

# NO doubt's Invisible Troopers

It's mid-afternoon and the lobby of The Four Seasons hotel in downtown Toronto isn't quite bustling, but it's busy enough. Staff and guests mill about, but no one takes notice of the thin man with the bleached blond streaks in his hair who's wandering through the lobby. No one even glances at him. Even I look up only briefly, long enough to realize that it's the subject of my interview who has just wandered past.

A few minutes later, accompanied by his publicist, Tony Kanal is back in the lobby, to join drummer Adrian Young and myself. The pair collectively make up the rhythm section for No Doubt, a band that has sold millions of albums and packed stadiums around the world. Yet, we'll sit for the duration of this interview in the hotel lobby as people continue to pass by, and not one will stop to ask for an autograph or even to stare wonderingly at the punkish men.

Such a situation is rare for most rock bands of No Doubt's stature, but the reality is that singer Gwen Stefani elicits most of the stares in this band. The perky singer with her cotton candy-coloured hair and Betty Boop voice is the subject of fashion spreads and gossip columns, but the band has remained relatively anonymous — a subject they cheekily broached in the video for "Don't Speak" from 1995's *Tragic Kingdom* album.

"It's kind of a cool place for Adrian, Tom [guitarist Tom Dumont] and myself," Kanal explains. "You get a little bit of fame, so you can get into clubs and stuff like that, but you don't have enough that it disrupts your daily life. It's just the right balance. You get all the benefits of playing onstage, you get all the financial benefits, but you don't have to deal with your life being disrupted."

Neither Kanal nor Young seem uncomfortable with their place in the band, all cheeky videos aside, and they're both quick to praise Stefani for dealing with fame so well. Throughout the interview her name comes up regularly as a songwriter, a friend and a tour bus clown. It's obvious that, whatever the press may speculate, Stefani is someone that these two men both love and respect.

These feelings helped the band get through two-and-a-half years of touring for *Tragic Kingdom* and through the time that followed, as they struggled to find the right producer to record the follow-up with. The band spent a year working with different producers before Glen Ballard (of Alanis Morissette

fame) entered the picture, but Ballard's ear for a good song and his stellar work ethic were exactly what No Doubt needed. The result of this collaboration is *Return Of Saturn*, an album packed full of the infectious ska-influenced pop that made the band famous.

*Saturn* has its weak spots, as Stefani seems to have taken a page out of Morissette's diary-style lyric book, but the girly innocence that made *Tragic Kingdom*'s songs so compelling balances this out. It's the up-tempo numbers, with their bombastic swell, that really showcase the band hitting its stride, and which make the album as strong as it is. It's an overall growth that's come about as the members have gotten older and come into their own.

"This is a much more mature record," Kanal says. "Gwen became much more introspective. She was searching different places inside to find the themes for the record."

Those themes, mainly involving the search for love and all its travails, resonate throughout. Songs like "Marry Me" and "Ex-Girlfriend" question whether she'll ever find the right person and will undoubtedly bring up questions about Stefani's relationship with Bush frontman Gavin Rossdale, in much the same way that *Tragic Kingdom* elicited numerous interviews about Stefani and Kanal's romance. It's Stefani's willingness to put a face on her relationships, to own up to them and to open herself up to the world, that seem to appeal to the band's legion of female fans. These were the girls pressed up to the stage when the band played Toronto, screaming along to "Don't Speak" and understanding perfectly.

Neither Young nor Kanal are major songwriters in the band, but they understand Stefani's appeal. For them, this album was a chance to mature as musicians and to tighten their sound. Live, both provide important elements;

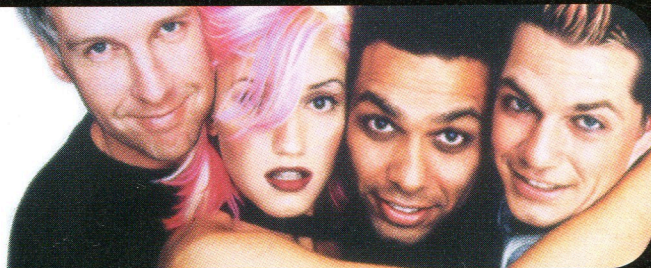
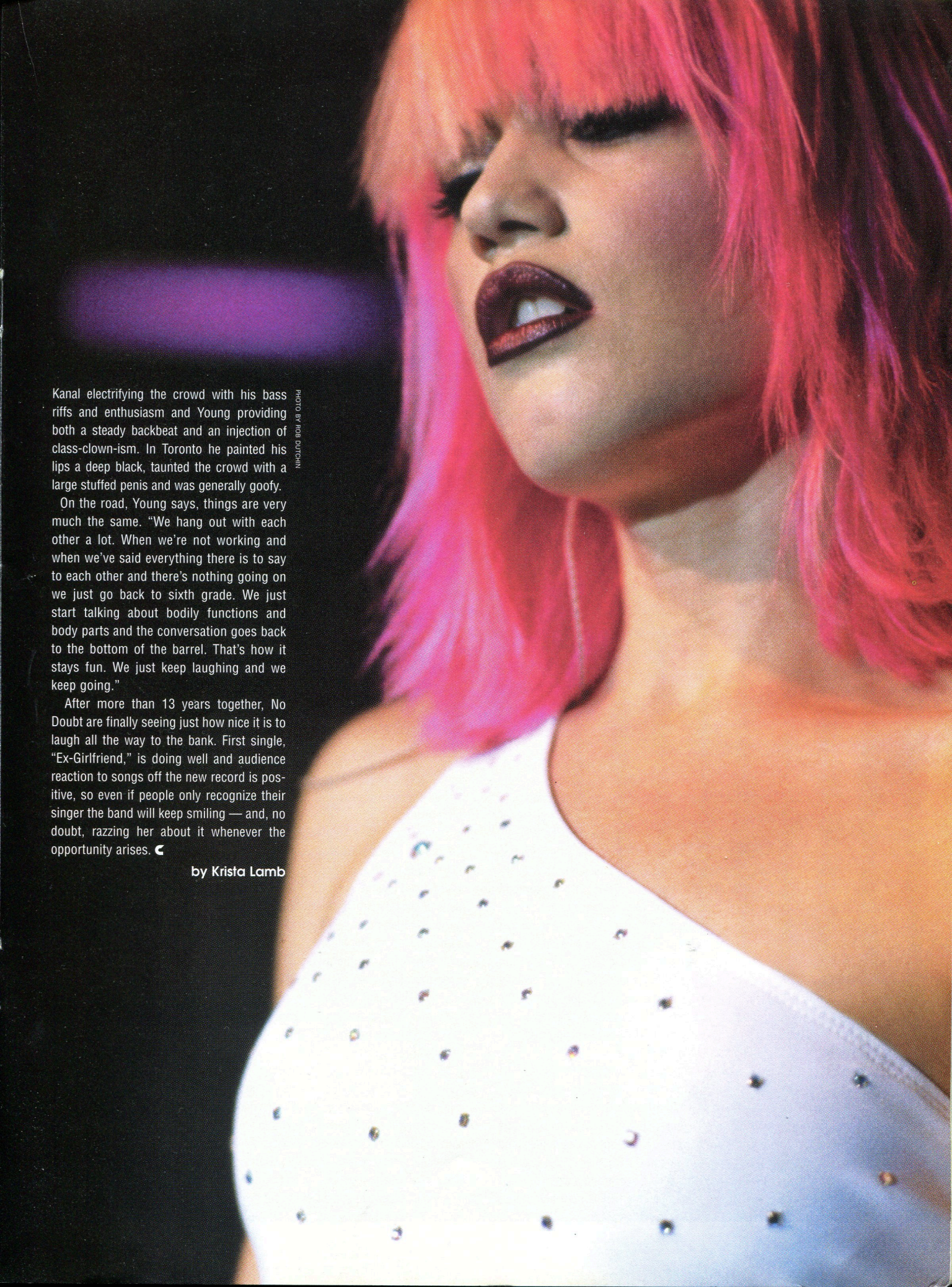


PHOTO BY CHRIS CAFARRO



Kanal electrifying the crowd with his bass riffs and enthusiasm and Young providing both a steady backbeat and an injection of class-clown-ism. In Toronto he painted his lips a deep black, taunted the crowd with a large stuffed penis and was generally goofy.

PHOTO BY REA DUTCHIN

On the road, Young says, things are very much the same. "We hang out with each other a lot. When we're not working and when we've said everything there is to say to each other and there's nothing going on we just go back to sixth grade. We just start talking about bodily functions and body parts and the conversation goes back to the bottom of the barrel. That's how it stays fun. We just keep laughing and we keep going."

After more than 13 years together, No Doubt are finally seeing just how nice it is to laugh all the way to the bank. First single, "Ex-Girlfriend," is doing well and audience reaction to songs off the new record is positive, so even if people only recognize their singer the band will keep smiling — and, no doubt, razzing her about it whenever the opportunity arises. ◀

by Krista Lamb