

Music



EDITED BY KEVIN O'DONNELL @ODtron



Gwen Stefani Reborn

The pop star, 46, opens up about overcoming heartbreak—and scrapping an entire album—to make her excellent, soul-baring comeback *This Is What the Truth Feels Like*.

BY MADISON VAIN

On your new album, you've written about your ex, Bush frontman Gavin Rossdale, and new boyfriend Blake Shelton. Did you get nervous sharing such personal songs?

I don't have any secrets; I don't have anything to hide. I haven't done anything wrong. I'm happy to share my story. [This] is really the only record I've written that's mostly happy; all the others are about heartbreak. And there's some of that on here—it needed that, to make the rest feel as good as it feels.

You worked with Selena Gomez songwriter Justin Tranter and Adele producer Greg Kurstin. What were those sessions like?

When I started this, I walked into the studio and said, "I don't care about a single. I'm doing this to get this stuff out. I want it to be the

▶ **NOTEWORTHY**

Carly Rae Jepsen, Steel Train, and **the 1975** will perform at

Jack Antonoff's Shadow of the City festival in Seaside

Heights, N.J., on June 18. "I want [people to expect] that I'm

going to do something totally out-there," Antonoff tells EW.

truth." So when we started writing, it was a lot of journal stuff that I had worked on. Every record was written around emotion.

You were working on a third solo album in 2014 with artists like Sia and Pharrell but scrapped those songs. How come?

I had just had Apollo [Stefani's youngest son], and they had just called me to do *The Voice*. It was like, "How am I going to nurse a baby, be a mom to two other kids, be on a new show, and write songs?" So I decided to curate a record. Everyone does that! Almost nobody writes their whole records! [Laughs] But it didn't feel right.

What felt off?

Every time people would write things, I was like, "That's what I sounded like 12 years ago—maybe you should call Charli XCX or somebody else." It felt weird and fake. It wasn't meant to happen. What was [meant] to happen was this crazy, horrible stuff went down, and I was supposed to write about it. I easily could have died, and I wanted to, but something in me was like, "I gotta turn this into music."

Is that how the first single, "Used to Love You," came about?

It's crazy, by the time I had written "Used to Love You," the bulk of the first half [of the album] was written in, like, eight weeks. I think I wrote 13 songs in those eight weeks. And that's when the record company was like, "We're so proud of you, but we don't think this is the record you want to make—it might be too personal." In the beginning I was quite heartbroken, but all I could do was deal with it.

What do you get out of sharing such intimate music?

When I started No Doubt, we

weren't doing music because we thought we'd make it. We knew we were making music that couldn't get on the radio. It was pop in the middle of grunge—it made no sense! [But] those songs were so personal. I didn't write them to help other people; I wrote to help myself. But after, I saw that music helps people. Now I crave that give-and-receive. By sharing it, I receive so much.

What do your kids think of their mom as a pop star?

They're excited for me to have new music. And I got Fetty Wap on my record! They're excited about that! But it's funny how kids really don't want you to do anything except be their mom. I'd write new songs and be like, "Let's listen on the school run!" They're like, "No, Mom! Put on the TV!"

Speaking of Fetty Wap, how'd you guys pair up?

I feel like a voice with so much character hasn't come along in a long time, so I told my team I wanted to work with him. They got me [studio] dates, and then I was like, "I'm working with Fetty this week!" Then I went in, and nope, he doesn't show. Day 2 and nope, he doesn't show. Day 3 and nope, he doesn't show. I wrote a song for us while I was in the studio and I sent it to him, and nope, no response. It was a miracle it happened.

After this album and two seasons on NBC's *The Voice*, what's next?

I'd like to write not just for myself. I could do that now. I had lost my way. When you have a long career, how do you compete with what you've done before? You lose confidence. Being on *The Voice* made me go through my Rolodex of life and go, "Oh, I did that! I wrote that song!" It restarted me, in a way.



Gwen Stefani

TITLE This Is What the Truth Feels Like

GENRE Pop | **LABEL** Interscope

REVIEW BY Leah Greenblatt @Leahbats



"TRUTH" IS THE OPERATIVE word on *This Is What the Truth Feels Like*, an album so directly

torn from Stefani's recent, much-documented romantic upheavals that it could be called *The Ballad of Blake and Gavin*. She's always been an especially guileless kind of pop star, one whose best songs are also her most personal: 1995's epic melodrama of intra-band tension "Don't Speak"; 2001's tender, vulnerable "Underneath It All"—and more recently *Truth's* lead single, the actually-ripped-from-the-headlines "Used to Love You." Part torch song and part kiss-off, it's strung with the sort of small, telling details ("Suitcase, Band-Aids/Pulling back out the driveway/You go, I'll stay") that help ground the record when it wanders into more generic dear-diary reflections on love lost and found.

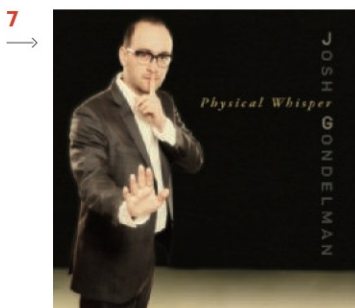
Some tracks, like the sunny, reggae-boosted "Where Would I Be" and roller-disco bounce "Make Me Like You," are so mindlessly fun they could have their lyric sheets fully told in emojis. (Cat With Heart Eyes! Handclap! Eggplant!) On the sly "Naughty" and bass-rattling "Red Flag," though, Stefani drills down, serving up glossy hooks with a side of verbal nunchucks. There are come-ons disguised as cautions (see the Fetty Wap-assisted stomper "Asking 4 It") and sweetly smitten confessionals ("Rare," "Misery"), too. At 46, the mother of three can sometimes sound like the world's most glamorous high school sophomore, passing mash notes after study hall. But she wears her girlishness on her own terms, and here it feels truer—and sounds stronger—than it has in years. **A-**

The Must List



6 MOVIES HELLO, MY NAME IS DORIS

• Sally Field sparkles as a kooky woman with a crush on an art director (Max Greenfield) half her age. You'll like her, you'll *really* like her. (R)



7 COMEDY PHYSICAL WHISPER, Josh Gondelman

• Gondelman (*Last Week Tonight With John Oliver*) puts his considerable knack for storytelling on full blast on this comedy album, which features hilarious tales about true love, public transit, and Otto von Bismarck.



8 MUSIC THIS IS WHAT THE TRUTH FEELS LIKE, Gwen Stefani

• 2016 is all about the Gwenaissance. The 46-year-old returns for her first solo disc in nearly a decade, and it's the most fun, personal, undeniably pop album of the year so far.



9 BOOKS THE FIRST TIME SHE DROWNED, by Kerry Kletter

• Lots of mothers and daughters have issues, but the one in this lyrical, resonant YA novel is especially rough: Cassie's mom had her committed to a mental hospital.

10 TV THE CARMICHAEL SHOW

• Jerrod Carmichael's comedy thrives on tough topics. See past episodes on: the Black Lives Matter movement, guns, and Bill Cosby. Up next? Islamophobia, gentrification, and somehow more laughs. (*Sundays, 9 p.m., NBC*)