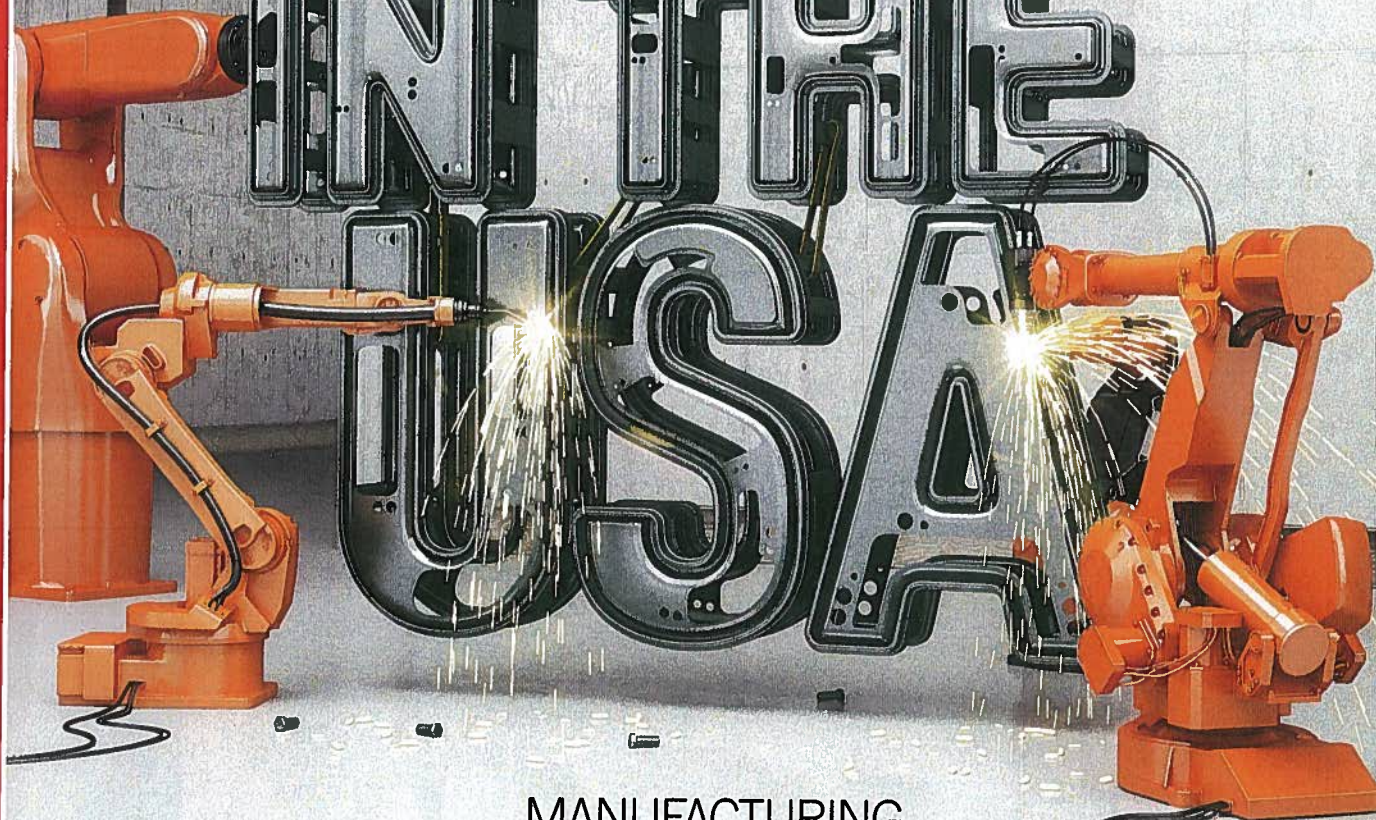


Too Old Dads My Bet on a Budget Deal By Joe Klein Iron Lady

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Music

Two of Hearts. Tegan and Sara take the long road to the stars

By Jesse Dorris

IN GREEK MYTHOLOGY, THE DIOSCURI were twin sons of Zeus who, upon death, transformed into the Gemini constellation, a navigational tool for sailors. They also appeared as St. Elmo's fire, scrambling compasses. They showed the way yet often confused travelers. Either way, no one could look away from them.

The pop-rock duo Tegan and Sara offers a similar combination of direction and dazzle. At 32, the twin sisters have spent half their lives in the music industry. Their career has built slowly and steadily, buoyed by endless touring and marked by flash points of exposure that should have brought them superstardom on the order of Lady Gaga—or at least Ke\$ha. Their seventh and most recent studio album, the euphoric *Heartthrob*, debuted at No. 3 on the *Billboard* album charts; they've performed its lead single, a fizzy wonder of a come-on called "Closer," on *Ellen* and seen it covered on *Glee*. This summer, they are touring 23 North American cities as the opening act for Grammy winner Fun. They are stylishly earnest—out and proud lesbians since their teens, tirelessly supportive of LGBT causes, their closets used only for skinny jeans—and earnestly stylish, with razor-sharp haircuts and gorgeous slouchy tailoring.

Somehow, strangely, they are still not household names—not quite, not yet. But they've never sounded happier.

Tegan and Sara Quin grew up outside Calgary, Alberta, "'80s feminist kids raised by a feminist social worker," as Tegan puts it, over coffee at their record label's office in New York City. At home, the girls con-

stantly recorded themselves with a Fisher-Price microphone. "We were also obsessed with recording TV shows on our portable stereo," Sara says, "just the audio, and then we would lie in bed and listen to them." They began recording songs of their own, written separately but played together. "We would make our own demo tapes"—two albums' worth, recorded at their high school's studio—"make artwork for them and sell them at school," Sara says.

They strummed acoustic guitars to start, fashioning self-mocking epigrams like "Take my heart/ Why don't you sign me up to sell me out?" Neil Young's manager called their bluff, signing them when they were 18 and putting them on a 2000 tour, opening for Young and the Pretenders. Another milestone was the accomplished 2004 album, *So Jealous*, which shined up their close harmonies with a coat of New Wave gloss; the haunting single "Walking With a Ghost" was covered by the not-yet-but-almost legends the White Stripes.

"It was the perfect description of a love I had lost in my life then," says Jack White. "I wished I'd written it myself. Those gals have beautiful voices—nice enough that sometimes it makes me want to kiss them. But I don't want to bother them with my problems."

They had problems of their own. The next few years brought opening spots for indie rockers the Killers, dates at mega-festival Coachella and their most successful album to date, 2007's *The Con*, which showcased skittering electronic beats and increasingly complicated vocal arrange-

ments alongside radio-ready gems like "Back in Your Head." But sales remained moderate. Tegan and Sara had stalled as a critically respected opening act, filling small venues in college towns, waiting for the stars to align. "There have been so many points," Tegan says, "when you think, Should we just accept that we're an underground, cult-status-type band and just be happy with it? Do what we love and something else on the side? Open a convenience store? I don't know."

They did none of the above. Instead, they went all in on branding. They put their logo on pencil cases and sweatpants. They partnered with Macbeth Footwear, run by Blink-182's Tom DeLonge, to sell vegan sneakers. For *Heartthrob*, they wrote superpolished, made-for-the-dance-club-or-the-elliptical anthems ("Goodbye, Goodbye," "Drove Me Wild") and some deceptively simple sing-along accounts of heartbreak ("Now I'm All Messed Up," "How Come You Don't Want Me"). Each one sounds equally at home in food courts and locavore coffee shops.

The change worked. Tegan shakes her head in wonder as she describes playing "Closer" to a deliriously receptive crowd at a huge outdoor theater in California—albeit still as an opening act, this time for fellow indie heroes the Shins. "When someone asks if we feel like we're selling out, I just say yes!" Tegan says merrily. "Because I want to change the way the pop mainstream looks. I want a girl like me there." In other words, they're making their own mythology, winning true believers one summer at a time. ■

A brief history of Tegan and Sara. Teen success, Twitter wars and tireless touring

1997 At 16, they make dozens of demos at their high school's recording studio



2000 They're signed and land a spot opening for Neil Young and the Pretenders



2001 They tour extensively behind their first Vapor album, *This Business of Art*, opening for the likes of Rufus Wainwright and Bryan Adams

2004 They update their sound (and win Jack White's fandom) with *So Jealous*



2009 After the somber *Sainthood*, they aim for a more accessible sound and image



2011 Sara criticizes the use of bigoted lyrics in the music industry, sparking angry tweets from rapper Tyler, the Creator, among others

2013 A mainstream milestone for a cult band: their fizzy single "Closer" is covered on *Glee*





Twin-sister pop duo Tegan and Sara (Tegan's on the left)