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# NO DOUBT

BY JOHN PECORELLI • PHOTOS BY MAGDA

**It's 1992 and your career looks bleak.** Your first record couldn't have been less adept to the climate: In the midst of gloomy, distortion-saturated sounds emanating from Seattle, you'd gone and released a peppy, pop-infused ska/new wave record that plunged into obscurity almost upon release. Your label has pretty much shelved you, and your key songwriter is about to bail. What do you do?

If you're No Doubt, you just keep to your game plan—and get famous. 1995's *Tragic Kingdom* scored the Anaheim, California quartet a slew of hit singles and an eventual resting place at *Billboard's* No. 1, but that's not all. Critics who'd dogged the band early on as throwaway pop or simply more product from the Orange County ska scene were now prais-

ing them for their infectious zeal and singer Gwen Stefani's potent stage presence. And fans were continuing to gobble up *Tragic Kingdom*, eventually rendering it platinum 15 times over. So what do you do for a follow-up? (Gulp.)

Here's what: Record a better one. No Doubt drummer Adrian Young and guitarist Tom Dumont played A.P. a stack of tracks from the upcoming album, all of which show the band at their creative zenith. They've learned that less is more; less convoluted songwriting equals more powerful songs. A full emotional range is present, but the record has something previous releases lacked: consistency. Uptempo rockers like "Staring Problem" sit alongside moody ballads like "X-Girlfriend" and "Simple Kind Of Life" without a hitch. Are the planet's favorite pop darlings growing up?

**Gwen Stefani:** Well, we're 30 now—you know what I mean? [Laughs.]

**Well, maybe a 30-year-old can do it better...**

**Tom Dumont:** There's a lot of people, though, that start making crap music as they get later into their careers.

**Adrian Young:** Yeah, I'm very fearful of that—that, if we keep going, we're gonna start putting out sappy, bullshit rock 'n' roll. I don't want to do that. We should just hang it up after this record and then we'll have a good myth about us.

**Really?**

**Young:** Yeah. Go out on top at the end of it.

**Dumont:** I hate to say it, but in most cases, pop music is for young people. I think there's cer-

tainly exceptions—people who are truly talented who can write well into their 30s, 40s and 50s. Something usually happens, though; people lose it. But right now, it's much more fun to try to force our way through it than to just quit. I think that we'd be bummed for years if we gave up at this point. Not that we're planning on breaking up necessarily, but we don't have any plans to make another record after this, *necessarily*. One at a time. The weird thing, too, is that on this tour we noticed that we still have a lot of teenage fans. That's how it's always been, even before we were popular. And I guess that's the question: If this record is a little more somber, how will they react to it?

**The expectations are high. Do you feel the pressure?**

**Stefani:** Now that we have the baby in our

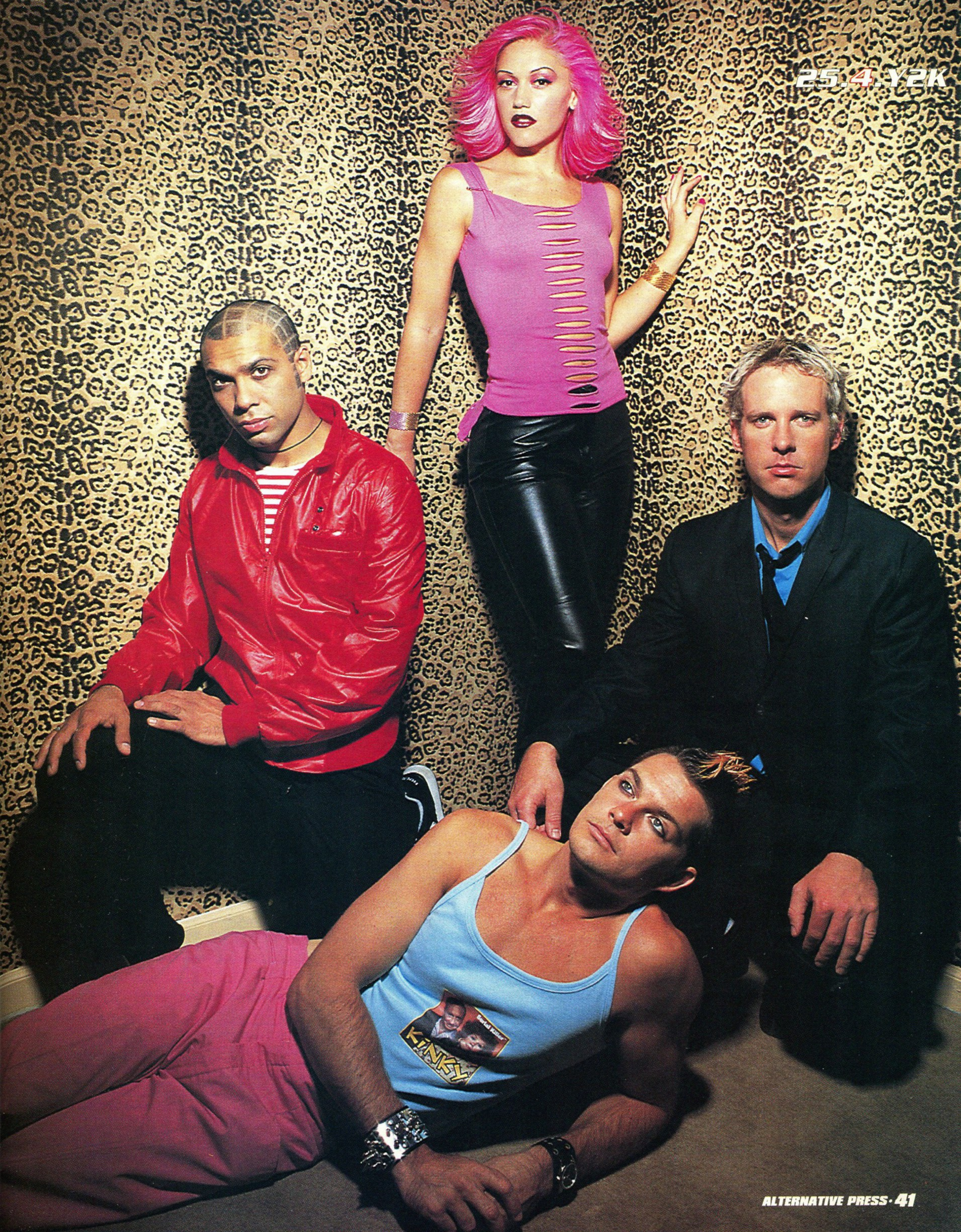
hands, no. It's not pressure, it's almost like being a bit desperate in the sense that I want people to hear it so bad. I feel like I'm inside-out after writing a record; I'm worn out. But at the same time, I feel so rewarded with the songs, you know, I'm just so proud of it. And if people don't hear it now and it's just a big flop, I would be so bummed.

**Tony Kanal:** You can't look at it like you're trying to have the same numbers as last time, because that's unrealistic—it's stupid and you'd kill yourself over it. I feel more of a creative outlet kind of pressure. Like, "Okay, we've done this. Now hopefully people will hear it."

**It's been a while since *Tragic Kingdom*, though. Why the wait?**

**Dumont:** I've come to the conclusion that we're just slow. [Laughs.]







# “We should just **hang it up** after this record and then we’ll have **a good myth** about us.”

**Young:** I was talking to my neighbor who doesn’t know anything about music the other day when he was mowing his lawn. He says, “How’s the band?” And I said, “Oh, we just finished this record that we’ve been working on for two years.” And he says, “Two years?” Even a guy that doesn’t know anything about music knows that two years is too long to make a record! I don’t know why, but it just takes us a while.

**Stefani:** We had finished the record, but when we were mastering it, the record seemed a little off-balance. It seemed like the more upbeat songs weren’t the strongest ones—we wanted to go back in. It was a hard decision to make, but we just stopped everything. And instead of trying to rush the thing out—even though we’d already spent a year and a half working on it [*laughs*—we just said, “You know what? If we want to be really honest with ourselves and try to make the greatest record we can, we should try to write a couple more uptempo songs.” We said, “Okay, 13 years into it as songwriters, maybe we can focus our talent and our experience and try to write certain kinds of songs.”

## **What lyrical themes are you dealing with this time around?**

**Young:** I can give you the short answer: The last album was about Tony and this album’s about Gavin! [*Laughs*.]

**Dumont:** Yeah, we’re rockin’ for Gavin!

**Stefani:** Coming off that last tour, I got home and thought, “God, I’m totally normal. It didn’t even faze me, this is so cool.” And then slowly but surely, through the year I was home, I started going, “*Oh my God*,” you know, falling deeper and deeper into a weird depression. The whole record was written during that stage of turning from 28 to 29, which is supposedly this “return of Saturn” thing—a time of reflection. I think everyone kind of goes through it, and you start to second-guess everything and clean house and say, “Who am I and what’s going on?” I think a lot of the songs on the record reflect the whole period of that age for me. It was

kinda cool to be able to write the record, even though in some ways it was a really hard year for me personally. But it helped for the album.

## **As for the songwriting, it’s really improved. Did you ever feel like you weren’t taken seriously in that realm, that you got unfairly tagged a “party” band in the past?**

**Dumont:** A little bit. I mean, well, we certainly weren’t Bob Dylan. It wasn’t really profound or amazing poetry. And we’re all aware of that. We’re closer to Journey than Dylan, I’d say. But the songs weren’t party songs. They were about Gwen’s life and her relationship problems. For most people, that’s about as profound as things get—if you’re in misery, if the person you love doesn’t love you back, it’s kind of a sucky thing to go through.

**Stefani:** When you’re playing in arenas around the world and you play in India and get recognized, all that other stuff just bounces off of you. You know when there’s an audience full of people there, and their hearts are being touched by the music, you know that you’re not just some *pop thing*. And that whole last record was directly written out of my life, so I know in my heart that it wasn’t some kind of manufactured thing. We were a real band that’d been together at that time for nine years. It would be wonderful to have [critical acclaim], though. Everybody wants their peers to approve and to be credible—we all want it all, don’t we? But then again when you tour like we did, it doesn’t really matter. The reality is that we’re on stage playing in front of 50,000 people.

**Kanal:** It would hurt a lot more if we didn’t have a history, but we do. We’ve already gone through the pain and suffering of being in a band, starting in high school, trying to make it—we put in the time and the effort. We paid our dues. So when you get that kind of stuff being said about you, and at the same time your record is No. 1, it’s just like, “You know what? It doesn’t matter anymore.”

**Young:** I felt like we had such a rad thing going that if someone said, “I think it sucks,” I didn’t

care. The only things that really bothered me were the inaccuracies.

## **What was the most inaccurate thing you ever read?**

**Young:** “Quirky ska album.” I mean, it’s got hints of it, but it’s very subtle. If anybody listens to *Tragic Kingdom* and calls it ska, they really don’t know what ska is.

## **To close, what’s the greatest thing about your experience with No Doubt?**

**Stefani:** My whole life, I never felt that I had anything that was specifically my thing. I didn’t have any kind of goal. Because my older brother [Eric] was super-talented, he was always the center, the focus. I didn’t have anything that was mine, but I could say that he was my brother. But now, I feel like I’m doing what I should be doing. Finally. It just feels really good that I can walk away and say that—“You finally did something; you accomplished it. And because of you and your friends, we put all this work into it, no one can take it away now. We did it; it’s gonna be there forever.” That’s my favorite part. I’ll feel like I did something in my life.

**Kanal:** For me, it’s just having that sense of belonging, that sense of purpose. For 13 years, this is all I’ve been doing. I eat, breathe and sleep No Doubt. You can feel that when you do good things and try to take care of the people who support you, you’re gonna get that back. From the smallest things like trying to keep the ticket prices low and merchandise inexpensive to the bigger things like trying to make the best record you can—you get it back 10 times. And that feels really good. It’s like, “Wow, we found our thing.”

**Dumont:** I think that going on tour and everything we’ve done is really intense. And to be together as much as we’re together is also an intense thing to go through. But what I’ve learned is that basically what’s important are people—your friends, your family. And the rest of the stuff is not really that important. I mean, music’s important to us. But if I didn’t do music, I’d still be pretty happy. **ALT**