

Since their 2010 self-titled debut, The Secret Sisters have brought their spellbinding harmonies to songs that untangle the thorniest aspects of life and love and womanhood. In the making of their new album, *Mind, Man, Medicine*, Alabama-bred siblings Laura Rogers and Lydia Slagle found their songwriting transformed by a newfound sense of self-reliance and equanimity, threading their lyrics with hard-won insight into the complexities of motherhood, commitment, compassion, and self-preservation in an endlessly chaotic world. Centered on a kaleidoscopic sound that boldly blurs the edges of country-folk, the duo's fifth full-length ultimately confronts many of modern life's harshest challenges while leading the listener toward a more open-hearted state of mind.

"In our previous records there was a feeling that we had something to prove, but now we're leaning toward a place of peaceful acceptance and trying to stay immersed in the present," says Slagle, noting that their shared experience in parenting young children greatly informed that shift in perspective. "There are definitely still moments of frustration and anger on this album, but there's also a little more light," Rogers adds. "I think a lot of that came from getting older, and from letting go of the pressure we put on ourselves in the past. We finally reached the point of saying, 'Let's just write the songs honestly as we can, and trust that they'll reach whoever they're meant to reach.'"

The follow-up to *Saturn Return*—their 2020 Grammy-nominated LP co-produced by Brandi Carlile and lavishly praised by the likes of *Rolling Stone*—*Mind, Man, Medicine* finds The Secret Sisters co-producing alongside Ben Tanner (Alabama Shakes, St. Paul & the Broken Bones) and John Paul White (formerly of Grammy-winning duo the Civil Wars). "On *Saturn Return* we'd gotten much more confident as far as directing the sound of the record and knowing how to capture our voices in the most honest way, so it felt like the right time for our first foray into production," says Rogers. The latest in a series of critically lauded releases, the album came to life at FAME Studios (the historic spot in their hometown of Muscle Shoals) and at Sun Drop Sound in nearby Florence, with contributions from such esteemed musicians as Alabama Shakes bassist Zac Cockrell and legendary multi-instrumentalist Larry Campbell (Paul Simon, Willie Nelson, Levon Helm).

Referring to The Secret Sisters' latest chapter as "one where we seek, savor, and settle," the duo lifted the title to *Mind, Man, Medicine* from a lyric in "Same Water": a gorgeously bluesy meditation on the search for healing in a profoundly troubled world, channeling both weariness and empathy with soulful conviction. "There's a line in 'Same Water' that says 'Mind or man or medicine/I have tried them all,' which feels like it encompasses everything we were trying to say on this record," Slagle explains. "In a lot of these songs we're struggling with our own minds and emotions, with our relationships, and with whatever we're using to try to cope and find relief."

In a lovely introduction to the album's expansive sound, *Mind, Man, Medicine* opens on a hypnotic number called "Space." With its stark yet sprawling arrangement of luminous piano, otherworldly synth, and moody guitar tones—achieved in part through Slagle's performance on rubber bridge guitar—"Space" infuses an element of dreamy psychedelia into The Secret Sisters' contemplation of human connection and all its intricacies. "It's about recognizing that loving someone isn't always going to be easy, especially when they have a belief or a political leaning that you disagree with," says Rogers. "It's so simple to project your desires onto someone else, but in the end you have to hold onto what you love and value about them, even when it gets tough."

In its lived-in exploration of what holds us together and tears us apart, *Mind, Man, Medicine* delves further into nuanced social commentary on "If the World Was a House." "We've all heard about moments in history where people collectively experienced something very challenging, but ended up coming out of it stronger," says Rogers. "When I look at the world around us, it seems like the pandemic didn't have that effect—if anything, it feels like we're even more divided now. That song is

wrestling with a longing for everyone to take better care of each other, and to recognize that every person you share the planet with matters just as much as you do.”

Astute observers of the heart’s most intimate dimensions, The Secret Sisters also offer up such wildly effusive love songs as “Paperweight”—a prime showcase for their deep-rooted country sensibilities, graced with galloping rhythms and a bit of exquisitely nimble fiddle work from Campbell. “I tend to go with the flow in a way that can be unhealthy, where I sometimes hold back from speaking up for myself because I don’t want to ruffle any feathers,” says Slagle. “But one thing that’s always made everything feel solid and stable is my relationship with my husband, so I wrote ‘Paperweight’ about having that person who keeps you grounded when you feel like you might just float away.” Meanwhile, on “All The Ways,” singer/songwriter Ray LaMontagne lends his raspy vocals to a slow-burning track touched with all the sublime simplicity and low-slung grooves of classic R&B. “I love those moments in a live show when everyone sings together and there’s a feeling of the artist and audience sharing in the song’s performance,” says Rogers. “I wanted to create a chorus like that—something everyone can sing at the top of their lungs—and eventually it evolved into a song about feeling strong and powerful in your own femininity.”

Elsewhere on *Mind, Man, Medicine*, The Secret Sisters bring their layered introspection and boundless sensitivity to such complicated subjects as fractured friendships (“Never Walk Away”), the interconnectedness of love and advocacy (“I’ve Got Your Back”), the loss of identity often experienced in the early stages of motherhood (“Bear With Me”), and the singular joy of truly conditional love (“I Can Never Be Without You Anymore”). “Through our experience in raising children, Lydia and I have both had the realization that there’s nowhere we could go on this entire planet where our hearts won’t be with our kids,” says Rogers in discussing the inspiration behind “I Can Never Be Without You Anymore.” “That can be a difficult reality at times, but it’s glorious as well. I’m really proud of that one, and of the fact that we were able to write a love song that comes from a less painful place than many of our love songs in the past.”

Looking back on the creation of *Mind, Man, Medicine*, The Secret Sisters reveal that the immense support of their fans played a major role in their willingness to tread previously uncharted emotional terrain. “I remember playing a show last fall and expressing my gratitude to the crowd that they’d come out to see us, because as mothers of young children we now understand how challenging that can be,” says Rogers. “Later on that night a woman came up to us with her daughter and husband and said something like, ‘I know it’s so hard to leave your babies—but you leaving your babies at home for a little while is what makes moments like this happen for other families.’ It was so gratifying to hear that, and reminded me of the whole purpose behind the music that we make: it’s to benefit the hearts of other people, anyone who needs that healing or validation or connection, or even just the space to cry. That’s why we keep doing this.”