

NOIR

love

**indie darlings
tegan and sara are
both in love—
but they'll still
break your heart.
by lynn stafford,
photographed by
zoey grossman**

heart

Nostalgia isn't what it used to be. Over the last decade, the sister duo Tegan and Sara Quin have made some of indie-pop's most haunting heartbreak songs by gazing at their own respective pasts—rendering love's transcendence and brutality with equal clarity. Their seventh album, *Hearthrob*, stays true to form: The single "Closer" coos the breathless first promise "it's not just all physical/ I won't treat you like you're oh-so typical"; the true-to-life "Now I'm All Messed Up" sings with icy acceptance: "Go if you want/ I can't stop you." But if its lyrics hit love's highs and lows with the same deadly aim, the music's operatic, whooshing synths and breathless, pounding dance beats suggest that *Hearthrob* wormholed the Canadian-born twins into an alternate synth-pop universe. Bathed in a warm glow by lastmaking producers like Greg Kurstin (Ke\$ha, Sia, Santigold, Peaches, Lily Allen) and Justin Meldal-Johnsen (M83), the infectious new tracks may add chart-topping success to the critical accolades the duo has enjoyed nearly since the beginning. This isn't entirely an accident.

When they began work on their new album, Tegan and Sara knew it would be their first as thirtysomethings. "I'm an incredibly anal-retentive Virgo who's very organized," says Sara, 32. "So we wrote the list, and based on the list, we said, 'Listen, we want to make a record that can accomplish the goals—our life goals. How do we make a record like that?'"

Though they're true identical twins, Sara somehow seems the younger—a chattier, self-deprecating presence with her hair cut high above the ears. Tegan comes off minutes older and a few shades darker, wearing the same cut with more flyaways, and she uses less makeup: They speak in separate conversations—both over the din of an indoor water fountain that echoes in the giant marble lobby of the Westin Bonaventure hotel in Downtown Los Angeles—a day after they opened for the Black Keys at a sold-out Staples Center.

An arena suits the enormous new aural landscape of *Hearthrob*, which finds new space and depth for the girls' lyrics, adding pulsating synths and stadium-filling drums. "I think Tegan writes massive, massive songs," says Sara. "I think they're amazing, but I potentially misuse some of the quirkiness from what I do into what she does. I think Tegan's an immediate person. I'll labor over something much longer, and she's quick."

Both sought to remix these components into a new creative entity for *Hearthrob*. "I always say to people that listening to our old music for me is like looking at old photos of ourselves," says Tegan. "When I listen to them, I can't relate to [that] me anymore."

They sought producers who would push their creative limits. "We wanted to jump into the studio with people that we didn't know, who we didn't necessarily have any idea of what we were going to get with, and just dive in," says Tegan. "Because we're so comfortable as writers and musicians, we needed to break down that confidence and get back to our roots and challenge ourselves."

But as they set out for new sonic territory, songwriting soon took them in the opposite direction. "I started this trek back into my past, and that's when the real writing began," says Tegan. "I started thinking about going [back to the] pre-unrequited-love period in my life. When did I get rejected the first time? OK, just ignore everything that happened after that and go back to before." She pauses and smiles, as if recalling the giddy

swell of an early crush that yielded "Closer." "It's a very nostalgic time. You're falling in love, but you don't even think about telling the person, or kissing them, or wanting to be with them, or coming out, or any of that. You're so grateful that you know them that you just want to hang out with them all the time."

Sara chuckles at the idea of her sister channeling the intoxication of first love. "It's funny because Tegan wrote all the ones that are about love, and mine are all the breakup songs." She laughs. "It's weird because I'm not going through a breakup. I was starting to write this record, and I was also falling in love and getting into this new relationship—and I was completely fixated on what she could do to hurt me, based on what other people had done." She grins and adds: "I think I'm a hypochondriac when it comes to love."

In a way, this kind of hurt helped define Tegan and Sara for most of their career. Their beloved 2007 album *The Con* gave devastatingly vivid portrayals of real romantic turmoil. Its 2009 follow-up, *Sainthood*, explored obsessive romantic ideals. Both albums were produced by Death Cab for Cutie's Chris Walla, who, Sara says, "changed our lives."

Now, as producers like Kurstin and Meldal-Johnsen change their music, other people have changed their lives. Both girls are now happy in long-term relationships—Tegan with the same partner she's had for years; Sara in the relationship that sparked between the new album and its predecessor, *Sainthood*. But if the stars aligned to find both Tegan and Sara happy in love at the same time, their gift for dark, alluring heartbreak songs is in no danger. As anyone who's been there knows, a truly crushing break up is a gift that keeps on giving. "All it takes is one," says Sara. "I could have been dumped just once and literally write about it forever."

stylist: laila babad; hair: ramsell martinez at styleros makeup; samuel quill at jodi foot; from left: on sara leather jacket by allentates; shirt by daniel; tights by macledicia; collar pin by b.l.o. jewelry; on tegan: jacket by savanna woodward; shirt by durak lamp; jeans by Lou & Lona; collar pin by b.l.o. jewelry; ring by namela_love

