

The risk of making anything that becomes beloved is that it comes to define you, to foster expectations of what you do and even who you are. Only a glance at the vast catalogs of cousins Mike and Nate Kinsella shows how wide their musical interests have always been, from the idiosyncratic experiments of Nate's Birthmark and his time in the great Make Believe to Mike's twisting path among Cap'n Jazz and Owen. (Fun fact: They both even shared stints in Joan of Arc.) But at least right now, Nate and Mike's most recognizable work together may be their contributions to American Football, a band that entered its celebrated second act after a 14-year absence, just in time for a vaunted emo revival. Nate joined American Football for that return, *LP2*, and 2019's *LP3*, buttressing their tender songs and skywriting guitars with his strong but subtle bass. Perhaps even to their surprise, The Kinsellas became newly synonymous with American Football.

But as the pair prepared to start writing new American Football tunes, perhaps noodling with guitars in the same room, Nate revealed a series of short synthesizer loops, potential prompts for a different sort of pop song. "I want to be in *that* band," Mike remembers telling him. And so, now they are: LIES, the new Kinsella cousin duo, represents the first time they have written together without anyone else. What's more, their gripping self-titled debut, *Lies*, rewrites the way Nate and Mike are expected to sound, breaking free of what could have come to define them.

These are explosive but intricate pop songs, their striking hooks nested in glorious composites of keyboard melodies and digital textures, powerhouse rhythms and sweeping strings. Above propulsive drums and kaleidoscopic sequencers that will excite the Depeche Mode faithful, Mike croons of modern disaffection during "Camera Chimera." A brooding but beautiful survey of betrayal, "Rouge Vermouth" suggests Tears for Fears on a morphine drip, keyboards refracted like sunlight split by raindrops. The bass propulsion of "No Shame," the tricky rhythms of "Knife," the danceable dynamics of "Broken": These are among the most compulsive and instant songs the Kinsellas have written in long-distinguished careers of memorable tunes.

The last three years forced most people to change how they approached everything, of course, especially work. Mike and Nate found freedom in their own shifts, the sudden flexibility it empowered. LIES began innocently enough, with Nate using the Propellerhead app to create loops for fun and even soundtrack runs. (A note to the copy editors of the planet: The band is LIES, and the album is *Lies*. Sorry!) When he'd made 40 or so, he wondered if there was more there. Song sketches started to take shape, and he named each bit for the artist it seemed to invoke: Robyn, Majical Cloudz, Peter Gabriel, and so on.

He and Mike grew excited and started rendezvousing every few days on Zoom to spitball ideas and share what they'd done. In Brooklyn, Nate would obsess over the arrangements; in Chicago, Mike would write about the obsessive aspects of love and what happens when it breaks. They felt open and enthusiastic, instantly unbridled from the compromises of writing with a full band that people already adored.

The pair finally knew they had enough to make it official, so they met at Mike Mogis' ARC Studios in Omaha, a space that was welcoming and familiar from American Football's two recent albums. For the first session, they had six songs carefully mapped, so they cut them fast and headed home. For their second trip to Omaha, they decided to trust the intense musical bond

they'd developed during the prior two decades, a bond that seemed innate since their shared days in Joan of Arc, anyway. They left things open to chance, writing in the studio like a veteran act. The results floored them. Nate tinkered with the tracks back in Brooklyn, working with acclaimed mixing engineer Sonny DiPerri to sculpt those two Omaha visits into this glorious hour-long escapade.

*Lies* charts the sometimes-difficult terrain of what it is to navigate a relationship, to power past feelings of deceit and doubt and move forward, toward an amorphous hope. Mike has written very explicitly about fractious divorce in the past, but, here, he funneled his experiences through the lenses of the songwriters these sounds invoked—Dave Gahan, Robert Smith, and Robyn among them. He's not so much as playacting as using surprising points of inspiration to step outside of expectations and gain a new perspective, the animating premise of LIES. From the apologetically lustful "Corbeau" and the unapologetically sensuous "Blemishes" to the abyssal lowering of "Summer Somewhere," *Lies* is a remarkably cohesive and complete portrait of what it means to feel your way through a world built on relationships. These songs are so mighty that you feel like you're right there for the rides between drama and possible redemption.

Mike and Nate struggled to come up with a name for this project. How do you label something that was just a light way to spend time together during a dark era? And how do you label something knowing people will inevitably compare it to the thing they already know? (By the way, American Football isn't going away again; this is simply a second band for two cousins and friends who have always had several things going on at once.) They liked LIES because it was straightforward and cutting, even daring. But there's a wonderful if unintentional irony to LIES, too, because this is actually the truth of two people following shared muses, of indulging sounds they love simply because, well, they love them.