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Talk of the South

YOUR MONTHLY GUIDE TO SOUTHERN CULTURE

SIBLING REVELRY

Sisters Shelby Lynne (left) and Allison Moorer, photographed at the High Line Hotel in New York City. On Lynne: Dress by Solace London. Boots by Prada (Lynne's own). On Moorer: Dress by Alejandra Alonso Rojas. Ring by Lady Grey.

Styling by Karen Schijman; hair by Andreas Schönaeger using Redken @ Utopia; makeup by Clizia Bergonzani using MAC @ Utopia

In Tune

Shelby Lynne and Allison Moorer join forces for an album born of the bonds of sisterhood

by

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THERE'S A MOUTHWATERING SMELL COMING FROM THE KITCHEN of Allison Moorer's Lower Manhattan apartment. "Would you like some bacon?" she asks radiantly. "I made biscuits too." ¶ "Go on, get your biscuit on," urges Shelby Lynne, Moorer's older sister, who is curled up on the couch tickling the stomach of Petey, the house Chihuahua. Moorer's cozy living room is a shrine to a busy working artist and mother. Photographs cover the walls, including many of her now seven-year-old son with ex-husband Steve Earle, John Henry, who was diagnosed with severe autism at twenty-three months. A tower of books sits next to the computer and desk, where Moorer is trying to finish her memoir, and pinned on the wall nearby is a white paper thank-you card in the shape of a guitar from a second-grade class at P.S. 51, where she recently taught a poetry workshop. ¶ Lynne, who just flew in on the red-eye from her home in Los Angeles, finishes off a biscuit. "They're good, Sissy," she says. "They're moist." Still, Lynne maintains their grandmother is the "best biscuit maker on the planet."

"But I know for a fact Nanny uses Crisco," Moorer responds. "I use butter in mine. More fattening."

"That's right, Sissy," Lynne says, nodding.

As the two banter back and forth, "Sissy," it becomes apparent, is an interchangeable nickname. "We've been calling each other Sissy and confusing the shit out of people for a long time," Moorer says, laughing. "It's a secret language."

Music, too, has been a form of communication the pair have long shared. They grew up in rural Alabama, listening to the Everly Brothers and Emmylou Harris, and singing was a daily part of life, oftentimes with their mother. The trio would sing three-part harmonies on songs such as the 1920s standard "Side by Side." But they also share a complicated and painful web of emotional history. When they were just teenagers, their father shot and killed their mother before taking his own life in the driveway of the family home. Music became a refuge, with Lynne soon moving to Nashville and Moorer following shortly thereafter.

Today, with more than twenty albums and a host of honors between them, Lynne and Moorer have established themselves individually as two of roots music's most recognizable artists. The forty-eight-year-old Lynne, who won the Best New Artist Grammy in 2001, has the more eclectic catalogue, dabbling in Southern rock, mainstream country, soul, and big-band jazz. Moorer, who is forty-five, has traveled mainly in the Americana

realm, peppering her work with restrained folk and crunchy guitar rock and earning an Oscar nomination (for her song "A Soft Place to Fall," featured in the 1998 film *The Horse Whisperer*), among other plaudits. But while the duo have performed together a handful of times in recent years, they've never collaborated on a record until now.

Out in August, *Not Dark Yet* finds the sisters interpreting a diverse collection of songs by artists ranging from Merle Haggard and Jessi Colter to Bob Dylan (whose 1997 song gave the album its title) and Jason Isbell, along with curveballs from Nirvana and the Las Vegas glam rockers the Killers. The sisters' voices and harmonies are front and center, heaving with emotions that range from majestic power to delicate near-whispers and contemplative exhales. A co-penned original, "Is It Too Much?," serves as a coda to *Not Dark Yet*, an emotional gut punch with lyrics that tackle dealing with the weight of the past: "Is it too much to carry in your heart?"

DOUBLE VISION

Not Dark Yet marks the first time Lynne and Moorer have recorded an album together. On Lynne: Top by Joie. Jeans by Frame. Boots by Prada (Lynne's own). On Moorer: Jumpsuit by Hellessy. Sandals by Paul Andrew.

No one else hears the rain fall. No one else hears the ghosts at all. Is it too much to carry in your heart?"

The two had batted around the idea of recording together for years, even trying to make an album six years ago, a tumultuous process that ended in a blowout fight and the pair not speaking to each other for a time. But in the summer of 2016, Moorer decamped to Lynne's house in Hollywood, where the older Sissy had turned her living room into a studio. This time—along with producer Teddy Thompson, guitar great Doug Pettibone, and keyboardist Benmont Tench of Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers—they worked quickly but confidently, trusting that their shared instincts would help them land on just the right mix.

"We chose the songs that would best reflect life now as forty-year-old women," Lynne says. "But we look at music individually in different ways. I could listen to [Miles Davis's] *Kind of Blue* all day and never hear a lyric and I'd be perfectly fine with that. I've

listened to that record thirty times a day when I'm writing. It opens me somehow. But then I'll walk in here and she's got *Solid Country Gold* playing."

Some songs, such as "Not Dark Yet" and the Louvin Brothers' "Every Time You Leave," which the sisters have sung since they were kids, were no-brainers. Others, like the stunning album opener, "My List," by the Killers, took some cajoling. "Sissy had to talk me into that one," Lynne says.

"The first time I heard that song, I thought of Sissy," Moorer explains. "She's on my list, meaning 'You're my person,'" she says, pointing at her sister. "It floored me because it's so open and honest. 'I'm not giving up on you, so don't think for a second you're getting rid of me.' I just thought we needed to do it." ¶

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