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WOMAN OF THE YEAR

GWEN STEFANI

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20 MOST AWESOMELY BAD SONGS OF 2004

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 5

WATCH BLENDER AND VH1'S
20 MOST AWESOMELY BAD SONGS
OF 2004
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ON THE COVER

GWEN STEFANI

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BUSTIER BY PRADA
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BROOCH, CROWN AND SCEPTER
ALL VINTAGE

BLENDER

DECEMBER 2004

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Woman of the Year



The Coronation
Gwen of
Stefani

*Blender joins the No Doubt singer's court
to find out about her solo album, movie career
and love life. "Everything you could think
up is probably true," she says.*

By Ariel Levy

Photography by Judson Baker

Styling by Andrea Lieberman

Gwen Stefani:
"And this is where
the dog lives."



BUSTIER BY VIVIENNE WESTWOOD; SKIRT, VINTAGE; SHOES BY DIOR; JACKET, SCARF AND SKIRT ALL VINTAGE

Production by Still Productions, London; Props and set design by Crest; Makeup by Lisa Butler for AirPartnerBeauty.com; Hair by Danilo for the Williams Group

Gwen Stefani is dancing barefoot in her kitchen. One of the tracks she's just finished for her first solo album is playing on her laptop, and she's spinning around saying "I love this song!" while a small posse of assembled staff looks on: her publicist, her graphic designer and her British manservant Pete, who is juicing a lemon and preparing Stefani her light, fragrant lunch.

All around Stefani, in her Mediterranean-style Los Angeles mansion, are the lavish accumulations of the truly successful: a driveway crowded with Mercedes; huge vases of tall, perfect lilies on every table; two silent cleaning women fluffing every cushion and dusting every shiny surface; a parade of Herb Ritts photographs of Stefani with her shirtless husband, Bush frontman Gavin Rossdale; and drawings by couturier John Galliano of the dress he made for her wedding, framed with a card from the designer that reads: "Dearest Gwen, Thank you for the most amazing evening." Stefani arrived here from London just last night, but Rossdale had to stay behind. "We're trying to get his dog out here," she explains, "but it's really hard to get a private plane to fly a person with a dog."

Stefani sings along to her song "Hajuku Girls" in the kind of mock pop-star voice one might use to croon "Like a Virgin" into a hairbrush. "I'm your biggest fan!" she squeals in perfect unison with her recorded self. And if *Blender* didn't know that the woman bouncing and

"This album is actually less of me than I've ever been before." *Gwen Stefani*



Gwen-ishly, stands for "Love Angel Music Baby," also the name of her new album. *Love Angel Music Baby* will not only bring her another car or manservant, it's sure to brighten the celebrity spotlight, as happened to Justin Timberlake when he stepped out of 'N Sync.

But going solo is still a risk, a move away from a proven formula and out into the unknown. Just ask Mick Jagger. Or David Lee Roth. Or Al Gore. Stepping out — at age 34, no less — of the protective cocoon of a band that she has been in half her life requires remarkable ambition,

twirling about was the queen of this castle, that she and Madonna have actually "hung out several times," that the voice coming from the computer has sold 26 million records worldwide with her band No Doubt, we might think she was exactly what she just said: a fan, a starry-eyed hopeful bopping along to the beat.

Blender's Woman of the Year still has the giddy enthusiasm of a person who is surprised by her luck, even after 17 years in music, three Grammys and the launch of her own fashion label, L.A.M.B., which,

power, balls. Gwen Stefani doesn't see it that way.

"Everyone keeps calling it a solo record and I keep calling it a dance record," she says. "Cause if I was doing a solo record, that would be like, finally, *me* . . . finally this is the real Gwen Stefani. It's not that. This album is actually *less* of me than I've ever been before."



GROWING UP, GWEN Stefani never fantasized about being a rock star. Never pictured living the brilliant, transatlantic life of pop royalty. The Gwen Stefani story, according to Gwen Stefani, goes like this: All her life, things *just happened* to her. She is an accidental rock star — or at least she likes to think so, maybe because it's true or maybe because lusting after fame and fortune seems unladylike to her.

And to be sure, Stefani has been lucky in one crucial regard: The men in her life have buffeted her from many of the uphill struggles of a life in music.

Her brother Eric founded No Doubt when Gwen was still in high school in Anaheim, California, and herded her into the band. "Eric's the one who brought the first Madness record home and got us all into ska," she says. "I'd wake up because he'd be banging on the piano. →



"Hey, why are all these windows broken?"

FUR STOLE BY LOUIS VUITTON; BUSTIER BY PRADA

Gwen Stefani

He would always be trying to get me to sing, because he couldn't sing very much himself, and I could sing along to the *Annie* soundtrack or *Evita*."

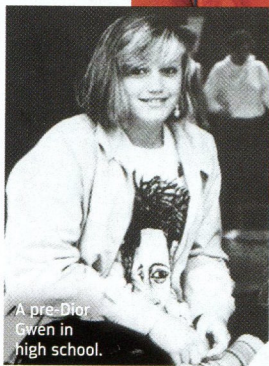
Gwen's first real boyfriend, Tony Kanal, was, and is, No Doubt's bassist and co-songwriter. Kanal has always handled all the wheeling and dealing and planning that are the crucial, tedious busy work of any successful band.

"Tony took care of everyone and he was on top of all the business," Stefani says. "Nothing went wrong — no stone unturned, every corner cleaned. The opposite of me. I'm a mess!" (She means this literally as well as figuratively: Stefani says that of all her indulgences, the one she'd most hate to lose is her cleaning women. "I get home, I drop." She mimes throwing things in every direction.)

Stefani entered the band that made her a star when she was 17 years old. "I was a very passive girl," she says. Stefani is perched on an immaculate, overstuffed white sofa, her white hair pinned up in a glamorous puff. "I was completely satisfied with just being in love with my boyfriend and dreaming about getting married." Stefani didn't consider herself talented. "I always thought of myself as really lazy because I was bad at school . . . Not that I was a bad girl," she says quickly, "just that it was hard for me to learn. I couldn't even



No Doubt in 1997, from left: Adrian Young, Tony Kanal, Gwen Stefani and Tom Dumont



A pre-Dior Gwen in high school.

pay attention. I spent the whole fuckin' time drawing pictures. The bell would ring and I would be like, 'Gosh the period's over?'

I would have just written my boyfriend's name in really sketched out, really nice letters."

Part of the fun of being a No Doubt fan has always been tracking Stefani's crushes and heartaches through her unusually transparent, occasionally artless lyrics. Listening to a No Doubt song can feel like peeking into Stefani's high-school journal: finding out on 1995's "Sunday Morning" how excruciating it was for her when Kanal ended their romance; hearing, on *Rock Steady*'s "Underneath it All," about how happy she's become with Rossdale ("You give me the most gorgeous sleep/That I've ever had"); or how badly she wants a baby on "Simple Kind of Life" ("I always thought I'd be a mom/Sometimes I wish for a mistake").

Gwen Stefani wrote that song in 1999, a couple of years after No Doubt and Bush were pushed together on a tour by their label, Interscope Records. Initially, everyone in the band was dead-set against the pairing. "The label was always talking about *Gavin and Bush*," she says in the whine of a kid talking about *history and math*. "We were just like, 'Whatever. We are not going on tour with those guys; that's not what we are.' And then we went and it was love. It was magic."

Well, maybe for her. The rest of No Doubt was furious.

"Everybody was against it," Stefani says. "It was a very crazy time. There was already my breakup with Tony, and we

were enjoying success for the first time and having outside things come in to our little band, our little family. And then I met Gavin. It was really lonely, because I felt like nobody wanted me to go out with him. My ex-boyfriend and all of my, like, brothers in the band were saying, 'You are not gonna go out with that guy!'

Why not?

"Because I had never been out with anyone else! And other reasons. Everything you could think up in your brain is probably true."



GWEN STEFANI STARTED thinking about making a solo album when No Doubt was on tour in 2002 to promote

Rock Steady. This was just a few weeks after she married Rossdale in London, went on a quickie honeymoon to Capri, then had a second ceremony in Los Angeles at the home of Jimmy

Iovine, her boss at Interscope Records. ("That dress," she says of her custom-designed Galliano with a giggle, "was the whole reason I had another wedding.") All four members of No Doubt were planning to take a break after the triple-platinum *Rock Steady* "because we hadn't had one in so long and everyone was burned out," Stefani says. "Me, first and foremost."

But the girl who had always worried she was lazy wasn't planning on taking it easy. "I had so many things I wanted to do: the baby, the movie, the whole list, and the clock was so loud in my head!" Stefani says making her solo album was actually a low priority, but that →

"Who knows? I might have a baby and quit everything."

Gwen Stefani



ALL ABOUT MY YEAR

GWEN STEFANI

No bandmates were consulted in the answering of this questionnaire!



Best song I heard in 2004
OutKast's "Hey Ya!"

Trend I'm most sick of
Reality television.

Sex symbol of 2004
Beyoncé

Most expensive purchase of 2004
A Vivienne

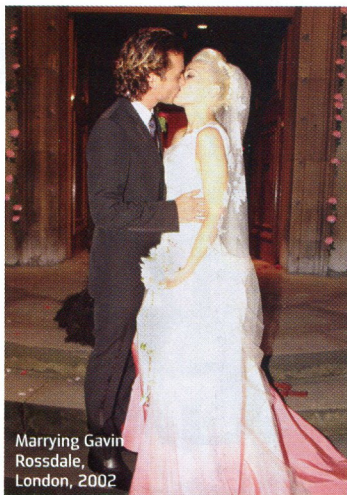
Westwood shopping spree.

Most rock-star moment of 2004
Every day felt like a rock-star day.

Where I'll spend New Year's Eve
At my house in L.A. with 300 people dancing to my record.

{ Gwen Stefani }

once she put it in motion, it was impossible to halt. An all-star group of musicians and producers from very different genres came forward to collaborate with her: André 3000, Dr. Dre, Linda Perry, Dallas Austin, the Neptunes and Nellee Hooper, to name a few. And once she told the label she was interested in doing her own "side project," you can imagine their reaction. Gwen Stefani, the billboard-ready blonde with the crazy voice and the mad style is finally going solo? *Ka-ching!*



Marrying Gavin Rossdale, London, 2002

"As soon as I told Jimmy Iovine that I wanted to do this record, it's been, like, his record," she says. "When someone believes in you more than you believe in yourself, you almost just want to do it to please them."

"I would literally back her on anything," Iovine says from his L.A. office. "Her vision is that strong. I use her a lot in Interscope's business, the way I would use Dr. Dre: 'What do you think of this? What do you think of that?'"

But when Stefani first started working on *Love Angel Music Baby*, she found herself — or cast herself — in a familiar role, as the subordinate: dealing with other people's time lines, striving to meet other people's goals.

"This is how crazy it was," she says, tapping her feet frantically as if still buzzing with the pressure and the adrenaline of the whole thing. "The record company called me and was like, 'You've got to go work with Linda Perry. Now. She only has five

days out of the whole year to work with you.' And I'd just got off tour! I was tired, I was burned out, I'd just got married. I hadn't even seen my husband! But then I thought, OK, if I don't do this now . . .

. . . I want to do great things, and I know that I'm super-lucky?" she says in perfect SoCal upspeak.

"So I should just take all the opportunities. It's one thing to have 'Just a Girl' on the radio, but to have years of cake and ice cream?" She grins and makes eating noises. "It's gonna end soon! So basically, I cried in my bed, like, for real."

When Stefani talks, she actually does sound very much like that teenager who

Her backyard is decorated with signs reading "Gwen Drive" and "Gavin Way."



sings into hairbrushes and spends 6th period tracing her boyfriend's name in curlicues. But it's confusing, hearing this animated, teenybopper voice come out of the crimson mouth of a woman who is so outrageously glamorous. She doesn't wear

clothes so much as she does costumes. Even sitting around the house, she has on gold high-heeled Mary Janes and a plaid Vivienne Westwood top with a cape-like piece that she throws dramatically over her shoulder every 20 minutes or so.

Her assistant brings out an exquisite china coffee service and she takes hers with honey and milk, raising a tiny teacup to her lips with a perfectly manicured hand. "I feel so 'lady' now!" she says, beaming. She is not unlike the cliché of the platinum-haired silent-movie star who opens her mouth and spoils the illusion of frosty allure with her Betty Boop voice.



↑ "All right, I've fixed the lightbulb!" Performing with No Doubt, June 2004



With Bono and Mom, 2002

Only in Gwen Stefani's case, the tears and the eating noises and the "rads" that pepper her conversations are a large part of her Valley-girl-next-door appeal. You can't be too fancy when you begin your career with a bindi glued to your forehead or decorate your backyard with two intersecting green street signs that read "Gwen Drive" and "Gavin Way."

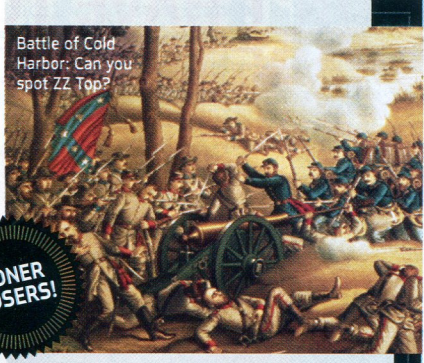
"I'm gaudy and cheesy and I always want to push it," she admits. "Adrian [Young] was always the yang of the band, if I was the yin. If I'm the cheese, he's the cool. That's what makes No Doubt." She thinks about it for a minute. "We would be, like, the most not-best-friends."

The down side of all this guileless, youthful charm is that Stefani sometimes seems on the verge of drowning in her own adolescent insecurities. "I think Gwen is very over-critical of herself," says Linda Perry, who was the first producer to work with Stefani on her solo tracks. (Perry was the lead singer of 4 Non Blondes and then went on to write and produce Pink hits like "Get the Party Started" and Christina Aguilera's "Beautiful.") "There was one day where she had a little insecurity breakdown. But I found it very endearing; I loved seeing her that insecure. You meet a lot of people who have half her talent and they think they're God's creative monster."

Somehow, when Stefani tells it, she is, again, the person who things are happening to, not the person in control. "At the Grammys, Linda Perry came up to me like a fucking bulldozer and basically put me in a headlock and was like, 'We need to write some songs together,'" says Stefani. Gwen was accustomed to taking her time — sometimes years — to write songs with No Doubt. "It was always a →

{ Gwen Stefani }

Battle of Cold Harbor: Can you spot ZZ Top?



LONER LOSERS!

Solo? Oh No!

Gwen Stefani's decision to fly solo might prove smart, but some malcontents haven't fared so well....

JUDAS

THE SPLIT: It's hard to share the spotlight with a charismatic frontman like J.C., but Judas's split from the Apostles was particularly acrimonious. Consumed with guilt after selling Christ out to the Romans for 30 pieces of silver, Judas pulled the ultimate rock-star move and hanged himself.

THE RESULT: The name "Judas" became synonymous with "traitorous bastard," and the epithet was yelled at Bob Dylan in 1966 when he dared to play electric guitar.

THE AMERICAN SOUTH

THE SPLIT: Despite stringing together a successful 85-year career with the United States, the slavery-lovin' Confederacy struck out on its own for a turbulent four-year solo stint. Following a particularly disastrous gig at Appomattox, they reluctantly rejoined the Union in 1865.

THE RESULT: Molly Hatchet

AL GORE



THE SPLIT: After eight years in Bill Clinton's shadow, Gore distanced himself from Bubba during his own Presidency campaign in 2000, discouraging his boss from making cameos that would only remind the public how uncharismatic the VP was in comparison.

THE RESULT: The White House got a new Bush; Columbia U got a new professor.

SHELLEY LONG

THE SPLIT: As the female lead on TV's most popular sitcom for five years, Long had every reason to think she could walk away from *Cheers* and not, say, instantly slide into total obscurity and cultural irrelevance. *Cheers* managed to stay on top for another six years with the not-yet-corpulent Kirstie Alley.

THE RESULT: Troop Beverly Hills, anyone?

STEVE KANDELL

long, hard process. So I was like, 'I can't sit next to you and pour my heart out. I don't even know you!' There were times I was just like, 'Fuck you, dude, you're totally stepping on my territory.' Other times we were really inspired by each other. Linda and I had a meant-to-be thing that was magical. I get emotional about it," Stefani says, and starts to cry a little.

It will probably come as no surprise that Stefani is big on emotion. She is also big on magic. With Pharrell Williams, she "wrote three songs in three days and they're all magic." The Rock Steady tour was "so magic." Shooting her cameo appearance as Jean Harlow in Martin Scorsese's upcoming biopic on Howard Hughes, her film debut, was "super-magical." She had a "magical night" with Adrian Young at the MTV Video Music Awards in Miami.

And recording with André 3000 was, you guessed it, "total magic!"

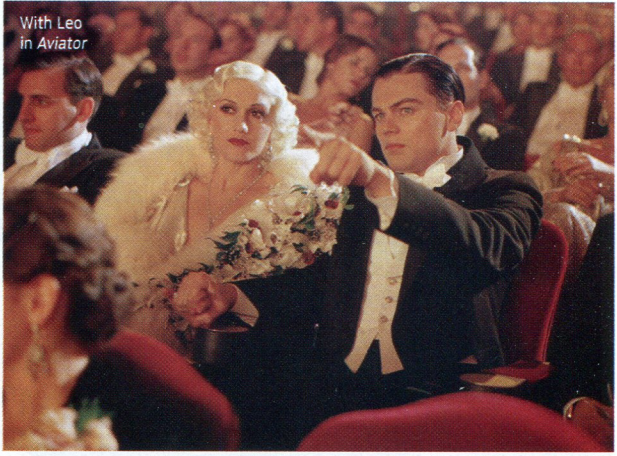
Despite all her breathless enthusiasm for the new pool of talent she's been soaking in, Stefani claims she has no plans to stay solo. "No Doubt is definitely not broken up," she says firmly. "I don't even have plans to tour at this point; I don't see myself putting out a bunch of Gwen Stefani records. Who knows? I might have a baby and just want to stare at it all day and quit everything." She assesses her time with No Doubt thus far like so: "To be able to put that many years into one project? It was magic."



BACK IN HER capacious, green-tiled kitchen, Stefani plays a few more of her new tracks for *Blender*, and one in particular stands out: a heart-melting '80s-ish pop song called "Cool" that she wrote with Dallas Austin. She sings, "After all the obstacles/It's good to see you now with someone else/It's such a miracle that you and me are still good friends/After all that we've been through/I know we're cool."

Sounds personal. Is this about anyone in particular? Any bassist in particular?

"It reminds me of the ending of something . . . that place we are with the band. Like, how everything's cool no mat-



With Leo in Aviator

ter what and we all know it," she says and looks at her feet. "And other things you can probably pick up on."

Blender wonders if all this isn't a little weird for her husband: having a super-famous wife who's still intensely enmeshed with an ex boyfriend, an ex she's written whole records about, an ex who has produced several tracks on her solo album, an ex on whom she still depends ("Doing this on my own there's this whole pile of things where you go,

"My record's gonna be your guilty pleasure. I just know it!" Gwen Stefani



'Frick! Where's Tony?')

Stefani won't get specific about it. But she does admit that working without No Doubt on this record has made it possible for Rossdale to contribute more to her music.

"It's one thing to be in a band with all those guys, and obviously Gavin's not gonna offer much of an opinion," she says. "But when I'm on my own, we can talk even more, he can have more of an opinion. It's been really . . . romantic."

For the first time, Rossdale wrote some lyrics for one of Stefani's songs, a track called "The Real Thing." "It's so clear the lines that he wrote because they're so visual and mine are always the most obvious," she says. "Like, just how you would talk it."

Their second wedding anniversary, on September 14, just passed. "We haven't done anything yet because he's in London, but when he gets here I'm sure we'll make out or something."

For all her insecurities, Stefani is refreshingly proud of this album. She fully expects 7th graders to be slow dancing to "Cool" and requesting it — begging for it — at make-out parties.

"That," she says, "would be so perfect! The thing about my record is you can try to not like it. You can try. But you know what? It's gonna be your guilty pleasure. I just know it!" [BLENDER]