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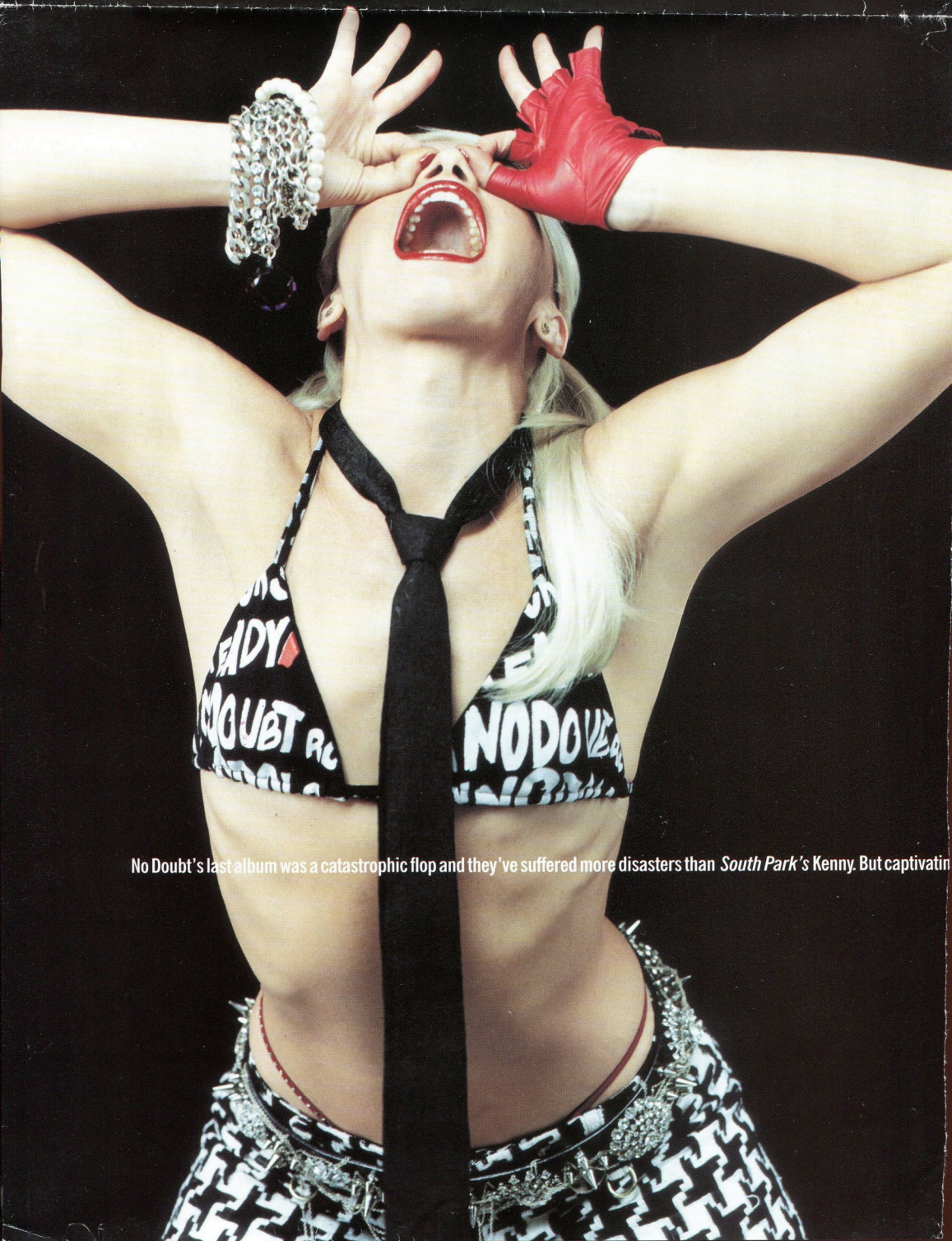
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No Doubt's last album was a catastrophic flop and they've suffered more disasters than *South Park*'s Kenny. But captivat



THE GOOD-TIME GIRL

Controvertor woman Gwen Stefani hasn't lost her party spirit, and now with the success of their new album she's finally got something to celebrate

Photographs by Isabel Snyder Interview by Richard Galpin

No Doubt should, in theory, no longer exist. If they were a boxer, the towel would have been thrown onto the canvas in the first round. While it's usual, and some would say necessary, for rock outfits to suffer alcohol-fuelled creative differences, indignant infighting and the departure of a band member, there are few acts still going that have endured the death of their lead singer, the resignation of their chief songwriter, a painful in-band relationship break-up and album sales so poor they make Victoria Beckham's recent release seem like the musical equivalent of *Harry Potter*. But somehow they've managed to survive and release their fifth album.

Formed in Orange County in December 1986 by singer John Spence, No Doubt's first incarnation had platinum blonde Gwen Stefani on backing vocals, her brother Eric on keyboards and Tony Kanal as the band's manager (later taking over on bass and becoming Gwen's other half). However, on the eve of playing a big music industry gig at the Roxy Theatre in Hollywood, almost a year to the day since they were formed, Spence committed suicide in an Anaheim park. No Doubt almost called it a day. "I'd never experienced any kind of death before," says Gwen, the 32-year-old, self-styled frontwoman and fiancée of Bush singer Gavin Rossdale. "I was in complete shock. We thought, 'How could we go on without John?' but we were 18-year-olds and thought it was what he would have wanted".

With the addition of Tom Dumont on guitar and Adrian Young on drums, by the summer of 1990 No Doubt were supporting the likes of Red Hot Chili Peppers, Ziggy Marley and Fishbone, and in 1991 signed to Interscope Records, although in their typical feet-on-the-ground attitude to life, they kept their humdrum day jobs. Adrian waited tables, Tom worked as a filing clerk, Gwen tried to stop herself eating all the fudge behind the counter at the local Dairy Queen, while Tony risked the wrath of security guards by sneaking into office buildings to paste up replacement door stickers. "I worked for an industrial door company," he says. "My job was to get into offices and put up stickers next to doors, so that if the door broke the owner would see it and call to replace it. I'd have to walk in, rip down any other company's sticker and put up ours. I'd get a quarter for each one I brought back which belonged to another company. In the end I got so fed up I took a rival company's sticker and just went to the copy place, made a bunch of them and took them into work to get my payment."

In 1992 they released their self-titled first album, but America was gripped in Seattle-grunge fever and the local radio stations refused to play their record. In fact, the programme director of influential LA rock station KROQ said at the time, "It would take an act of God for this band to get on the radio." And things went from bad to worse. Eric Stefani decided to leave and take up full-time employment as an animator for *The Simpsons*, Gwen was dumped by Tony and their new record, *Tragic Kingdom*, didn't even register on the Billboard Top 200. Word gradually spread though, and five months later their single "Just A Girl" reached number 10, they appeared on David Letterman and the follow-up single "Don't Speak" (written by Gwen about her break up from Tony) went to number one all over the world – then, 14 months after its release, *Tragic Kingdom* hit the top spot (the album would go on to sell 1.6 million in the US alone). It was also a time of self-discovery for one band member. "There was a two week period where we were number one all around the world," remembers Tom. "It was so cool, and it was also around that time Adrian had his first masturbation experience."

"It was at the Intercontinental Hotel in Mayfair when I was 27 years old," says Adrian. "The next day I was like, 'Guys you're never going to believe what's happened but... I know this sounds disgusting, but I was a little unprepared for what was going to happen. I got up and it went all over the carpet of the hotel.'"

In 2000 No Doubt released *Return Of Saturn*. It took a dive in both sales and the critics' response. "We spent two years working on *Return Of Saturn*, because we felt it was important to prove we could do a record that had depth and substance," says Tony. "It was a tough record to make. But once we got that out of our system, it was time to have some fun." And having fun is something No Doubt

have become particularly good at in the 15 years they've been together. Their New Year and Halloween parties have become legendary. "After you've had a few parties you realise what you need to do to stop your house getting wrecked," says Gwen. "We get a production company to come round, remove all of the furniture, cover the floor in cardboard, get a dancefloor put down, put in a DJ booth and then away you go. In fact, at one point the parties were becoming more important than our shows. I think a lot of people never considered No Doubt to be so rock and roll."

No Doubt has good reason to be in celebratory mood. Their new album *Rock Steady* has already clocked up a million sales in the US and been widely hailed as a return to form for the four-piece. Recorded in London, San Francisco, Los Angeles and Jamaica, it features some intriguing collaborations: Sly & Robbie produced the lead-off single "Hey Baby", The Neptunes co-wrote the album's opening track "Hella Good", The Cars' Ric Ocasek helped out with "Platinum Blonde Life" and "Don't Let Me Down". Elsewhere, there's contributions from William Orbit, Prince, Nellee Hooper, Dave Stewart and Steely & Cleve. Their time recording in the West Indies was a particularly enjoyable experience.

"After all this time making a style of music that originally came out of there, we felt it was time to actually go to Jamaica," says Gwen. "We hooked up with Sly & Robbie and Steely & Cleve but never thought it would end up to be as magical as it was. We were only there for two weeks, it was a slow-paced vibe, it was all about the process and not about the outcome. We'd get to the studio and be all ready to go, and then the power would go off. We'd just have to sit and listen to Sly & Robbie tell old stories, drink Red Stripe and watch the fireflies."

"We had demos for four of the songs, and thought when we got there we could rework them," adds guitarist and co-writer Tom. "But when we arrived the producers were like, 'Mmm, sounds good man,' so after a day of adjusting to that, we realised that it wasn't going to take a ton of time. There were guys who would just stop by, who heard we were in the studio, with loads and loads of weed. I'm not saying we smoked it, but there was definitely something in the cookies. It was great to get away from the freeways and just have a completely different pace of life."

For this album Gwen also spent less time thumbing her thesaurus to compose elaborate lyrics, and wrote about what she was feeling at the time. Unsurprisingly, many of *Rock Steady*'s songs are a spyglass into her six-year relationship with Gavin Rossdale. "Making Out" is clearly about the loneliness of being in a long-distance relationship, "Rock Steady" is almost a plea to Rossdale for their love to survive, while "Underneath It All" is Gwen finally admitting how much this particular boy from London means to her. "I was in the park with Gavin and I had been keeping a journal," she says. "We were so in love, I wrote the line, 'You're lovely underneath it all.' It's like, despite all the shit we've been through, you're a really good person. The whole album was an exercise in this sort of spontaneity and that challenged me to write more directly from my thoughts and feelings."

At *Arena*'s photo shoot, amid the uniform, box-shaped industrial buildings of Culver City, LA, the quartet are relaxed and friendly, despite a punishing schedule of promotion. Yesterday the band played a surprise gig at a high school in San Diego and tomorrow they'll take the stage at a KROQ music event at the Universal Amphitheatre in LA, alongside the heavy rock sounds of Linkin Park, Staind and Bush, before heading off to Europe for a round of TV appearances. The closeness of the band is evident; while Tony retells stories of working with one of his musical inspirations, Prince, it's Gwen who's adjusting his tie and flattening the rogue hairs on his blond head. Sickeningly chummy as it seems, you get the feeling it isn't put on for our benefit and that all four really are as good friends as they say. "The chemistry in the band surprised us all, because we genuinely love each other so much," says Gwen, who's squeezed into a string bikini top and dog-tooth culottes emblazoned with "Rock Steady" on her backside, despite it being an unusually cold day in California. "It's weird to think it can be like that 15 years down the line."

"I think it's because we're older," adds Tony. "We've had the crazy success of *Tragic Kingdom*, we had the growing pains of *Return Of Saturn* and we're now at ▶

The programme director of the influential LA rock station KROQ said at the time, "It would take an act of God for this band to get on the radio"



TOP: JEFFREY MAYER; HAIR: PAVILLO AT MAGNIE; MAKE-UP: JENNIFER PITT; OPENING SPREAD: CHITTI; GWEN'S OWN CUSTOM MADE; BELT BY TOM BINNS (001 212 929 6565); THIS PAGE: BLACK; GAVIN ROSSDALE: JEFFREY MAYER; GAVIN ROSSDALE: TOM BINNS (001 212 929 6565); BRACKETS BY TOM BINNS



the place where it doesn't matter anymore, we can have fun, write music and be friends and enjoy ourselves. We've seen and done so much stuff together, now everything else is just icing on the cake."

This love-in hasn't always been apparent to the outside world. Much to the dissatisfaction of the rest of the band, Gwen was always the focal point of the media's attention. In fact, the video to "Don't Speak"—with Gwen dripping in jewellery while the three guys mill about in the background getting edged out of the picture—was a sarcastic take on how it seemed everyone thought No Doubt was just Gwen Stefani. "Has it got to the point where we mean nothing?" Tony asked in an interview for *Rolling Stone* in 1996. "If Gwen doesn't speak, we have nothing to say?" A lot of these feelings seem to have subsided, although it's worth noting that the record company are adamant that the photographer shoot the whole of the band and not focus solely on Gwen. To be honest, the boys should be grateful for the attention Gwen has received. It was her eye-catching performance last year with Eve in the Dr Dre produced "Let Me Blow Ya Mind", particularly her strutting through a pumping, packed nightclub in a minuscule bikini top, that kept No Doubt on the radar and elevated Stefani to the next rung of stardom. Although she's discovered that the spotlight can be as cruel as it is kind. "It's weird because I've won the most fashionable artist on VH-1," says Gwen. "But then I'm always in magazines on the pages 'When bad fashion happens to good people'. But I like the funky, risky styles."

And the negative comments haven't just been reserved for the lead singer. "I won an award in a magazine for being the worst dressed person," says Adrian. "It was for a picture of me with devil horns on my head, wearing tennis shoes, socks and a G-string. There's usually drinking involved when I'm wearing ridiculous outfits. Although I did a photograph yesterday just wearing a stripper's Santa outfit—a little skirt and high-heeled boots."

That sense of enjoyment has followed No Doubt on the road—for a large portion of 2001 in between recording *Rock Steady*, they supported U2 on their American tour—and it didn't take them long to adjust to the lifestyle of arguably the world's greatest live act. "U2 have their own plane, a 727 and they use LA as the hub," Tony says. "You meet at the airport at 3pm, fly to the venue, land at 5pm. Have a police entourage from the airport to the venue. They shut down the streets, it's like being royalty. We'd have half-an-hour to get our shit together and get on stage. Soon as the show's over and they walk off stage you have to be ready to go, back on the plane and three hours later you're home."

Of course, with No Doubt's love of partying, this regimented schedule didn't mean there wasn't time for a little tour bus hilarity. "We were in Denver, it was snowing and we were in our bus heading out of the arena," says Tom. "We were stuck in traffic, so I bet Adrian \$50 to take his clothes off and run around the van. He gets out, nude, waving his arms and starts running. Suddenly we see this cop approaching, but Adrian doesn't see him, the first thing he knows about it is when he's tackled to the ground, being handcuffed. I broke out the video camera at that point. We had to circle the block and come back round. Our tour manager had to do some fast talking to get Adrian off a public nudity charge."

Today's shoot draws to a close and although heading off in different directions, the four will meet up later for a family gathering at Gwen's house in the Hollywood Hills. Gwen's cooking. Having had such a close relationship with the three men since she was 17 has meant there's been little time to develop really close female friends, until recently. "It's kinda my new thing," Gwen says. "We did this video which had a load of dancers in and I became good friends with them. We're all like Chatterbox Charlies. Sometimes I think I might have missed out on having a close group of girl pals, but at the same time I feel so lucky, because this is a man's business. I'm also lucky to be in a band with guys who are all great. There are times when the partying gets too much and I'm disgusted and I put my foot down. I start to feel like it's gross and I don't want to be part of it, but that's just them getting carried away." **A**

No Doubt's Rock Steady is out now.

Left to right: Adrian Young, Tony Kanal, Tom Dumont, Gwen Stefani



