

Lucius is family. When I first heard their tight and fluid harmonies in 2012, I figured Holly and Jess were siblings. Then I saw a photo with their matching hair and outfits, which reassured me. WRONG! Holly Laessig and Jess Wolfe are best friends. They met at Berklee College of Music in their teens, nearly 20 years ago.

The story of Lucius comes full circle on this new self-titled and self-produced album. It was loosely inspired by a recent re-recording of their debut album, *Wildewoman*, roughly ten years after its release. Jess Wolfe told me redoing that record “really struck a chord. It reminded us of who we were as a band when it all started, each of us integral to the sound. If one thing is off, it falls apart. That sort of vulnerability, playing on the edge, was a coming home, and solidified the decision to nurture that feeling again in the studio”.

Dan Molad is not only the drummer, and Pete Lalish not only the wild card guitar player; they both play synths, guitars, and bass, bringing inventive arrangements - with Dan producing, helping to establish and capture the sound and dynamics of the group.

When they got together to write, it was often talking through relationships, grief, and home life. Pete lost his mom to Parkinson's; both Holly and Jess had miscarriages. There was also the divorce between Jess and Dan after seven years of marriage. More children were born; for Pete and for Jess, it was each of their first. So, the roots of this album are domestic, personal experiences.

In the past, Holly and Jess wrote most of the songs alone, though, for this album, they did much of it in the same room with Dan, creating tracks amidst the writing sessions; the creative spark flowed. As a band, they wanted to return to their own devices and not seek outside influence to bring their songs to fruition. “For the first time, Jess and Holly brought me into the room when songs were just seeds. And that's been really exciting. I'll connect one synth, dial up a sound, and tell Jess or Holly, ‘Go fiddle on this,’ and as they fiddle, then I fiddle,” says Dan.

Lucius often plays with duality, reflection, and symmetry, echoed in their onstage look, singing as one voice - “dressing the sound” as they call it. You can hear the personalities come through on this record; Holly is more of the introvert and Jess more of the extrovert, the balance between inner dialogue and an invitation.

The album opens with “Final Days,” a musically rousing but lyrically devastating cut. The opening line, “I hope I didn't let you down 'cause it's too late to make a change.” The chorus is the gut punch. “Could've said I'm frightened but I couldn't, I didn't have the heart. Are you scared of dying?”

I assumed the subject was an aging parent. Holly started the lyrics with two parallel meanings. “I had to have a tree taken down in my yard; it was the biggest, oldest, most majestic in the neighborhood. I had dream plans for a treehouse...but ultimately, it became a safety hazard when it started to die. I sat in the yard the day before they came to take it down and started the verses from the beginning. Flipping between wondering if I had neglected this tree and let it down and laughing at myself for even thinking that I could hold that much power in a couple of years over something as grand as her. But as the words came out, they began to sound a lot like the human experience of loss and grief in general. We always

love playing with duality and double meanings and taking simple or seemingly naive things like saying goodbye to a tree and, in the same breath, feeling the depth and potency of love and loss.”

The music performances on this entire record are filled with a craft that brings the most out of the words. This isn't simply beats and melody while the singers tell a tale. The instruments intertwine in ways that are both organic and purposeful.

There are collaborations on this new album; it wasn't done in complete isolation. Old friends visited and contributed to the Lucius family, including War On Drugs guitarist Adam Granduciel on the song “Old Tape,” Dawes' Taylor Goldsmith on “Stranger Danger,” and a songwriting collaboration with Madison Cunningham along with Ethan Gruska for a tune titled, “Impressions.”

Following their 2013 debut, Lucius began playing more prominent stages, touring, and building a thriving and enthused fan base. At the Newport Folk Festival, they became a staple not only as a band, but with Holly and Jess joining My Morning Jacket, Brandi Carlile, Mavis Staples, John Prine, Paul Simon, Wilco, Joni Mitchell, and Pink Floyd's Roger Waters.

Jess and Holly would later join Roger Waters' tour, singing backup and recording an album with him and Nigel Godrich. They worked on other recordings with John Legend, Harry Styles, Sheryl Crow, Ozzy Osborne, Nathaniel Rateliff, The Killers, and the War On Drugs, to name a few. In 2022, Dave Cobb and Brandi Carlile helped produce their 3rd official release, *Second Nature*.

“We've loved working with some of the great producers of our time: Shawn Everett, Tony Berg, Richard Swift, John Congleton, Dave Cobb, and Brandi,” says Pete. “But it was important to get back to our home base with Danny at the helm producing; his patience and persistence in seeing a song through to the end. The soul of the band has always been about helping to bring Jess and Holly's words, melodies, and harmonies to life and it was so nice to just revisit what Lucius has become for each of us over the years - less of a band and more of a family.” Those outside encounters and collaborations, plus their 18 years of deep friendship, have taken them home with 11 songs under one roof. It's called *Lucius*.

- Bob Boilen, January, 2025