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PUMP UP THE VOLUME

We're turning up the dial with our Women in Music portfolio, featuring some of the biggest stars to top the charts and make headlines this year. Gwen Stefani! Taylor Swift! Adele! Lady Gaga! Plus, Jennifer Hudson discusses her triumphant return to R&B and fresh outlook on life. Even accessories are getting into the groove for fall: In case you haven't heard, punk-inspired studs are all the rage. Some of the sexiest glam looks from the '70s—louche jumpsuits, strong-shouldered dresses—are also back in a major way, so get set for a sneak peek at fashion's new Jerry Hall moment. It's all about fierce attitude this season. No doubt!

Duchess satin dress, MARC JACOBS, \$2,500, at Marc Jacobs, NYC. Sterling silver necklace, ROBERT LEE MORRIS, price upon request. Brass-detail wood cuff, STELLA MCCARTNEY, \$995. Sterling silver and black diamond bracelets, both, DAVID YURMAN, prices upon request. For details, see Shopping Guide.



Above: Cotton shirt, **Dsquared**, \$595, at Bergdorf Goodman, NYC. Cashmere cardigan, **Yves Saint Laurent**, \$1,090. Bra, **Vassarette**, \$12. Cropped skinny jeans, **Current/Elliott**, \$189. Studded suspenders, **Dsquared**, price upon request. Booties, **Christian Louboutin for Giles**. White gold and diamond earrings, **Andrea Lieberman for Mouawad**, price upon request. Gunmetal and crystal necklace, **Janis by Janis Savitt**, \$500. Link bracelet, **Just Cavalli**, price upon request. Lambskin gloves, **Chanel**, price upon request.

On man, left: Wool coat, **Burberry**, \$895. Cotton shirt, **Rag & Bone**, \$285. Angora-blend cardigan, **Fred Perry**, \$225. Tie-dye denim jeans, **Bess**, \$240. Leather boots, **Dr. Martens**, \$125.

On man, right: Cotton shirt, **Ben Sherman**, \$59. Wool-blend jacket, **Fred Perry x Raf Simons**, \$395. Tie-dye denim jeans, **Bess**, \$240. Suspenders, from **Trash and Vaudeville**, NYC. Leather boots, **Ben Sherman**, \$179.


Far right: White gold and diamond earrings, **Andrea Lieberman for Mouawad**, price upon request, at Barneys New York. *For details, see Shopping Guide.*



UNDERNEATH IT ALL

IN THE EARLY DAYS OF NO DOUBT, GWEN STEFANI—ALL FIERCE AND FABULOUS—WAS ALREADY SUPERWOMAN. NOW SHE'S SUPERMOM, SUPERBRAND, AND STILL BRINGING IT ONSTAGE WITH THE FORCE OF A SUPERSTAR.
BY AARON GELL

PHOTOGRAPHED BY *carter smith*
STYLED BY *andrea lieberman*



Looped fringe wool dress, **Rodarte**, \$3,450, at Bergdorf Goodman, NYC. Cropped skinny jeans, **Current/Elliott**, \$189. Studded suspenders, **Dsquared**, price upon request. Booties, **Christian Louboutin for Giles**. White gold and diamond earrings, ring, both, **Andrea Lieberman for Mouawad**, prices upon request. Stone and crystal-detail lacquered necklace, **Louis Vuitton**. Safety-pin-detail pearl necklace, **Tom Binns Design**, \$3,750. Brass-detail wood cuff, **Stella McCartney**, \$995. *On man, left:* Merino wool cardigan, **Fred Perry**, \$322. Skinny jeans, **Levi's**, \$70. Suspenders, from **Trash and Vaudeville**, NYC. *On man, right:* Cotton shirt, **Ben Sherman**, \$79. Wool suit, \$2,545, silk tie, \$180, both, **Dior Homme**. Melton wool hat, **Ben Sherman**, \$60. Leather boots, **Dr. Martens**, \$190. *For details, see Shopping Guide.*

t seems impossible now, sitting with Gwen Stefani amid the dazzling bougainvillea and azalea on the sun-dappled patio of the Beverly Hills Hotel's Polo Lounge, but there was once a time, not long ago, when the delicate flower perched beside me on a leather banquette with her strong, thin arms wrapped around her midsection, blinking away a tear and looking like she could maybe use a hug, seemed to me the most terrifying woman in pop.

Remember those No Doubt videos? There was Gwen the Malfunctioning Aerobic Fem-Bot, wires crossed, head jerking maniacally from side to side in "Just a Girl," and Gwen the Post-apocalyptic Jet Ski Hellion in "Hella Good." Gwen the Noir Femme Fatale, throwing a courtroom conniption after bumping off a series of beaus in "It's My Life," and Gwen the Tae Bo Powerhouse with the wife-beater tee and lipstick snarl, ready to take out the camera with a single well-placed kick in No Doubt's "Excuse Me Mr." And let's not even mention Gwen the Foxy Nun in her solo hit "Wind It Up." (Excuse me, sister!)

What made Stefani seem all the more dangerous—it wasn't just me, was it?—is the way she tempered that madwoman mystique with an exaggerated, Kabuki-like femininity...no less alluring for seeming like it might be a big put-on. "She's like a diamond-encrusted heart," says her longtime stylist and friend Andrea Lieberman, "like this bottle of champagne with this girly effervescence, but balanced with the tomboy thing." The whole package can make for a dizzying flurry of sexual semaphores. Think of those caterpillar eyelashes, batting coquettishly one moment, peeling back into a horrified scream-queen grimace the next. And those Bowflex lips (her killer app), morphing from sweet pout to feral sneer in an instant. It's this combination that makes Stefani—who spent years as a rock singer, Xeroxing band posters at Kinko's, touring the country in a van, before her detour into pop-princess territory—so much more formidable than her semimanufactured cohorts. And now, with two platinum-plus solo albums under her belt, she's preparing to go on the road with No Doubt, the poppy ska-punk foursome that since the late '80s has been her musical family.

Rocking a brand-new pair of superluxe Dior shades ("there's a girl that hooks me up sometimes," she says), a Vivienne Westwood wrap-blouse, baggy Dsquared jeans cinched with a studded belt, and a pair of five-inch heels from her L.A.M.B. line featuring enough straps to immobilize a grizzly bear, she casts an impressive figure as she breezes into the joint with baby Zuma on her hip, turning heads (including that of fellow celeb-mom Jennifer Garner) as she goes. And boy, are those lips red. But then she opens them to speak. Stefani is so emphatically *nice* in person, so unassuming and normal and chronically insecure—in the course of several conversations, she informs me that she doesn't know how to write songs or even really sing, is a hopeless dancer, and knows next to nothing about fashion—it's easy to forget she's a superstar. She seems to have forgotten it herself.

"Obviously, I'm not anything more than I am," she says at one point. "I'm just, like, totally normal. The fact that *any* of this has happened, that we're sitting here at the Beverly Hills Hotel"—she casts a dubious expression over the well-manicured patrons around us—"just gets me going, like, What?"

Apparently, Scary Gwen emerges only when Stefani's working out (her Scottish trainer has recently flown in to prepare her for the three-month tour) or performing. "Definitely when I go onstage I feel superpowerful," she says. "There's something that clicks, another side of me. I don't even have control over it."

"When you put her in a costume," says Jimmy Iovine, the legendary chief of Interscope, Stefani's label for 18 years, "she turns into Superman."

Five years ago, Stefani took a break from No Doubt—her first since high school when the band's then-mastermind, her big brother, Eric, asked her to help out on vocals—to try her luck as a solo artist. "I just did the circuit," she says of working with producers such as Pharrell Williams and Nellee Hooper. "You write with all the same people Christina Aguilera writes with, and the music's very programmed and done in this very patchwork way. But it was so fun. I felt like I was playing a character." After two monster hit albums, 2004's *Love. Angel. Music. Baby.* and 2006's *The Sweet Escape*, she finds herself negotiating old relationships on new terms.

"Everybody's making it like there's all this tension, you know, like I stepped away from the band and now they're jealous of me, and look, maybe there is a little bit of that," she admits, while emphasizing that she never actually quit the band. More important, though, is the personal transformation she's gone through. When No Doubt recorded its last studio album, 2001's *Rock Steady*, she points out, "I wasn't even married. Now I'm a wife and a mother of two. It's a really different role. I always referred to No Doubt as a marriage, because that's what it's like to be together for so long and go through what we've been through. I can't really have that relationship with them anymore. My priorities are always going to be my husband and my family now. That's a huge, huge thing."

Originally, No Doubt hoped to record a new album before going on tour, like bands usually do. But when they got together to write new material, Stefani says, nothing really gelled. Practically every day at noon for four months, bass player Tony Kanal and guitarist Tom Dumont turned up at her house, where she and her husband, Gavin Rossdale, have a studio, and thought about music. "At about 4:45, we'd be like, 'Okay, the magic's going to happen right now,'" she says. "And it just wasn't happening." When they recorded a cover of Adam and the Ants' "Stand and Deliver" for a forthcoming episode of *Gossip Girl*, Gwen and Tony wound up having "a heated conversation" over how the song should sound. "But some fights aren't really what they seem," she says. "I think it was a little about the song, and a little about our coming back together. There was this air bubble that needed to pop, you know?"

Speaking of pesky air bubbles and the troubles they cause, Stefani is also in full-on mom mode. "It's one thing when you have an infant," she says, "but when you have this two- or three-year-old going, 'Mommy, what's the deal?!' it's harder. Kingston's whole thing is, 'I need, I need.' He is insane right now. We're just hoping for the best and that he's not going to turn out to be a freak, but we'll see."

She would never, ever spank her kids, she says. "But I've wrestled him. I've gotten my muscles out on him, that's for sure. He's in that really challenging phase, but what I'm learning is it's *all* phases."

Stefani, who turns 40 in October, is going through a phase herself. Her voice seems to drop several decibels when she talks about it. "I just feel very *in between* at the moment," she says. "Like in my cocoon waiting to blossom into whatever's going to be. But like, I'm screwed right now, okay? I'm so screwed. I might never be able to write another song. Who knows? I *did* try. So here we are, going on tour without a new record." She pauses and shakes her head. "But then I think, what I've gone through is *major*, right? I got married and had two human beings come out of my body—plus two albums and two clothing lines that were born during the same period. I'm still nursing! I'm a little sucked dry. Like maybe once I sleep through the night, maybe I'll be able to write a song. That's where I'm at. I want so badly to write a record. I want to make every other songwriter jealous. But it's just not happening right now."

It's at this point in the conversation, which has turned into more of a rush of words from her and a sort of open-mouthed silence from me, that I notice Stefani's eyes begin to glisten. And although she's



Wool and mohair-blend blazer,
Louis Vuitton, \$2,396, call 866-
VUITTON. Zipper-detail Lycra
pants, **Danielle Scutt**, \$745. Wool
hat, **Dsquared**, \$365. Booties,
Christian Louboutin for Giles. *For
details, see Shopping Guide.*



got way too much expertise with mascara to be wiping away tears, it's a little stunning to witness a celebrity in such a vulnerable and raw condition. "I feel superinsecure right now," she says. "But this always happens to me."

"The stakes are higher," Lieberman comments later. "You've got kids and fancier things, bigger houses, and more people to pay. But she goes through it every time."

"Every album," Iovine agrees, noting that an earlier case of writer's block was the theme of a scene in her "What You Waiting For?" video from *Love. Angel. Music. Baby*. Iovine first saw No Doubt in 1990 and famously promised Stefani—whom he recalls as being "a hurricane in a bottle"—that if the band stuck with it, she'd be a star in five years. "I don't blame her for saying she's nervous," he says. "She should be. Gwen's not going to lie to herself. She knows what's ahead of her in that studio, and she won't do it half-ass. She's the real thing."

The second of four siblings, Stefani grew up in Anaheim, California, practically in the shadow of Sleeping Beauty's castle. Her father was a marketing executive, her mother an accountant turned homemaker. It was an idyllic childhood in many ways—she describes her family, with whom she's still extremely close, as "like *The Brady Bunch*"—but after third grade, she began to struggle in school. "Once you got into the real nuts and bolts of it, like my spelling and math and basically all the other subjects, I had a hard time," she recalls. She now thinks she may have had a touch of dyslexia. "School was just really hard for me. I didn't want to fail. I wanted to be smart! But I was really dreaming, like drawing my boyfriend's name on my notebooks. It was such a disaster. It's so sad! It makes me sad when I think about it. I still have nightmares about tests."

A "total goody two-shoes," as she puts it, Stefani describes herself in the *Rock Steady* track "Hey Baby" as "just sippin' on chamomile" while her bandmates lived out a slightly more familiar rock star fantasy. Her teen years were spent practicing with No Doubt (sharing vocal duties with John Spence), sewing her own clothes, and listening to favorite musicals such as *The Sound of Music* and *Evita*. Eventually she landed a job as a makeup girl at a local mall. "I never had any kind of ambitions," she says. "I just thought I was going to have babies."

Though she joined No Doubt mostly to placate her brother Eric, she soon found that performing gave her a desperately needed jolt of power. The ska-punk scene was deeply male, she says, "so whenever I went onstage there was this automatic assumption that I couldn't get the audience going because I was a girl. I just ignored that, like, 'Yeah, I'm going to be all made up, and I'm going to destroy you. If you're not looking at me right now, you're going to because I'm going to fucking get you to look at me and fuck you! Raaarrhhg!'" Stefani puts up her fists and growls, and suddenly, for a split second, there she is, the girl in the videos. "The F-word was my favorite word," she adds, laughing.

Gwen became the band's lead singer in 1987, following Spence's suicide. She took an even more dominant role several years later when Eric left to become an animator on *The Simpsons*. "When I found out that I could write songs, I felt like all of a sudden I'd found myself. Like, really, this power that I had that I never had before. It was amazing to have something that I could do after the whole school problem. I remember playing them for my dad and him being, like"—her voice cracks a little—"Keep going. Because these are really good."

Stefani's high school boyfriend was No Doubt's bass player, Tony Kanal. Somehow the band stayed together when their romantic relationship ended after roughly eight years, and Stefani's anguish over the split inspired many tracks on their third album, *Tragic Kingdom*. Barely a year later, she met Gavin Rossdale when No Doubt

opened for his band, Bush. "It's like, I only had two boyfriends in my life, and I married one of them," Stefani says. "That's how I wound up getting over Tony. It was like, Wow, someone can be really into me! Someone likes me!"

The next day, Stefani arrives at the tiny West Hollywood bungalow belonging to her younger brother, Todd, a videographer. With her are Zuma, his nanny, Stefani's personal assistant, and an old friend of Rossdale's named Pete. "Great, now the house is full!" Todd jokes to his wife, Jen.

First on the agenda is a "merch meeting" with one of Stefani's managers, an officious blond named Lisa, who's come armed with a MacBook. Zuma hangs in the other room with his nanny and Aunt Jen as Mom surveys proposed designs for ringer tees, hoodies, "button packs," and glow-light bracelets, some for sale in tour venues, others bound for retail outlets. "I want that pink, that Sex Pistols pink," Stefani says at one point, later declaring the use of multiple arrows in one No Doubt logo "a little too ska." With her two fashion lines—L.A.M.B. and Harajuku Lovers, which, combined, rake in retail sales of some \$200 million per year—not to mention her Harajuku Lovers fragrance, one of the top 10 best-selling in the country, Stefani is an old hand at such meetings. While her style has become more sophisticated over the years, she's bounced between two poles—prim and punky—since the beginning, when she'd just as likely be found sporting combat boots as dresses lifted from *The Sound of Music*.

Next, a short video greeting for an awards show Stefani can't attend must be shot. The plan: Walk up Melrose and wing it. Lisa wonders about security. "Oh, come on," Stefani says. "Nobody's going to mob me. Nobody cares."

Todd hands Pete a boom mic, lifts a camera onto his shoulder, and, as everyone heads out, bellows, "This is run-and-gun, people!"

She's barely finished one take when the first paparazzo arrives and radios for reinforcements; suddenly there's a swarm: paps, fans, tourists, curious passersby. Traffic slows to a crawl as motorists crane their necks for a look. A few takes later, Todd announces he has what he needs and the entourage hightails it back to the house, slamming the door behind them. Outside, the paps slowly circle the block like gangbangers plotting a drive-by.

Back at work, Stefani and Lisa confer over her schedule, trying to isolate the few days when Gwen's and Gavin's tours nearly intersect so King can see his dad. They take a quick spin through the new No Doubt website and talk over a new shirtdress for Harajuku Lovers.

Once the paps have given up, Gwen, Zuma, and Pete pile into the Range Rover and drive to the Hollywood Hills to meet with Lieberman about the tour costumes. As Zuma and Lieberman's baby daughter Paloma (wearing a Harajuku Lovers onesie) enjoy an impromptu playdate, the two moms fondle metallic fabric swatches and talk kilts, corsets, and punker pants. The overall look, as Stefani puts it, is "like a '60s, cyber-futuristic version of the old me."

Although she won't be doing nearly as many costume changes as she did on her solo tours, she and Lieberman plan one big "reveal," when Stefani will doff her skirt and jacket to show off a pair of shorts during "Underneath It All."

Stefani sings a bit of the song, snapping her fingers and grooving to the music. Her eyes light up, and for a moment you can see her imagining herself onstage, looking out over the ocean of faces, her power returning at last.

"Okay, what about the encore?" Lieberman asks as Paloma crawls over and begins gumming Stefani's BlackBerry Pearl. Stefani laughs. "You know, we might not even get an encore," she says, the insecurities flooding back.

Prudently, they hook up a hot costume, just in case. ●



Wool dress, **Alexander McQueen**, visit alexander-mcqueen.com. White gold and diamond earrings, **Andrea Lieberman for Mouawad**, price upon request. Safety-pin-detail pearl necklace, **Tom Binns Design**, \$1,113. For details, see *Shopping Guide*.

SET DESIGN BY STEVE HALTERMAN AT STARDUST VISIONS; HAIR BY DANILO FOR PANTENE AT THE WALL GROUP; MAKEUP BY JO STRETTELL FOR DIOR BEAUTY AT CLOUTIER; MANICURE BY TOM BACHIK FOR CHANEL AT THEMAGNETAGENCY.COM; PRODUCED BY CAT BURKLEY AT PORTFOLIO ONE; FASHION ASSISTANT: MICHAEL RUSSO.