

camp

Coachella Valley Music & Arts Festival 2013





WILD BELLE

RIVALRY MEETS REVELRY WHEN SIBLINGS DECIDE TO MAKE BEAUTIFUL MUSIC TOGETHER

FAMILY VALUES

by Drew Teaksbury

"Brothers and sisters, pump up the volume!" It's not just a decree postulated by the proto-electro act M|A|R|R|S. It's a scientific fact. From the five Jacksons to Oasis' Gallagher brothers, when family members decide to write, record and perform music together, the results are anything but ordinary. But after all the fights and forgiveness—the inside jokes and the outward oddities—blood is the tie that binds. We asked indie duo Tegan and Sara, fuzzed-up garage rockers JEFF the Brotherhood, and blissed-out dub-pop act Wild Belle what's it like to work alongside someone you've known your whole life.

"We did not choose. We grew up in the country with no friends," laughs JEFF the Brotherhood's Jake Orrall of their Tennessee upbringing. The sons of RCA recording artist and acclaimed Nashville songwriter Robert Ellis Orrall, Jake and brother Jamir took matters into their own hands and went the DIY route. "I played a miniature drum kit and Jamir played a replica of Paul McCartney's signature bass made from rubber bands and cardboard."

Similarly, music has always been a family affair for Natalie and Elliot Bergman of Wild Belle—a fortunate byproduct of

having not one but two musically inclined parents. "There was music all around us growing up," Elliot says. "Our mom played jazz piano and guitar in open D tuning, so there was lots of Gershwin and Cole Porter coming from the piano and Dylan and Joni Mitchell coming from the guitar. Natalie always liked to set up a little show to impress my friends. This usually consisted of a portable boombox and some Whitney Houston or Mariah Carey tunes belted from her 8-year-old soul."

The Quin sisters, Tegan and Sara, spent their adolescent years obsessing over 1990s grunge acts like Nirvana and Hole. After tinkering on the guitar, Sara was the first one to kick off their career. "We didn't actually start writing or playing together until we were 15," Tegan remembers. "I was home sick from school and Sara came in after school with the guitar and wrote me a funny song called 'Tegan Didn't Go To School Today.' When I got better, we started writing together."

For all three bands, the kinship of family not only helped assuage the social aspects of being in a band, it also helped stoke the creative spirit that can only be forged between two people who instantly get one another.



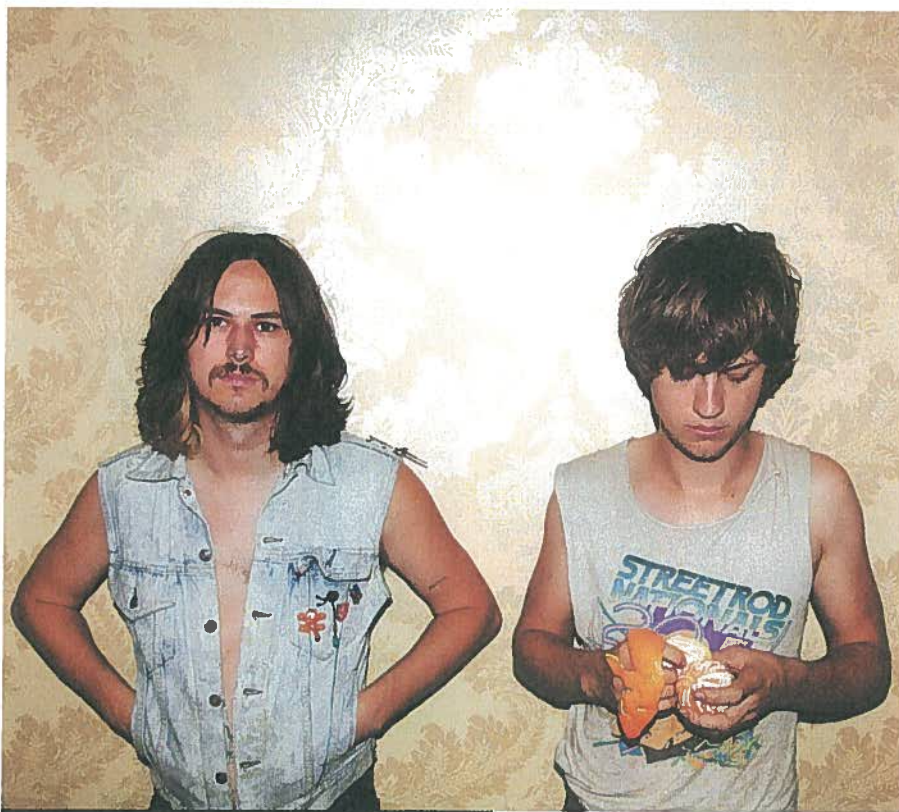
TEGAN AND SARA

“I don’t want us to appear too ‘twinny’ but...we are,” says Tegan. “From the very first collaboration we did, it was obvious to both of us—and our parents, who we were opening through Sara’s bedroom door—that when we worked together, performed together, helped each other—we were better.”

The Bergmans echo the idea that there’s an innate understanding and common creative language that goes along with being related. “We have a pretty similar vocabulary in terms of musical ideas and the sounds that we are drawn to,” Elliot says. “It makes for a fruitful and easy collaboration. We always go through a long process in the studio while searching for the magic button—the thing that transforms a song into what it should be. Natalie often comes to the studio with GarageBand demos and then we break them down, breaking them down and building them back again.”

When it comes to their creative process, the Quin sisters have found a formula that works well for them. “Sara has patience when it comes to writing. I don’t,” Tegan says. “She takes her time, rewrites constantly and consistently tries to look at it from a new perspective. It’s inspiring.”

Being in a band with a brother or sister isn’t always easy. Refer to the epic dust-ups between Liam and Noel Gallagher of Oasis, who wreaked havoc upon any room that had the audacity to house both of them at the same time.



JEFF THE BROTHERHOOD



The Jacksons were notorious for the animosity and backstabbing that happened behind closed doors. All collaborations are flammable, and when a spark ignites, no one is immune from the fire. Thankfully, however, these three sibling duos have figured out how to keep tempers from flaring too high.

"One time Natalie shoved me and then ran away to hide in the ladies' room!" Elliot jokes about Wild Belle's battles. Jamin says that fights in the Brotherhood camp usually involve "a lot of yelling," but Tegan believes that no matter what kind of rivalries spring up, sisters have a resiliency that can keep them together.

"Siblings fight, but more than anyone else, siblings get over things fast," Tegan says. "I think we both recognize that for most people it would not be possible to work, travel, share and live with your sibling 250-plus days of the year. So we take comfort in that. We're able to get through most days without any issues. So when we do have issues, we accept that it's part of the natural order of things."

For the Bergmans, the close quarters of traveling and the long days and nights on the road are familiar. They had plenty of practice packed into the car for their family road trips. The ups and downs of those *National Lampoon*-style vacations, Elliot says, helped make it easier to roll with the punches today.

"We did 'the great American road trip' when we were young," Elliot says, "before seatbelt laws were enforced. The kids had sort of a party pad in the back—a mini-cooler stocked with the Clearly Canadian and baby carrots, and a portable TV / VCR to pass the hours. We went to the Badlands, Devil's Tower, Rushmore and a few other national parks. It was formative and perhaps influenced our tendency to be road dogs! [Now] when [we] get out to the great plains, [we] play a game called Mountain or Cloud? We also have a penchant for spotting bald eagles, hawks and other birds of prey. We've spotted over 15 bald eagles this year!"

Being family members makes many aspects of being in a band easier, yet Tegan says being labeled "a sibling band" can also be a hindrance. The novelty of their act, as well as the close connection to a bandmate, can be limiting at times. "Sometimes I wonder if we both stay with Tegan and Sara because we feel like we have to," she says. "Neither of us would ever want to let each other down. So maybe once a year, I wonder if we are on the path we are supposed to be on. I worry that Sara stays in the band because she feels like if she doesn't, I won't have anything else to do. That's the worst!"

But despite it all, Tegan says having a sister on her team creates a system of support that's unstoppable: "She's got my back and I have hers." Elliot agrees. Playing music is in their blood, and that creative connection transcends it all. "There's a level of comfort and trust that is hard to beat," he says. "You can't mess with family!"

photos: Tegan & Sara by Lindsey Burns; JEFF the Brotherhood by Jo McCaughey; Wild Belle by Jennifer Tzar (first page) and Tom Oxley (this page)

