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Veronicas double their pleasure

Australian twins Jessica and Lisa Origliasso are big back home. Now 'Untouched' has given them a U.S. following.

AUGUST BROWN

In the music world, it's rarely a bad time to be staggeringly attractive twin sisters who make club-friendly techno-pop about kissing other girls in dark corners.

But somehow, Australia's the Veronicas managed to find one in 2008. Their former tour mates, the Jonas Brothers, had the sibling angle on lockdown and, in America at least, Katy Perry and Lady Gaga staked first claims to post-post-feminism, flirting openly with bisexuality on the dance floor.

Though top sellers in Australia, Jessica and Lisa Origliasso seemed consigned to the long list of neglected-in-America acts after their second album, "Hook Me Up," was released with zero fanfare last August in the U.S. by Sire Records.

But the 24-year-olds have hit an unlikely sweet spot recently with their single "Untouched" — a lithe bit of ravey shoegaze teenpop written with longtime producer Toby Gad.

Word of mouth and constant touring have moved more than a million sales of "Untouched" in the U.S. and have left the band in an unusual place in America's pop scene: that of a striving Top 40 act whose newly rougher electro edges have a ready place in today's mainstream.

"We love bands like CSS and MGMT, but when you think of dance music, you don't usually think of honest lyrics," Jessica Origliasso said. "But that's what's different about this record."

Unlike their more guitar-centric and sensitive debut, "The Secret Life of . . ." "Hook Me Up" details the travails of a vigorous nightlife regimen and the first twinges that it all might be an empty show. (Think Bloc Party's "A Weekend in the City," minus the politics and with an impressive knee-high boots collection.)

"Untouched" slips from cloying catcalls into a blown-



CHRIS COLLIS

DUO: "We like challenging what people expect from pop," says Lisa, left, with sis Jessica.

out emo-disco chorus, while "Take Me on the Floor," with its lascivious, tossed-off bridge of "I want to kiss a girl / I want to kiss a boy," helped spur tabloid rumors about Jessica Origliasso's sexual preferences. Lisa Origliasso's recent breakup with fiancé and former "Australian Idol" contestant Dean Geyer has added unintended resonance to more tender numbers such as "This Love"; Geyer also starred in the video as her love interest.

Although all this is old hat to Australia, the Veronicas' recent American upswing has given them a chance to recalibrate away from celebrity and toward their intended aims —

crafting catchy and decadent pop with touches of post-adolescent angst. A cameo as the house band at the prom on the CW network's "90210" on May 12 seems entirely apropos.

"It was like I was their shrink digging deep into their private emotions," said Gad, the writer-producer who co-penned "Untouched" and whose credits include Fergie's "Big Girls Don't Cry." "Listening to them, you can tell that the artist has really suffered and that every word is true."

At this point, it seems that the duo, fresh off an Australian tour with the like-minded L.A. quartet Metro Station and due to head out on the U.S. festival

circuit in May, finally might be able to realize their brasher impulses while staying firmly in the pop orbit.

In other words, they can have the Jonas Brothers on speed dial but cause the kind of trouble that would make Disney execs blow a blood vessel.

"We like challenging what people expect from pop music," Lisa Origliasso said. "In Australia, we get bigger venues and can splurge on light rigs and hotel rooms, but in America we can do smaller club tours where the boys in the band will go out to party and we can be like 'Take us!'"

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