argue differently but that's my experience.

So there is a lack but at the same time, it's a gateway, it's a gateway drug for people to dance. We really liked that; we wanted to embody that. So the title might be negative in a sense but it comes from this really positive place that we want to embody.

**SSv: That's really inspiring. I've seen shows where people stand around and don't get into the music but it seems like from your music, from the shows that you've played, you've had a good experience. So let's talk about your instrumentation a bit. I know you guys have a slide guitarist as well as a stand-up bass. How did you and your sister get together with everyone else after you started the band, initially?**

**Robert:** I played for a long time in a band called Lemon Sun and we'd find members different ways. But it was always much more thought out, "We want a keyboard player, so how are we going to find him? We're going to ask our friends. We're going to put a Craigslist ad up. Duh- duh- duh- duh."

With this band, it was none of that. We started the band as an acoustic duo. We didn't think much more of it than that. Lauren came on board, she began tap-dancing in the band. Then my friend Felipe who is from Colombia was doing stand-up drums, which Lauren eventually incorporated into her own—so she almost took on Felipe's role and combined it with her own.

And then for a while, we had a cellist in the band, Satya Bhabha, an actor who is doing quite well in film and television, and he was playing the cello in an unorthodox way where he would play the bass—he would pluck the cello as a bass—but then he would also bow it. He'll still be guesting at our CD release and, occasionally at bigger shows, he'll make an appearance and play cello on some songs.

So it was the four of us for a while, and then Satya had to leave to pursue his acting career. Then we brought on Oliver, who's an incredible bass player, painted his bass. He was just a friend, you know? Oliver was in the music scene, he was composing with Henry Wolfe and some other great local LA acts. He's an incredible musician all around; he composes electronic music, he also scores arrangements for musicians around town, including Jonathan Ballston, who's quite a well-known local act. So Oliver came on playing the bass and painted his upright and really took on this role as this vibrant, enthusiastic, dancing character on stage, which is really who he is.

Aaron, he was playing in another local band. He played in Fuel for a little while, and some other acts playing guitar. We love this idea of this swirling lap slide because you just don't hear it in modern music that much, unless it's specifically country. But we entertained ourselves as something more than just a country band, but also it's like a rock/indie/pop band.

Incorporating that instrument, we thought was an interesting choice. It almost works as something that could resemble a violin or a cello but it swirls more and it slides, and it's got a lot of different qualities about it and he plays it in such a way where it changes its identity from song to song.

Aaron and I met at a party and we were actually just like wasted and said "Let's play in a band together one day!" And two years went by, and we eventually did play in a band together. A lot of times you say that kind of thing and it doesn't necessarily come into fruition. Everyone kind of just fell into the band and it sort of came together organically, I suppose.

**SSv: The band's sound is beautiful and distinct, so it seems the instrumentation has worked out splendidly for you guys. The slide guitar definitely adds a bit of depth not found in a lot of other rock music; a little bit of that southern twang, but you can hear that identity change from track to track.**

**I know that you guys played over 150 shows last year and that it's been about two years between the releases of that first EP to this LP. What has that journey been like from 2010 to now?**

**Robert:** [Laughs]. Our last tour was seven weeks straight. And we're in a van. It's not like we're touring in a bus like bigger acts so it can... but at the same time, when we started touring—I guess I'm jumping around but—when we started touring, we were lucky if we had one hotel room. And there were six of us. So we would get cots and put the cots between each bed.

There was one night I remember—we have some footage of it, some photos—where we literally slept adjacent to one another across a full room. So, if you were at the end of the bed, which was really one entire bed that we shaped out of two beds and two cots. If you wanted to reach the restroom and you were at the edge, you literally had to climb over everyone in the band, and our merch girl Courtney who was on tour with us, to get to the bathroom, and then back the same way to get to your spot in the bed. We had these extremes that really brought us together.

We had so many laughs—there were moments where, you know, you're delirious on tour as it is. You're in a new city every day, you're travelling in such frenzy. There's a lot of excitement but it's also like 'get up, get ready, breakfast, alright we're on the road, stop at a gas station, stop at places if we have time but we've got to get to sound check.' Your mind takes on a different form and so you see the world a little differently.

And, as a result of almost like a delirium—you take on a little bit of delirium—you have these moments when laughter ensues; we'd all be laughing and makes jokes, cause we're also in such tighter quarters that you can't avoid it. I have a

lot of fondness for those early days. Now we're still sharing rooms but we've got two hotel rooms so it's a little bit—it's evolved.

It's been amazing to see the country, too. I've seen such a variety of people, really wonderful people of different ages. It's been great to connect with kids at some of these festivals, like young kids who will climb on our shoulders to take photos. And then grandparents who were there and love it and it reminds them of some of the music they grew up with, whether it's the Mamas and the Papas, The Beatles, bands like that. We've seen such a spectrum and it really gives us such an appreciation of America, of our country, which is so vast and diverse. We've really had a window into that; seeing different cultures that are within the US.

You can't really sum up this country. And people from other countries sometimes try and bash America, but whatever. It's impossible to get down to any one adjective or one description, which is really exciting to be part of that, and seeing that evolve. That's been a huge part of the journey.

And then, with this album, we had a kind of unique situation where we were touring the album before it was released, because those were the songs in our set and we hadn't really had a chance to record a record earlier. Which is great because it meant we developed those songs on the road. When we recorded them, it was mostly live with no quick tracks. A lot of the parts, the actual musical parts and components, were cut right off the floor live. To try to do a project like that—so many records these days are recorded with a clip and they have more of a studio quality about them. I feel like our record still embodies that live feel.

**SSv: I would definitely agree with you. It has a real solid, rich sound that is lacking in a lot of auto-tuned recordings that are coming out today. It's really nice to see bands getting back to the roots.**

**Robert:** Thank you. Well, we appreciate that, we're glad people are picking up on that. It's exciting.

**SSv: It seems like you guys are doing well. What do you think is going to be next for your guys after this big year of touring?**

**Robert:** A new album! I would love to release a new album, even within a year from now, ideally, like, bring in 2014. Sometime early in that year would be a great thing to aim for.

We're already developing new songs, our sound is evolving. I think some darker songs will emerge, but also some more explorational songs, I think. It's still tough to say. But I think we're going to incorporate other sounds, developing more elements of psychedelic and pop. I think the next record's going to be—I could be wrong, it's still early—but I think it's going to be a bigger-sounding record, maybe an evolution of being even more of a more produced-sounding album.

We'll see, but I'm excited to start developing that. It's still in the early stages. But yeah, I'm hoping that next year—coming out with a new record, would be really a great thing.

**SSv: Another thing for us to look forward to as listeners. I know that you said a lot of the songs for *Nobody Dances in this Town* were practiced and finessed on the road. Could you walk us through the songwriting process that you guys undergo—give us a little insight into what goes into the songs that we hear?**

**Robert:** Absolutely! I can use some examples. We have two new songs. One song, I was playing with the idea of the perspective of a vampire. So you're seeing it from the point of view of a vampire who loves and wants to be with this woman but is also luring her into his world because, ultimately, she would become a vampire as well. Trying to write songs from a different perspective, we're also exploring.

I'll write the lyrics and I'll send them to Rachel and she'll go "oh yeah, I like this part." She'll give her opinion and we'll kind of go back and forth to see what works. Then I'll send melody ideas, and she'll also come up with some herself and we'll fine-tune it before we present it to the band. Then Lauren and I will go in, and it'll be the two of us in the space, for example, and she'll start composing a rhythm that she thinks embodies that mood and reflects the song in a way that people will groove and dance to it but it also has a character that complements the lyrics and the music.

Or Rachel has a new song and she'll send me the lyrics and even a melody—a capella because she's not as much of an instrumentalist—so she'll send an a capella melody with lyrics and a beat, maybe. So what I'll do is I'll be listening to her melody and going “okay, this chord can work under her voice.” And so I'll present to her “these are some chord progressions we can go with—do we want to go more minor and dark on this song? What works for the mood?” And we'll talk about it and then we'll settle on something that we both agree on.

It's kind of an exciting process because I've been in other bands where the songwriting was all on my shoulders. In this case, there's a lot of back-and-forth, especially between Rachel and I. Also, lyrically—I was always writing the lyrics, and I feel more free now. I also really like her lyrics and I like the choices she makes to change my lyrics and vice-versa. It's a great relationship.

We definitely fight at times, we definitely don't always agree. There are certain songs she wants to bring into the band that I'm not excited about and certain songs I want to bring in that she's not excited about. But it forces us to compromise and find music that all of us are excited about. All in all, it's a pretty enriching relationship. I think it helps make each song unique.

**SSv: Sounds like the collaborative process you have going on only lets the best of the best come through. It's interesting to hear that most of the songwriting starts with you and your sister and moves on to the rest of the band. Is that a product of it having it been your original project?**

**Robert:** I think so. I think there will be a transition—especially with Oliver, but Aaron also writes—because Oliver is very opinionated and has a lot of musical knowledge. Rachel and I also have a certain vision for the band—Lauren also has influence in that—but Rachel and I, creatively, definitely curve the band and have a direction we aim for so I think it helps that we at least initiate that music.

**SSv: You guys have been playing together for a few years now. Would you have any advice for anyone starting out?**

**Robert:** We love that question, actually. There are so many people out there in bands and we're not even that big of a band but they're bands that look up to us just like we look up to other bands. I think taking chances is a huge thing. Following your instincts and taking chances musically will always open interesting doors. I think innovation is important.

But also looking back to music that brought us to where we are now. Being innovative, but also recognizing what made things great in eras past. I feel like there are two ends of the spectrum: there's people who are trying to write pop songs in a way to be hits, and that's great, and there are people who are doing things that are incredible innovative and it's all

about innovation and I think that's great.

I find the marriage of the two is what excites me, to combine that innovation with a song that people can relate to and identify with. I think if people can accomplish that, you will find success. I think there's a variety of ways to do that, but I think there's always quality with that kind of marriage of innovation and familiarity or acceptability.

Also just not to give up, because you'll develop. I started out as a pretty awful singer and I just kept singing because I loved it and I wanted to. And eventually, over time, developed a voice that I'm still struggling with, but at least I'm confident enough to go out on stage and sing and believe that people will enjoy and hopefully hit a few notes in the right key [Laughs]. But really, just to just keep going, to not give up.

You'll find in your career—young, old, new, veteran—that you'll always come across people who will doubt you. Whether it's a critic, whether it's a friend, whether it's family member, whether it's someone in the audience—it's always someone. Instead of that bringing you down and pulling you into a state of self-analysis of frustration, turn that into a way to propel you forward, put it as something to strive to overcome. If people can change that mentality, it would be exciting to see.

**SSv: Perseverance is a huge thing in any field. I'm sure listeners looking to start out will appreciate that advice and encouragement. You mentioned about Oliver's painted stand-up bass and it really seems as if each person in the band has their own individual style that contributes to the stage presence. I know you mentioned the glam aspect of the shows earlier. Rachel's done styling for Lady Gaga and Nicki Minaj. You've also mentioned that Aaron is a composer.**

**With those kinds of credentials across the board, sounds like you guys would be well equipped to make a musical. Any chance of one of those coming out from HMBSMS?**

**Robert:** You are very astute. Yes. We definitely, definitely would love to work on a musical and to incorporate the theatre elements into the band even more. Even from the beginning, our hope was to transcend the idea of being a touring rock band. So developing different ideas, whether it's stage or television or film—we have a few ideas in the works that we're playing around with. As those develop we hope to bring them to our fans, to audience around the country around the world. So absolutely, yes.

Rachel has done a lot of styling; she's always had an eye for style. She was working with our cousin-in-law, Haley, styling for the *LA Times* magazine and that brought her into other styling she did for lady Gaga and Nicki Minaj. And we did that music video just yesterday for a new song ["Same Old Ground"] and she was very involved in the styling for that. So she has a real eye for visual and aesthetic.

**SSv: When is that video going to be released?**

**Robert:** We're hoping to release it to coincide with the 22nd but it may be slightly after, depending on edits. We don't want to compromise too much to get it done on time.

We just shot it yesterday—it's all come together very quickly. It's meant to be kind of a fantastical, almost *Alice-in-Wonderland*-meets-rock 'n' roll type of arc where Rachel is running away from something—she's a deer—and she bursts into this building, this room, which is full of frozen characters. Very Bellini-esque characters, with wild, interesting costumes and attire. Almost like a dream world, a dream venue. And they're all frozen, and she walks around and looks at them and they're all frozen and still. And she comes up to the stage—there's a stage in the room—and I'm standing there frozen as well with a guitar.

And she sees a riddle below on the floor and it reads: "palm to palm begins the song." So at first she puts her hands together thinking, "what does this mean?" kind of thing. Then she decides to try a clap so she claps. And the world starts to wake up. She continues to clap and the beat of her clap begins the song and the song sort of takes off from there, the whole world becomes alive.

That was the initial idea for the video ad then it goes on from there and gets a little bit more wild from there—you'll see it when it's done—we wanted to go with a fantastical vibe for that one.



And you know, Lauren has just arrived in the studio. Would you like to talk to Lauren really quickly?

**SSv: Absolutely. Lauren, I've been sitting here having a great chat with Robert about the band—he's given me good insight into the collaborative process, how you guys have gotten to this point, and what's next for the future. Now that you're here, I wanted to ask you specifically about your very unique style of percussion. Can you tell me a little bit about how that started?**

**Lauren Brown:** I definitely am new-ish to the drums. I started learning how to play them in a really bizarre way about a year and a half ago. I went to theatre school at NYU with Rach, so my training is in dance, tap dance, experimental dance and also theatre—no musical training whatsoever. I did not play an instrument growing up, did not think I was ever going to be in a band.

It all just worked out knowing Rob and Rach. And I joined this band as a tap dancer in 2008, I think it was. It kind of grew—we had a drummer playing with us. I would tap dance alongside a drummer who was already doing the basic beat and I would fill it in with tap dance percussive sound.

By 2010, our drummer had quit and we actually didn't want to get another drummer—we wanted to keep the band relatively small and we wanted to experiment with other ways to incorporate drums. So I just started learning how to do that too—and, through necessity, learned how to play the kind of beats that would hold down the song, you know, nothing too crazy. Then tap dancing at the same time—I wouldn't be changing what I brought to the table in that way because I really enjoyed dancing.

It kind of morphed into the octopus-style thing that I had to figure out as I went along, and I'm still trying to figure out—adding more drums too it, learning new songs, trying to find new ways to do a fill. Every day is a learning process for me [Laughs].

**SSv: It's definitely unlike anything I've ever seen before! Very well executed. I never would've guessed you didn't have a musical background.**

**Lauren:** It's fun, too, being a dancer and having that be your background and then being responsible for creating the drumbeat that inspires other people to dance. Seeing that, being part of that inspiration, is so gratifying. I think that's my favorite part about all of this.

And also creating beats that you yourself want to dance to. I know when I'm feeling a song and it's going in the right direction if I am moving my hips while I'm tap dancing.

**SSv: I think the tap dance background also instilled in you a good sense of rhythm.**

**Lauren:** Yes! It's always weird though when you know how to do rhythms with your feet—hands are an entirely different beats. I would never call myself a drummer because I believe it takes years of training and there's so much more that they can do than I can do. But it's really hard to do two different things with your hands at the same time. The feet I get because I grew up doing it, but the hands... like pianists, I have no idea how someone could play the piano doing two different things with their hands. It just seems impossible to me. It's like patting your head and rubbing your belly at the same time.

**SSv: I was chatting a bit earlier with Robert about Rachel your theatre and style backgrounds; could you tell me a bit about that?**



**Lauren:** Rachel and I met at NYU freshman year, orientation-week actually—which is a long time ago! So we've known each other for god...like 12 years now. She was studying playwriting there, I was studying experimental theatre, so we both came from a performance art background of creating plays from the beginning—not taking a scripted play and restaging it, but creating our own art from the ground up.

I think having that training helped the band as well, because we're all about music video and our shows. We can bring that to the table from a production side and from a creative side, building a show from the ground up. Yeah, we have a theatre company that we were focused on while the band was more of a side project. We liked to incorporate experimental

As the band started taking off—which none of us planned on—that became more of a backburner. But I definitely feel like we can bring that energy to this project.

**SSv:** I think the theatrical elements have made your stage shows all the more impressive, and I hope to be able to see you guys in-action on the upcoming tour.

**Lauren:** Thank you for taking the time to talk to us! Hopefully we'll cross paths soon.



By [Olivia Snider](#), Monday, January 28th, 2013



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