

R&B HIP HOP GARAGE HOUSE SOUL JAZZ

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TERRI WALKER

WHOOPIE DAISY
HERE COMES TERRI

VAN HUNT

DIRTY DEEDS

BEVERLEY KNIGHT

SHE CAN BE DIRTY TOO!

MAXINE BRAHAM
LALAH HATHAWAY

SANDY RIVERA

TAMMI TERRELL

LUDACRIS

DWELE

LYN COLLINS

NATE JAMES

SAUL WILLIAMS

MARIO

PILLOW TALK

T.I.

NOT YOUR AVERAGE
STREET SPITTER

GUERRILLA BLACK

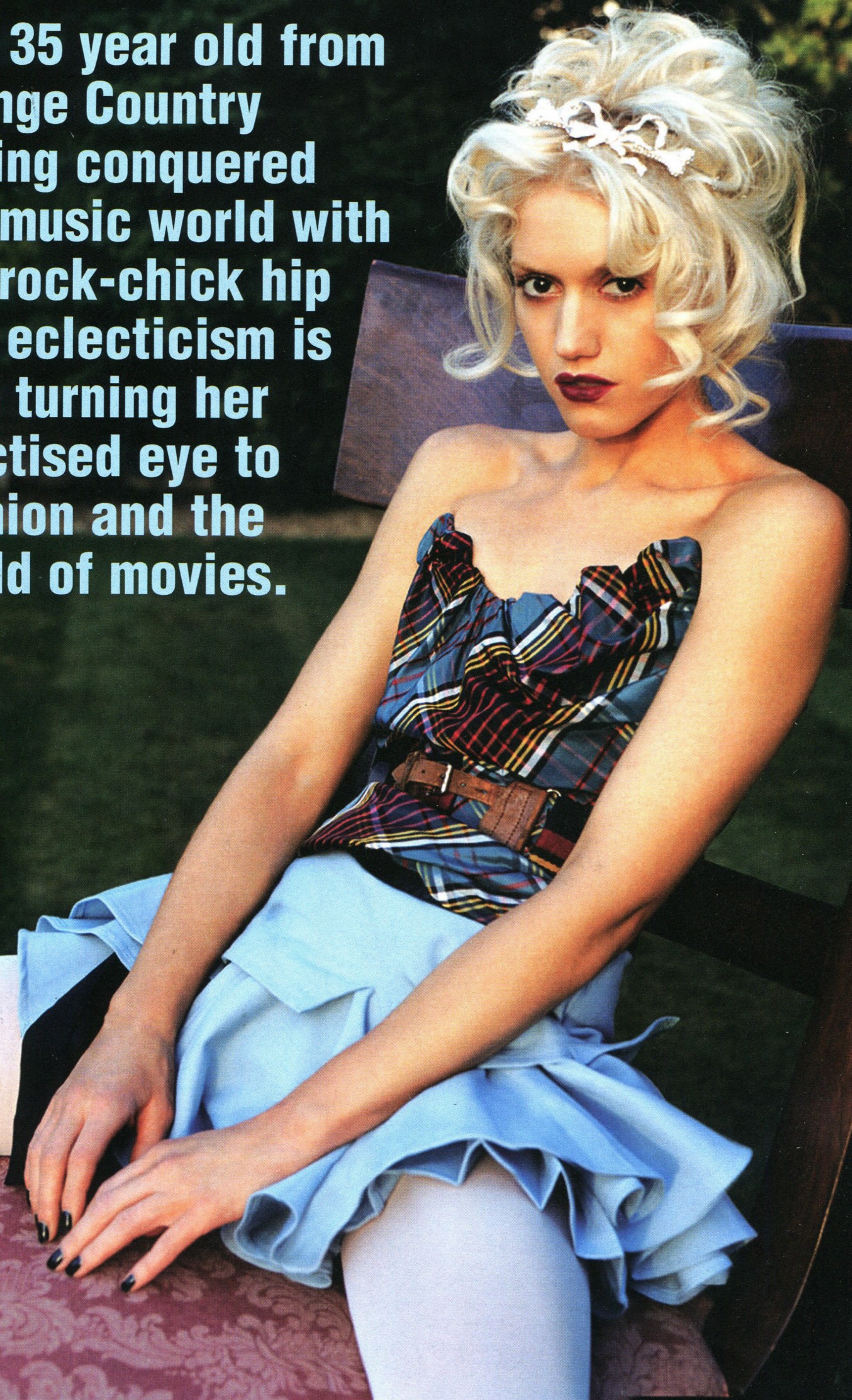
WHOLE LOTTA SHAKIN' GOIN' ON

Gwen Stefani

NO SILENCE OF THIS L.A.M.B.

Plus
Upfront news
views, reviews
charts, essential
club rundown

The 35 year old from Orange Country having conquered the music world with her rock-chick hip hop eclecticism is now turning her practised eye to fashion and the world of movies.



Feature Zone: **Gwen Stefani** [Words: Rick Thorne]

RICH PICKINGS

"Somebody once called me a cheerleader but in a negative light... like talkin' shit on me. So I said, 'well fuck you, I *am* a cheerleader, watch me on stage; I am a fuckin' cheerleader and I'm gonna fuckin' rule the world and make a big cheerleader song and you can fuck off!"

Music diva, style icon, movie star. When you're hot you're hot, but Gwen Stefani didn't wind up in the spotlight by accident. On the subject of the declamatory "Hollaback Girl", the fiery streak that runs through her shows no signs of being doused, despite her current status as one of music's most high-profile celebrities. From the pop charts to TV to magazines, to the big screen, Stefani's brash post-punk platinum blonde exterior has been everywhere of late. Following our lively conversation, Gwen was shortly to leave LA for the upcoming Brits (where she would scoop the award for Best International Female), before bouncing back Stateside for the Grammys, the Oprah show ("cos I frickin' love Oprah"), then back over to Europe to promote the next single, the Dr. Dre-produced "Rich Girl", with Eve. Clearly, life has never been busier for the thirty something No Doubt lead-singer. "I had like a few seconds to myself, it was weird," she says of a recent lull in the schedule. "I think that really brought me down, I was like 'let me go back to work, I don't know how to deal with this inactivity.'"

Despite the 'extra-curricular' stuff - the fashion, the movies, the Harajuku girls (which we'll get to later) - it is Stefani's music career that is of particular interest to B&S. The singer professes her joy at appearing in the magazine, and is chuffed her album "Love.Angel.Music.Baby" has made the impression it has, flouncing its way across the music scene, pleasing pretty much everyone in the process. With a production line-up including the Neptunes, Dr. Dre, Nellee Hooper, Jimmy Jam & Terry Lewis, Dallas Austin, and Andre 3000, it's no surprise Stefani's new sound can only be described as eclectic. Heck, even New Order drop in to jangle some Mancunian guitar into the mix.


It was her collaboration with Eve on 2001's Grammy-winning "Let Me Blow Ya Mind" that redefined Stefani's punky, rock-chick image to one of the smooth-voiced club diva. No Doubt had just finished their highly successful 2002 tour in support of the "Rock Steady" album, when Stefani told fellow band member and former boyfriend of seven years, Tony Kanal, of her desire to make a dance record. The band had spent the last 18 years together, Stefani had just got married, other band members were in relationships or having children, and all agreed it was time for a break. "I had heard a Club Nouveau song, "Why You Treat Me So Bad", and it just took me back to when I met Tony," says Stefani of the initial creative spark that would become "Love.Angel.Music.Baby". "He was really into Prince and the Time, and Lisa Lisa Cult Jam - a totally different scene than I was in 'cos I was really into ska music, hardcore. So I just pictured myself singin' those songs, I wanted to be Wendy & Lisa."

What started as (she hoped) a bit of light-hearted fun with Kanal, ballooned, no doubt with assistance from Stefani's label Interscope, as an A-list assemblage of collaborators and producers was put together. "It was a lot harder than I thought it was gonna be and my ego had a real problem with it a lot of the time because what really defines me, when I think about myself

and what makes me feel good about myself, is that I'm a lyricist," says Stefani on having to take direction from people other than her fellow No Doubters. "You have to put your ego aside and open yourself up to not only new people that you respect and that you're a fan of, but also like a whole different culture of music as well, so it was a pretty big trip I have to say."

The resulting album, a full-on garish amalgam of electro pop, new wave rock, and hip-hop, all charged with a shameless '80s sensibility, has been critically and commercially well received, and boosted Stefani's relevance factor. Despite the sonic mishmash, the singer says she was always clear on the form her new 'old' sound would take. "There was no confusion in my head about what the inspiration was or what I wanted it to sound like," she explains in her free-flowing Southern-Cal pitch. "Everybody that I sat down with was under strict instructions. Everybody had to listen to the same CDs, there was definitely a game plan, but there was so much more that came out of it than I thought. I was never intending to have anything more than 'let's dance on the dancefloor', and if you try to fuckin' write that shit it's hard 'cos it's been written so many times, and it's such a simple idea lyrically that you try to do it and it just sounds cheesy; and after all the years of writing songs that have your heart and soul in them, totally written out of pure experiences, to try and go in there and write 'get into the groove' or whatever, is really hard."

Stefani's parlance is characterised by Southern Californiaisms like 'like' and 'dude', and she crams the information into our conversation. It's endemic of the numerous hats she wears. Her unique fashion sense, for example, has made her a bona fide style queen, drawing comparisons to Madonna in her heyday. The omnipresent Harajuku Girls (the four Japanese dancers that seemingly accompany her every public appearance) are an integral part of the "L.A.M.B" circus. She's even dubbed the girls individually, with each word from the album's title. "They do go everywhere with me," she says, with a tiny hint of irony. "They're my little shadow, my living accessories."

A flick through the album's artwork (by Japanese artist Shinjuko) bears testament to the huge influence of Tokyo's trendy Harajuku scene on the singer, where young women wearing outlandish 

"I was really into ska music, hardcore..... I wanted to be Wendy & Lisa"



→ clothes teeter around on the sort of heels you'll see Stefani precariously strutting in (see the 10-inch Diors) on TV. "The idea of self-expression through fashion and being unique and individual, having that whole vibe, I was on a quest," she enthuses. "I was like, 'I know, I'mma get some Harajuku girls and I'm gonna roll with them everywhere I go! When I first wrote "What You Waiting For?," I'd written a line in the song and it said: "I can't wait to go back and do Japan and find some brand new fans, Osaka, Tokyo, you Harajuku girls, damn you got the wicked style". I was giving them a shout-out basically because they're wicked." All of which leads us to the clothing line, L.A.M.B. (it all ties in), which actually derives its name from Stefani's dead dog (name Megan, pet-name Lamb). And as if the itinerary wasn't loaded enough, she's currently putting together the next collection for her first fashion show in New York this September ("I'm really designing it for myself, it's a very selfish project - I don't necessarily want people to have it, do you know what I mean?"), and has a Japanese-inspired accessories line called Harajuku Lovers coming out, again based on artwork by Shinjuko. "The whole design process is something I've done my whole life and it fulfills me in the same way as music - ya know, you have nothing and then you have something," she explains. "It's something I'd like to do for the rest of my life and that's why I started the line. I think that every season it just gets better and better, I have a lot to learn still, I'm still totally a baby at it."

Maybe one day we'll see Stefani the designer? Or actress, perhaps? She cut quite an image as Jean Harlow on the arm of Leonardo DiCaprio's Howard Hughes in *The Aviator*. "I would love to do another movie, to have a real role - not that that wasn't - I mean portraying Jean Harlow in a Martin Scorsese movie is not bad!" she says of her cameo slot. "But I would love to do a film; I have something I'm developing right now..." Again, Gwèh's creative apparatus is ticking to another possibility, another opportunity to be pursued.

It has of course been suggested that all this energy, this daunting workload, is Stefani's last hurrah before starting a family with rock-star husband Gavin Rossdale of the band Bush. It's something Stefani has undoubtedly pondered - the 'tick-tock' refrain from "What You Waiting For?" the sound of the biological clock? "You know, it's definitely on my dream list," says Stefani on the subject, before confirming the notion. "It's one of the big reasons I wanted to do this dance record. I knew that my passions were gonna change soon and I'm gonna want to have a family. But right now I'm tryin' to live in the moment and really enjoy this wave that I'm riding. It's not really up to me is it? If it happens it happens. It's such a miracle anyway that when it's supposed to happen to me I guess it will."

A tiny glimpse into the life of a superstar. Music diva, style icon, and movie star for our age. Just don't let her hear you call her cheerleader!

The album "Love.Angel.Music.Baby" is out now on Interscope Records. The single "Rich Girl" is released on March 14.