

Escape Route

BRITT STUBBE TALKS TO SUPERSTAR **GWEN STEFANI** ABOUT SOLO ALBUM #2 (*THE SWEET ESCAPE*), MOTHERHOOD, AND HOW A BABY HAS TEMPERED HER VANITY...AT LEAST A LITTLE

London, UK – One of Gwen Stefani's assistants enters the hotel room in haste. Gwen's coming," she whispers as she lifts the coaster covering the scented candle on the table. It's a Haru candle. Retail value: 58 dollars. She holds a lighter to the wick and an eastern aroma wafts through the air.

Less than ten seconds later, the door opens. Gwen Stefani has returned from lunch with her stylist, nanny and two friends. The room is suddenly full of commotion. The No Doubt singer and solo star carries her five-month-old son Kingston to the bedroom en suite.

She is thinner than ever and still overwhelmingly beautiful, although she doesn't look like she just stepped out of a video today. "When you have a child, you cannot wear your prettiest things because before you know it your beautiful dress has been spit on and the beads of your necklace are rolling all over the floor," she says, laughing.

Stefani looks relaxed and remarkably approachable for a superstar of her caliber. While in our previous interviews she would sit in a chair at some distance, Stefani now settles down on the couch next to me. And she has finally lost the annoying little-girl edge to her voice. She says she has been tired all the

time these last few months. "Two weeks ago, I was still singing, and now the album is finished. The single ['Wind It Up'] was already playing on the radio as I drove to the studio to record the last tracks. And on top of that I'm a mom so it all adds up."

The album, *The Sweet Escape*, sounds anything but a rush job. The songs are at least as catchy as those on the first, *Love Angel Music Baby*, as well as more personal and coherent. Stefani has learned which songs suit her best and which producers she prefers. As on *L.A.M.B.*, Pharrell Williams produced the majority of tracks, with ex-boyfriend (and No Doubt bassist) Tony Kanal contributing a few songs.

Q: I thought your second solo album was going to mostly consist of leftover material from your first album, *L.A.M.B.*

It looked like it was going to be. I had a lot of good songs still lying around, and a year ago I went into the studio with Pharrell to just record a few extra tracks. The album was planned for Christmas [2005], but I got pregnant and my creativity just plummeted.

After giving birth, I thought, 'I'm going back to the studio.' I wanted to change a thing or two about the album. It was like redecorating a house. Once you start painting one wall you have to do the others, too. And then you end up wanting a new couch with matching lamps. So I threw a lot of the old songs away. *L.A.M.B.* was pretty retro, lots of Eighties dance songs. I was kind of over that sound – it had to be more *now*; fresher and damn good. Most songs were written in the last three months so now I'm really beat.

You went back to work soon after the birth even though this is your chance to live your Italian-mama dream.

[Laughs] Before you become a mommy you don't know what it's gonna feel like at all; like getting engaged or getting married, the big things that happen in life. When I was pregnant, I wasn't, like, living on a pink cloud at all. It was really hard – it didn't feel at all as natural as I had hoped. [I dealt with] all

we go through rough spots, but, like I said, so do other couples. I am very happy with Gavin. And you really shouldn't take all my lyrics literally. I co-wrote that song with Pharrell. We've become good friends by now, and his experiences were also worked into the song. It is most of all about the fear of losing someone.

Nevertheless, you make those lyrics very personal. For instance, the lines: 'K, now gonna call you at home and leave another sorry message / You've got your voicemail on / I'm so frustrated'.

The baby is crying. Do your maternal instincts make you want to go to him?

[Very relaxed] No, I didn't even hear it.

That's very refreshing that you are so relaxed. Most mothers would have trouble concentrating.

I sometimes don't even hear it I'm so used to him. My parents are there, my nanny and my friends. They are having a ball with him right now. I am blessed with all these people who are so good for my son. I can imagine how for

Two years ago you thought becoming a mother would end your vanity.

[Laughing] How naive can one be? It would have been nice to have a break from my vanity for a minute, but it didn't happen. What's worse I couldn't stand the extra pounds that I still had after my pregnancy. Vanity, it's all part of human nature. And I was so happy to be able to work again after giving birth, to be someone outside of the home.

Have you become addicted to success?

Yes, I'm like a total junkie. Nothing beats the rush of having a huge hit. But writing songs is still the greatest sensation. Making a good song is like giving birth to a child. Less intense, of course, but the great sense of pride and joy are similar. Despite my enduring addiction to success, motherhood has changed me in a positive way.

Was there much room for improvement?

Yes. I think I'm improved in a lot of ways. You automatically become less egoistical when you become a mother, a good thing in my case. I live in a world that largely revolves around me. Now that I have Kingston I feel an enormous responsibility for someone else, and that feels good. Even though I love to sleep, it's okay when I have to wake up in the middle of the night because I know he needs me. It's fine, it's supernatural. It's like you become a superhuman. I do mind but I



“Nothing beats the rush of having a huge hit.”

those mood swings and a body that you just barely recognize.

Your new album is full of personal lyrics about promises that aren't kept and early winters as a metaphor for cold times in love. The most pronounced is 'Breaking Up'.

I write those kind of songs in times of insecurity. Any girl in a steady relationship recognizes that, the fear you'll lose each other no matter how strong your love. The next day you can feel entirely different.

But some people might think, listening to this song, that you wrote it when you found out your husband already had a daughter. [Gwen's husband, ex-Bush frontman Gavin Rossdale, has a teenage daughter from a previous relationship — something which wasn't revealed publicly until 2004.]

[Sharply] If you think I have a bad marriage, you're mistaken. Of course

Okay, I expose myself all the time. I also write funny, light lyrics. But I do like to write about my sadness. It's therapeutic. But I haven't been with Gavin for years without a reason – we are more than good. Sometimes there are sh**ty moments and I have to get rid of my frustration. The lyrics become personal then, sure.

It does make you vulnerable, especially because you lead such a public life. It sometimes seems like you do that on purpose. Maybe you have that in common with your heroine, Sylvia Plath. Do you think you have a slightly masochistic side?

I'll never get used to analysing myself in interviews. But, okay, maybe you're right and I do it on purpose. I am good at torturing myself by getting stuck on negative thoughts. Oh, I don't know! I'm just a girl who writes down how she feels. My words are hardly as dark as Plath's but then I am not blessed with her talent.

a single mom it is impossible to find time for yourself; terrible. For a while, I thought, after [having] a first child, I would want to be a full-on, stay-at-home mom, but now I've found out it would drive me insane. No matter how much I love my son, I have to be creative.

don't mind. Our love is so solid and permanent in such a natural way. Fame and success are short-lived; not always a happy thought.

GWEN'S CANADIAN TOUR DATES

- May 29 – Montreal QC at Bell Centre
- May 30 – Toronto ON at Air Canada Centre
- June 7 – London ON at John Labatt Centre
- June 10 – Winnipeg MB at MTS Centre
- June 12 – Edmonton AB at Rexall Place
- June 13 – Calgary AB at Pengrowth Saddledome
- June 15 – Vancouver BC at General Motors Place