

TEGAN AND SARA

Twin talents enjoy the view from the bright side on their latest project

AFTER 13 YEARS AND A DOZEN albums, identical twins Tegan and Sara Quin are not afraid of change. "We always aim to create a slightly different record each time we step into the studio," says Tegan. Take their latest album, *Hearthrob*. "Sara encouraged me to write outside my usual themes, like self-loathing, loss and heartbreak. So I wrote love songs for the first time—ever. And I encouraged her to write more traditionally, arrangement-wise. In the end, this record feels a lot more triumphant, romantic and empowered than the past few."

Pushing the creative envelope is exactly what fans have come to expect from the Canadian duo. And some of their loyal following are famous—from the White

Stripes, who covered their breakthrough "Walking With a Ghost" to superstar DJ's David Guetta and Tiësto, who have collaborated with the pair. They've toured with such diverse acts as Neil Young, Paramore, the Killers, Death Cab for Cutie and the Black Keys—and they've sold nearly a million albums along the way. Tegan and Sara have also found success in Hollywood, garnering song placements on *Parental Hood*, *Melrose Place* and *Grey's Anatomy*.

Now *Hearthrob*, their seventh studio album, finds the 32-year-old twins embracing a lighter attitude and more dance-friendly tempo than previous efforts. "We were hoping to tip the guitar-keyboard scale toward a heavier presence of keyboard

rather than guitar," says Tegan. Between shows, the sisters spoke to us about the making of their new record and the shift in their creative psyche.

What brought on the new attitude?

TEGAN: Likely our age and life experience. We're in our 30s now. We're successful in our careers and our personal relationships. We intentionally tried to write songs from a different perspective.

SARA: Some of it is about age, getting to a place in our lives where we are able to reflect on our relationships and past breakups with more empowerment and a wider lens of experience. It was natural to do something less passive than our last

album, *Sainthood*. I think this album and *Sainthood* work well as a call and answer to each other.

How important are demos?

SARA: The demo process for us is very comprehensive. The earliest stages had quite a lot of programming and harmonies. It's essential to us that any ideas we have are put on tape and considered in the studio, even if only as a suggestion or placeholder for something else down the road.

TEGAN: These aren't your basic two- or four-track guitar-vocal demos. For certain songs we probably did 80 demos. Sara and I like to experiment in the demo process. A lot of the vibe, arrangement and melodic ideas were already in place when we got to the studio.

What's your writing process?

TEGAN: Over the years, we've tried all sorts of different forms of collaboration. For *Hearthrob*, I had Sara write all my bridges. I was interested in really having a different voice in my music. For *Sainthood*, we collaborated on two songs. It was our first time actually sitting in a room and working in a session together, and I think it gave us understanding into each other's processes that we weren't aware of until that point. Ultimately, writing is a solitary experience. We prefer it that way. But now that we've collaborated successfully—and with other artists as well—we're always open to it. It's important to keep things fresh—especially after 17 years.

Are you ever concerned the music distracts from the lyrics?

TEGAN: We don't typically worry much about the emotional depth or lyrical content being missed by our fans. They definitely react a lot into the music and consistently find meaning in the songs that reflect their own lives and experiences. It's what most fans love about us.

SARA: Lyrics are very important to us—messaging is first and foremost. We feel strongly that the stories we're telling should be as honest and compelling as possible. The music on this album is more of a pop sound, but I don't think the two have to be disconnected. Some of my favorite pop songs have incredible lyrical depth, but also have a poppier sound—think about "Dancing in the Dark" by Bruce Springsteen.

TEGAN: If anything, the vibrant melodies and infectious sound create an interesting juxtaposition. That's exciting to us—it creates a challenge for the listener and the player.

How have you evolved as artists?
TEGAN: Our first two records were just about the songs. We were exploring our voices and our writing. We didn't get into the arrangements or sonic template much. Our next two records were when Sara and I started to record ourselves at home before we got into the studio, which led to a lot more experimentation instrumentally. With *The Con* and *Sainthood*, we were getting more adventurous and had certainly developed a strong sense of self. We were striving to hone in on what our sound really was. With *Hearthrob* we were specifically attempting to focus on creating classic, quintessential pop songs that reflected not only the music we loved growing up but also what we loved that's popular now. We decided not to worry about what anyone else was looking forward to hearing, and instead create something that was fresh and exciting to us.

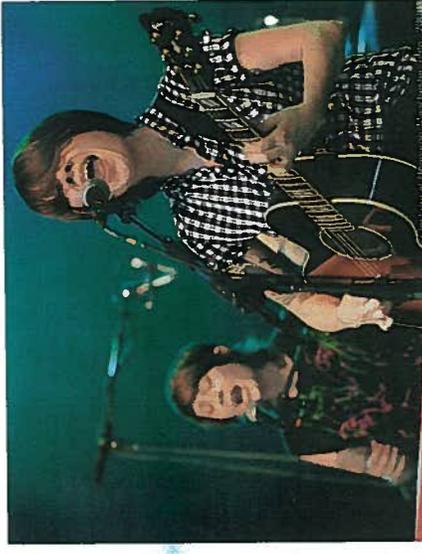
Does being sisters ever create its own set of challenges?
TEGAN: Of course. But over the last 13 years we've really learned to work together, and we've learned how not to push each other's buttons. I would never want to be in a band with anyone but Sara.

SARA: It's complicated to have a business and personal relationship with anyone for this long. We work hard to respect the two very different parts of our lives, and ultimately I've been grateful that our successes were celebrated together, and all that we

continue to accomplish is greater than any conflict we have.

Have your perspectives as openly gay women affected how audiences relate to you and your music?

TEGAN: I'm not sure. I'm much too embedded in our projects to know what people experience when they listen to us. But I assume it's like when I interact with people who aren't identical to me in terms of sexuality and gender. It's interesting to hear another perspective. Ultimately I don't think gay/love is much different from straight love. **SARA:** I think love and relationships are universal. I've always struggled to understand why my sexuality would devalue or exclude people who weren't like me from enjoying the music that I write. Which isn't to say that we haven't been cognizant of the influence or impact we've had on those



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in the gay community. We've seen our audience diversity over the years to reflect a broader demographic. But ultimately I see us as gay artists, and that shouldn't mean we're marginalized in the mainstream. —Lee Zimmerman

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