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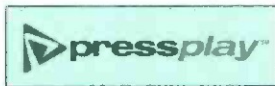
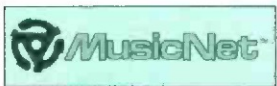
THE INTERNATIONAL NEWSWEEKLY OF MUSIC, VIDEO, AND HOME ENTERTAINMENT NOVEMBER 24, 2001

Distant Profits Or 'Pipe Dreams'?

Experts View Online Music Services As Uncertain Propositions

BY BRIAN GARRITY

NEW YORK—The first major-label-backed digital music-subscription service is set to bow later this month, when Real Networks launches its version of the MusicNet service from Warner Music Group, BMG Entertainment, and EMI Recorded Music. But despite the industry's hopes for its ability to profit from this new business line, analysts and industry executives say the timing and size of any payoff on the bottom line is still uncertain and most likely years away.



NEWS ANALYSIS

Among the hurdles still facing virtually every digital subscription service (major-label or otherwise) now in development are tenuous consumer demand, undefined economic models, unknown costs, as well as a lack of compelling content selection, clearance from all interested rights holders, an understanding of how to market the new services, a relationship with traditional retail, and—despite hundreds of millions of dollars of collective development spending—sustained support from the

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BMG Sees Sales In New Heritage Catalog Division

BY CHRIS MORRIS

LOS ANGELES—BMG, the last of the five majors without a dedicated enclave for catalog exploitation, has taken a giant step with the institution of its newly christened BMG Heritage catalog division. The unit—which will draw on the catalogs of



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RCA, RCA Nashville, Arista, Windham Hill, and Higher Octave—will be headed by senior VP Alex Miller, who joined BMG from Sony Classical three years ago to start up the reissue imprint Buddha Records as part of the company's special products division.

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AVALANCHES

Dance Surges Down Under

BY LARS BRANDLE and CHRISTIE ELIEZER

MELBOURNE—As it grows up and travels the world, Australian dance music is challenging traditional stereotypes of its homeland as a purely rock'n'roll nation, while indicating that a distant location on the atlas may actually help the development of new, distinctive strains of music. "Australia has a rich history and



success in rock and pop," says Barney Glover, GM of the New York subsidiary of dance-business kingpin Ministry of Sound. "Now what's going on is not only rock and pop but also those DJs and producers shuffled away in dark corners not necessarily embracing the cultural history of Australian music." Welcome to the light—and to

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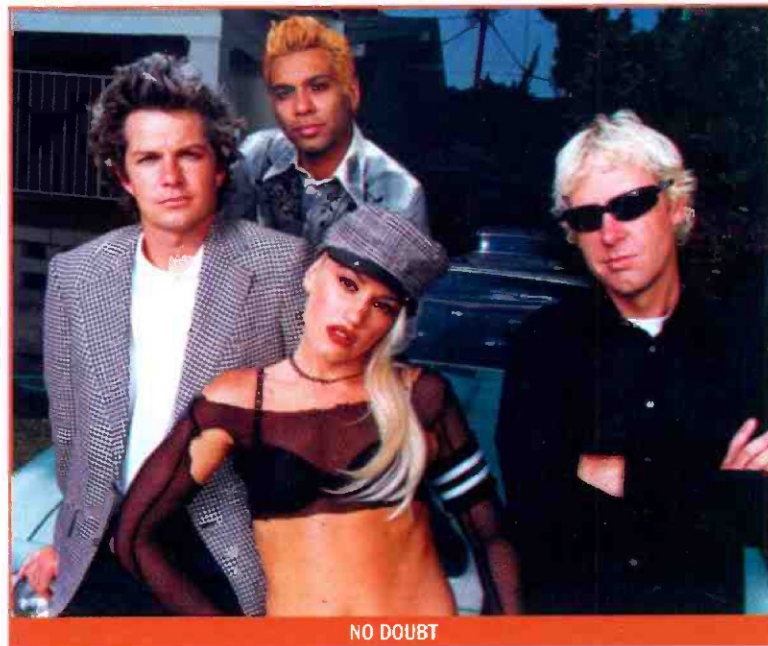
Interscope's No Doubt Feels 'Rock Steady'

London, Kingston Trips Enhance Music

BY WES ORSHOSKI

NEW YORK—Discussing the making of No Doubt's new album, *Rock Steady*, Gwen Stefani saturates her comments with utterings of "like" and "know what I mean?" It's, like, quite charming, and, honestly, a little bit funny too—know what I mean? But, as she and bassist Tony Kanal recount the creation of *Rock Steady* (due Dec. 11, Interscope), one word more than any other comes up—fun. And that makes perfect sense, as *Rock Steady*, with its polished blend of dancehall, hip-hop, and '80s new wave, is a party record rooted in, well, parties. Kanal explains, "When

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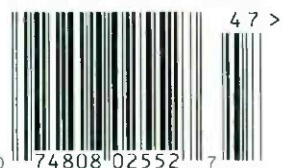


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No Doubt

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we were on the road last year for *Return of Saturn*, we were having dance parties every night after the shows, inviting a bunch of people back and listening to a lot of Jamaican dancehall—just having the most fun. In fact, the dance parties became just as fun as the shows themselves. So, when we started making this record, we decided to put everything else aside and just have a great time.” The thinking was, “While we’re writing music, let’s keep the fun going.”

The result is an album made like no other No Doubt set—one that, as *Rock Steady* mixer/co-producer Spike Stent notes, marks “a great, great return to form” for the band, and one that was borne out of collaborations with, among others, Prince, Nellee Hooper, noted dancehall producers Sly and Robbie, and the Cars’ Ric Ocasek.

Stefani, Kanal, and guitarist Tom Dumont—the band’s songwriters—set out to keep the party alive in early January, when the trio convened at Dumont’s home studio in Los Angeles. Accustomed to writing songs on acoustic guitar and then cutting and recutting them in the studio, they decided that this time—after their particularly laborious work on the *Return of Saturn*—things were to be much more spontaneous and free.

Working at first with prerecorded drum beats, the shared goal was to both write and record a new song each day—quite a new experience for Stefani, the band’s chief lyricist. “For me, that’s like a huge challenge to just kind of write on the spot,” she says. “I’ve always been a real, like, journal/book-reading type. It takes me forever. But on this record, it was just, like, ‘OK, write it right now, record it, and it’s done.’”

Like the *Return of Saturn* shows, each session had a festive after-party. Kanal says, “We were having so much fun that once we were through each day, Tom, Gwen, and I would go, ‘OK, let’s go out and join all our friends at a dance club now.’ And we would do this daily—go out and have a few drinks and dance the night away and at the end of the night go, ‘OK, I’ll see ya tomorrow at two o’clock, let’s do it again.’ We were just keeping that life energy and that vibe flowing.”

Having come up with a batch of songs heavily influenced by the dancehall that the band, especially Kanal, had been listening to over the past year—records by the likes of Mr. Vegas, Bounty Killer, and Cutty Ranks—No Doubt (now with drummer Adrian Young) then carried those tracks and that vibe to Kingston, Jamaica. “We thought, ‘Let’s go make it real,’” Kanal says.

Through some friends, the bassist had arranged for the band to continue work on *Rock Steady* with the legendary reggae rhythm section of drummer Sly Dunbar and bassist Robbie Shakespeare (Jimmy Cliff, Desmond Dekker)—who invited Bounty Killer and fellow Kingston dancehall fave Lady Saw to spice up the tracks—and fellow helmsmen Steely & Cleve (Maxi Priest, Gregory Isaacs).

The band’s enthusiasm was immediately noticeable, says Lady Saw, who was familiar with Stefani through her guest appearance on Eve’s Dr. Dre-produced “Let Me Blow Ya Mind.” (“When I heard that song, ‘I was like, ‘It’s beautiful, and it’s a white girl kickin’ it!’”)

“Sometimes you’ll get a call to do a song,” Lady Saw notes, “and once you get to the studio, you’re not feeling the vibe. Or the song isn’t good. And it seems like you’re wasting your talent. But it wasn’t that way with No Doubt. I was *feeling* it!”

Working in Kingston proved to be a “phenomenal” experience, Kanal says. “We spent every morning at this place called the Blue Lagoon, this pristine lagoon. And we would be drinking rum and Red Stripes and eating jerk food and then, we would go into the studio at

about four o’clock and work through the night. It’s a wonder we actually got stuff done.”

Recording the album on hard disk using Pro Tools made it easy for the band to move the project to Jamaica and to London, where it co-wrote “Underneath It All” with the Eurythmics’ Dave Stewart and worked with Stent (Massive Attack, Madonna) and fellow producers William Orbit (Blur, Madonna) and Nellee Hooper (Björk, Soul II Soul).

With some songs boasting hip-hop grooves and others carrying an almost electro, Erasure-like feel, the different tracks seemed to yearn for

ing and recording. “I think we had to get through that phase to get to where our heads could be free and clear,” he says.

And despite the fact that *Return* was considered by many to be both an artistic and a commercial disappointment—though reaching platinum status relatively quickly, the album did a fraction of the business of *Kingdom* and was, lyrically, a much more serious and mature album that reflected Stefani “turning 30, becoming a woman, and reassessing my life”—the band was feeling little pressure this time around.

In fact, “all that mattered was that the process



different producers, the band’s A&R man Mark Williams says: “The songs had different personalities, so we tried to match the right producer with the right personality.”

By the time they got to London, the members of No Doubt were still having a blast. Stent says they were even giddy at times. “The first time I got [first single] ‘Hey Baby’ up and got it rockin’, they were just like, ‘Oh, my God, this is fantastic’—really excited and jumping around.”

Ocasek, who helmed the keyboard-laden tracks “Don’t Let Me Down” and “Platinum Blonde Life” back home in L.A., agrees. “Their spirit was great. Everybody was in such a good mood and always a bit happy about things—it was unusual. And I think that probably transcended, making the tracks sound very nice and ‘up.’”

“They’re one of the most together bands I’ve worked with,” Ocasek continues, adding that the band’s spontaneous approach to songwriting “kind of reminded me of how the Cars went in to do a record, in a sense. We weren’t too self-conscious about that stuff. We used to run in, rehearse it a bit, and just go do it.”

After 1995’s *Tragic Kingdom* made stars of the members of No Doubt—selling more than 12 million copies worldwide—Kanal says the 15-year-old, Orange County, Calif.-born act felt “the need to prove ourselves as a band and as musicians and songwriters” when working on that album’s follow-up, the Glen Ballard-produced *Return*, which they spent two years writ-

ing and recording. “I think we had to get through that phase to get to where our heads could be free and clear,” he says.

Helping to keep things loose and natural—and opening up a new musical world for the band, managed by Laguna Beach, Calif.-based Jim Guerinot at Rebel Waltz and booked by the L.A.-based Mitch Okim—was its decision to collaborate with hip-hop hitmaking producer/artists Dre, Timbaland, and the Neptunes.

None of the band’s work with Dre or Timbaland made the final cut. But, like the *Rock Steady* track “Waiting Room”—a song originally written during the *Return of Saturn* sessions that was later re-arranged and co-produced by Prince—some of those songs will probably surface eventually, Kanal says.

The band’s work with the Neptunes, though, yielded the funk-filled sure-hit “Hellagood,” of which Neptune Chad Hugo says he and partner Pharrell Williams were trying to re-create the danceable but band-sounding vibes of “Another One Bites the Dust” or “Brick House.” He notes, “We were trying to bring No Doubt in the clubs.” And Kanal says that’s exactly what No Doubt was looking for: “When we started writing this record, we wanted a record we could fuckin’ groove to and dance to. We wanted to go to dance clubs and hear *our* stuff played.”

The band’s sessions with Hugo and Pharrell Williams also yielded another Neptunes/No Doubt co-write, “Perfect Day,” a track given to

R&B singer Kelis for her forthcoming Neptunes-produced album, *Wanderland* (Virgin).

Sales-wise, *Rock Steady* is certain to benefit from Stefani’s own collaborations outside of the band during the past year, one of which she says almost didn’t happen.

After partnering with Moby on his “South Side” single, she says she was reluctant to take part in Eve’s “Let Me Blow Ya Mind.”

“I felt like if the Moby thing hadn’t been such a big thing, it wouldn’t have been any big deal, but it was like, ‘Should I be doing another side thing?’ Ya know, ‘Are people gonna think that I’m just, like, the side sausage?’”

But she says she couldn’t pass up the opportunity to work with West Coast hip-hop czar Dre, especially after she had heard an early version of the song. She says of the experience, “I probably sang the chorus for, like, two-and-a-half hours straight. He beat me up as a singer. He really challenged me. He had one thing in his head, and I wasn’t hearing the same thing in my head.”

While such projects continue to keep Stefani’s star status at a much higher level than the band’s, the title of the new album—like Stefani’s decision to wear a jacket bearing the group’s name in the “Let Me Blow Ya Mind” video (“I wanted to represent!”)—is meant to serve as a statement about the act’s current state. It’s also, of course, a shout-out to the music that’s helped inspire this set of songs.

Mark Williams says that *Rock Steady* will most likely attract those whose first real introduction to the band was through Stefani’s work with Moby and Eve: “I think this record naturally, perfectly continues down the path that was started with those tracks. I think that what people liked about those songs they’ll find here, plus another whole side that is her and No Doubt—one that they might not be familiar with, but I think [they] will enjoy.”

And that’s already proving to be the case. Interscope bumped up the album’s release a week after immediate positive reaction to “Hey Baby” from top 40 radio and MTV. The latter recently debuted a *Making the Video* episode on the single.

Judging from “Hey Baby” (which features Bounty Killer), “it sounds like *Rock Steady* is going to be a little more pop, which doesn’t necessarily make it better,” says Ken Hopkins, PD at top 40 KZZU in Spokane, Wash., which is spinning the single. “I think the jury’s still out on whether that’s going to be better for their fans.”

In any event, the new, “less introspective and more fun”-sounding material (published through ASCAP), seems poised to mesh well with the current mood of the country, Hopkins says.

Indeed, Williams says, “*Rock Steady* is a record that’s all about celebration and life.” And that, says Jay Smith, manager of Tower Records’ Sunset Boulevard store in L.A., is what people want right now—fun music. “The only thing that’s going to be tricky,” Smith says, “is the timing”—the record arrives at the height of the Christmas-shopping season.

A source of pride for Stefani, Kanal, and Dumont is that much of *Rock Steady* is taken from the demos recorded in Dumont’s apartment, embellished with a touch of organ here, some keyboards there. “That was really cool,” Stefani says, “because it’s like the producers that we were working with liked what we were doing so much that they just kind of added to it, instead of starting all over.” By writing and recording songs on the spur of the moment and having at least a portion of almost every track’s demo surface, the band captured “that initial spark” that is sometimes lost, Stefani says.

“I feel so sure about [this album],” Stefani says. “I’m so confident that people are gonna love it, just because it’s so simple, and it’s so easy. It’s just fun and upbeat. And it doesn’t have anything to it. Like, it’s not too much work. And I think people need that sometimes in music.”