

# HARPERS

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& Queen

## Gwen Stefani

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# Rock idol

Equal parts punkette and starlet, Gwen Stefani is about to go super-stellar. Scorsese's new star and pop's hottest hybrid, she's far from just a girl, says Charlotte Sinclair.

Photographs by Lorenzo Agius.

Styled by Andrea Lieberman

# G

wen Stefani is halfway through our cover shoot when there's a security breach at the country house that's serving as our location. While on a tour of the building, a group of blue-rinsed ladies stumble into the music room where Gwen is being photographed. If the peroxide blonde with flowers in her hair stirs recognition in the octogenarians, it probably owes more to their memories of Forties starlets than any familiarity with the sexy, stylish, stiletto-wearing tomboy who fronts the Californian rock band No Doubt. Gwen is nonplussed, and smiles graciously, arching a perfectly pencilled eyebrow at the group as they are ushered outside onto the lawn, their chorus of interest ('Goodness, wasn't she pretty?' and 'Who was that?') drifting in through the open window as the shoot resumes. The renegade OAPs could be forgiven their ignorance, but Gwen Stefani – whose currency as a bona fide rock chick, fashion icon and budding actress is already soaring – is about to hit the big time.

A few days previously, I was led into a closed room at St Martins Lane hotel to listen to exclusive tracks from Stefani's new solo album, *Love Angel Music Baby*. The clandestine circumstances say much about her exalted status. With the kind of secrecy



**GREEN GODDESS**

**This page** Velvet and moiré strapless gown; crown; both to order, Christian Dior Haute Couture.

**Previous page** Striped jacket; skirt; both to order, Christian Lacroix Haute Couture. Gloves, about £270, Sonia Rykiel. Hat, £1,305, Stephen Jones

Gwen really can write.  
Her lyrics are beautiful – for  
example: ‘Born to blossom  
and bloom to perish’





**LOOK BACK IN LANGUOR**  
Silk dress with feather detail, £3,855; satin lace-up boots, £360, both Stella McCartney. Lace and crystal flower brooch (in hair), from £465, Basia Zarzycka. Diamond and ruby heart (in hair), to order, Neil Lane. Silver earrings, to order, Shaun Leane

**CRYSTAL GAZE**

Chiffon dress with  
Swarovski crystals,  
£12,500, to order, Viktor  
& Rolf. Silver earrings,  
to order, Shaun Leane



usually reserved for top-selling global artists such as U2 or Madonna, I was allowed only a supervised listening of three of Stefani's new tracks, the words of which I had to frantically scribble down before the lyric sheets were snatched back at the end of the session. There was no question of taking the CD home. The album is her 'side project' – her first record without the No Doubt boys (ex-boyfriend and bassist Tony Kanal, guitarist Tom Dumont, and drummer Adrian Young). As well as representing her solo debut, it marks her initiation into a more mainstream sound.

'I had a very clear idea of the kind of record I wanted to make, as far as the style and sound goes,' says Stefani later. 'I wanted to sound like Prince, Lisa Lisa and Cult Jam, and Club Nouveau.' But the change in direction is not a snub to No Doubt's sound. 'It's not like, "Hi, I'm Gwen Stefani and this is me; these are my true feelings because I've been compromising all these years,"' she says. 'That was the true me the whole time.' The songs, upbeat dance tracks with a strong Eighties influence and plenty of attitude, include her first single, 'What You Waiting For?', produced with Linda Perry (who has written songs for Christina Aguilera and Courtney Love), and 'Pop Electric', a frenetic beat-filled track produced with Andre of OutKast. The Neptunes, Dr Dre and New Order are other collaborators. Gwen's voice switches from a tremulous reminiscent of Kate Bush in 'Cool', a wistful song about past love, to a throaty Debbie Harry growl for lines such as 'I'm itching, you could come and scratch me' in 'Bubble Pop Electric'.

Stefani's half-street, half-sweet image reveals the contradiction in her. With an English husband (36-year-old Gavin Rossdale of the rock band Bush), a Primrose Hill pad whose elegance is her own, and wholesome moral principles, committed Christian, Stefani has a classic, ladylike appeal. But, equally, she's a dowdy, dirty riot-grrrl pin-up from Anaheim, CA, who has spent the past 17 years playing with the boys and sporadically dying her hair blue. 'Being a girl in a band,' she explains, 'means that I want to do my own hair and wear cute clothes – but, when I get on stage, I want to rock out.'

Gwen has garnered a solid fanbase with No Doubt (with whom she has sold more than 25 million records and won three Grammys), but this temporary break from the band, plus her designs for burgeoning clothing line LAMB, and a small but potentially career-breaking acting role as Jean Harlow in Martin Scorsese's *The Aviator*, mean that everyone is watching Stefani now. As Missy Elliot, with whom she performed at the 2004 Brit Awards, says: 'When Gwen does this, it's not going to be just another record; it's going to be an event.'

However, if she's feeling the pressure, it's not showing. It's a yawning, sleep-fogged Stefani who walks into the old manor-house for our shoot. Pushing open the huge oak doors into the Tudor hallway, wearing a white tracksuit and trainers, she says in her surprisingly little voice: 'This place is ridiculous!' 'Ridiculous' and 'sick' (Californian teen patois for fabulous) are trademark Stefani words that, sprinkled into conversation along with 'dude', 'crazy', and 'magic', make her sound younger than her years. She is someone who is visually defined by her make-up – the indelible slash of red lipstick, the long black Cleopatra kohl line on her eyelids – so her bare face comes as a shock. She stands in the dim and dusty hall, her skin clear and almost translucent, and her face dominated by huge brown eyes. A sliver of her famous washboard stomach flashes at her waist as she pushes away a strand of white-blond hair from her eyes. 'She ruined her hair on tour with bleach and hairpieces,' says her stylist and friend, Andrea Lieberman. You've got to admire Stefani's commitment to peroxide. She even dedicated a song to her ravaged locks on No Doubt's last album (the dancehall-influenced,

outrageously catchy *Rock Steady*), called 'Platinum Blonde Life': 'I want a platinum blonde life/So I keep bleaching out the colours.'

Against this backdrop of faded glamour, Gwen plays the imperious and errant lady of the manor for the camera. She sings along to one of her new tracks, 'It's My Shit', standing on the lawn in a floor-length silver sheath dress. 'Damn,' she shouts over herself. 'This song doesn't match my dress.' Stefani plays her part with élan, at one point standing in a revealing silk basque, throwing her head back, her hand on her forehead in a mock faint, as 16 spectators look on. 'Oh my God!' she yells cheerfully on seeing the Polaroid. 'Dude, I look like a mannequin. I had to wear this dress yesterday that was so tight my kidneys were squashed to hell,' she adds. 'It was amazing.'

**G**wen Stefani has been experiencing a renaissance over the past couple of years. At 34 years old, she has become the kind of celebrity whose presence in the front row of a show lends instant kudos to the designer; gossip columnists adore her. At a time when Chloë Sevigny and Sarah Jessica Parker are offbeat fashion sense and quirky under that Gwen, who can carry Prada and Louis Vuitton prom dresses like a style leader. And all without losing her edge. A collaboration with Moby, the 'Mezzanine' brought her to a new dance music level. Her incredibly technically proficient 'Mezzanine' singer. And last year's hit, 'Let Me Blow Up My Summer with You', gave her approval with a cross-genre appeal. The 'Mezzanine' video, the first ('Before that I always did everything myself'), also launched her new look: a slicker, slimmer Gwen whose colourful style had been refined with 'that bling R 'n' B lustre', according to Danny Eccleston of *Q* magazine.

Sitting in a dusty armchair in an attic room filled, appropriately, with vintage costumes, Gwen Stefani is voluble, launching straight into the story of her album. 'I'm just going to go for it, OK?' She is refreshingly honest and artless throughout, readily admitting her insecurities in going solo. 'I don't really know why I'm doing this record, either,' she says. 'I'm just as scared as the fans are for me, and I have been uptight about the whole thing. But I just want to do it.' Stefani also understands how exacting her standards are. She tells me about a quarrel with Linda Perry over a song they wrote together called 'Wonderful Life For Him' about Stefani's first high-school crush, who died a few years ago. 'I wasn't finding the right way to say it, and Linda wrote these lyrics and it was the last straw. I was PMS-ing and just wanted to break out in tears,' she says, shaking her head. 'So I left and didn't go back. But months later when I listened to the song again, it was beautiful – so I ended up recording it.' She smiles, contritely spreading her hands.

A highly ambitious perfectionist, last year she launched herself into an punishing, itinerant recording schedule. 'I wanted to take time off to get inspired but I was really feeling the clock. The ongoing joke between me and my husband,' she says, rolling her eyes, 'is that we went on a vacation to the South of France when I got off the Tragic Kingdom tour. That was seven years ago. And there was our five-day honeymoon, which is the only other vacation we've ever had.' And what of Rosedale? The pair met on a No Doubt tour in 1995, when Stefani was 25. After a somewhat shaky courtship (during one break-up, Stefani famously dyed her hair pink, cut a fringe and got braces on her teeth), they married in 2002, once in St Paul's Church

**'Being a girl  
I want to do my own  
wear cute clothes  
on stage'**



**SALES QUARTER**

The page 80 list items, including dresses, boots to order, Alexander McQueen, Bottega Veneta, and a selection of Christian Louboutin, Dries Van Noten, and Hermès, were all priced at over \$1,000. Some of the items were also on sale, with some prices as low as \$500. Items on sale include a pair of Bottega Veneta boots and a pair of Dries Van Noten shoes.

Opposite 80: Dress with leather detail, \$2,200. Shoes: Miu Miu. Long and short-sleeved, \$1,200. From 1995. From Jacquemus. Shaded, \$1,000. The Last, \$1,000. From 1995. \$1,000. \$1,000. \$1,000. \$1,000.





in Covent Garden ('by a Church of England vicar who was Gavin's religious-studies teacher') and once in LA; Gwen wore a John Galliano dress at both ceremonies. 'It's great to be married,' said Gavin at the time. 'It makes us feel our love is a lot deeper.' I ask her how she copes with having a long-distance relationship. 'For years, we were apart, which I think is a great thing when you're creative people. Anything more than three weeks is really screwed up, and causes problems. But we know that it's not going to be like this for ever,' she says. 'I think marriage goes in spurts. Sometimes you just can't take it any more and then, all of a sudden, you're in love like you just met again.' Babies are also high on Gwen's list, although when she will find the time is another matter. Fans have expressed concern about whether the couple will have enough time to devote to raising a child. 'We're just as worried about it as they are,' says Stefani. 'But it'll happen when it happens.'

**S**tefani was born in 1969, into a musical family; her childhood memories are of her parents playing Bob Dylan and folk records. In 1986, she was asked to sing with her brother Eric and friend John Spence's band, No Doubt. When Tony Kanal joined, he and Gwen started dating – he even took her to her senior prom. 'My mom remade Grace Kelly's dress from *Rear Window* for me to wear,' she says. She has been with the band ever since. ('I've been famous since I was 17 – I could go into Tower Records and be recognised,' she says proudly, giggling.) But the band nearly collapsed when Spence committed suicide, and Eric departed. It was then that Gwen found her voice as a songwriter; in 1995 the band produced their hit album *Tragic Kingdom*, which sold more than 16 million copies. 'Before, I was this Gwen, the little sister or girlfriend, and I was satisfied with that. I thought I could never have any kind of effect on anything or anyone. Then I learnt I could write songs – I realised I had a talent and a power.'

This creative period also coincided with her break-up with Kanal.

'Suddenly, I was this independent person who was happy and didn't have to depend on my lover. Before that, I never really had anything of my own.' The two have remained friends; the lament that resulted from the experience was the No Doubt hit 'Don't Speak'. Gwen really can write. Some of her lyrics are beautiful – for example, the phrase 'Born to blossom and bloom to perish' in 'Beauty Contest'. And with references to Sylvia Plath, Ted Hughes and Janis Joplin on No Doubt's second album, *Return of Saturn*, Stefani proved herself to be anything but the dumb blonde.

It was the video for 'Don't Speak', in which Gwen is seen moaning plaintively into a microphone, swaying barefoot in a blue polka-dot dress, that kicked off her reputation as a style leader. 'I got that dress at a thrift store, five years before we shot the video,' she says. 'It smelled so bad that I never wore it. It's beautiful fabric, that really old rayon that just hangs beautifully.' Her knowledge of how a fabric hangs is genuine. 'It's in my blood. My grandma made all my mom's clothes, and my great-grandmother always sewed. Then, all through high school, and in the band, I made my own clothes,' she says. 'I used to make corset-style drop-waist dresses with a cheerleader skirt. Underneath, I wore my boxer shorts, fishnets and Dr Martens. For years, though, I never wanted to talk about my style because I was more concerned about the music.' However, she now confesses that 'the visuals on this record are as important as the music for me'. She understands the importance of image innately. 'I had a very clear idea of how I wanted to look, and I prepared for it.' She relates

**'I bought a Vivienne Westwood corset for \$800 – with my own money – and wore it in a video. Then I got to meet her, which was like meeting the Queen. I was just like, "Aarrgh!"'**

the story of her first 'fashion moment' with the gusto of a true addict. 'I bought a Vivienne Westwood corset for \$800 – with my own money – and wore it in a video. Then I got to meet her, which was like meeting the Queen. I was just like, "Aarrgh!"'

Stefani's style aesthetic serves as a welcome foil to the homogenous Britney look predominant in the music industry. Gone is the unpolished grunge look; in its place is subtle overstatement with lots of colour. Knuckleduster rings and hound's-tooth check culottes mix with McQueen gowns. Her body is taut and muscular, all traces of the 'chubby child who had to join the swim team' erased. 'I've always had to work at it. I have a trainer, and when I'm at home I work out five days a week.' Standing in a Dior dress with built-in hips and a bustle, she says: 'What was the point of all that dieting? On tour, we all went nuts. We were training all day and by the end of it I was like, "Damn!" I didn't even recognise my own body. I just wanted to do the show naked.' And does she feel any pressure to stay thin? 'Beauty Contest' has the lyrics: 'How'd my vanity get such a mess/Reduce myself, I've got the strict restrictions.' Gwen sighs. 'Even if I wasn't famous, I'd still feel the pressure because I think we all do.'

Doubtless, she forgives John Galliano for the extra Dior-enhanced curves. Her relationship with him is prolific, and culminated recently in Gwen wearing Dior in the video of No Doubt's cover of Talk Talk's 'It's My Life', directed by David LaChapelle. 'I got invited to my first Christian Dior show, and I cried,' she says, slipping into ditsy LA speak. 'I could not believe that someone made that look up.' The respect is mutual. Galliano says: 'She has great energy. I love her personal style – she carries it off with such aplomb.' Gwen leans forward conspiratorially in her chair. 'I had John over to dinner the other night. It's so weird; he was describing the whole couture show

that he had just done and then today I'm wearing the dress!'

I ask Gwen if the white angora sweater she's wearing is Westwood. 'No, it's one of my fall pieces. I think it's gorgeous.' She's talking about LAMB (which stands for Love Angel Music Baby), the name of her fledgling clothing and accessories line – as well

as that of her new album – and yet another feather in her cap. Stefani clearly thrives on multitasking. Her design partner, LeSportSac's CEO Tim Schiffer, had his first encounter with Stefani at a Dior catwalk show. 'Flashbulbs went off and the paparazzi started going crazy. At that moment I really understood what star power she has. She is creative, full of ideas, and really has a sense of what her fans want.' For Gwen, it is a far more selfish endeavour. 'I'm not trying to impress anyone except for myself. I sit there and say, "What do I want to wear?" Then I make it.' She giggles, as if she can't believe her luck. LAMB bestsellers include her punk-inspired bags with metallic zips. More than a mere vanity project, her bags are selling well. 'For a while, I thought, "Why am I doing this? I just don't have the time." But Andrea helped me, and I'm going to keep getting good at it because I want to do it for ever. I'm not going to be dancing around for the rest of my life.'

An awareness of the limited longevity of the female rock star could explain Stefani's interest in film roles. 'I've never acted but I always wanted to. I've tried out for films before [including *Fight Club*, *Chicago* and *Girl, Interrupted*], which is humiliating but fun.' Having harboured a fascination with the Forties actress Jean Harlow for years, Gwen was 'on the floor' when Martin Scorsese sent her the script for *The Aviator*. 'I was like, "You're fucking kidding me!"' she yells. Scorsese had seen Herb Ritts' photographs of Gwen styled as Harlow, and asked her to come and meet him, 'and dress like a lady'. The part only involved a couple of lines, but she auditioned > 270

**WINDOW DRESSING**

Trousers, £850, Alexander  
McQueen. Silk organza  
corset, to order, Vivienne  
Westwood. Fur stole,  
£4,670, Louis Vuitton.

Shoes, from a selection,  
Giuseppe Zanotti Design.  
Beaded crown, to order,  
Basia Zarzycka. See

Stockists for details. Styled  
by Andrea Lieberman at  
[margaretmaldonado.com](http://margaretmaldonado.com).

Hair by Danilo for  
Flawless/The Wall Group.  
Make-up by Lisa Butler



# HARPERS & Queen

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### 187 ◀ ROCK IDOL

in front of Scorsese and Leonardo DiCaprio, who plays Howard Hughes. Not bad for a debut. 'I must have been in there for about an hour, talking about the band and everything, and then they called, and I got it.' Stefani considers it an auspicious start. 'In the movie, Hughes gives Harlow her first role, in *Hell's Angels*, so for me it's like Scorsese giving me my first role... And it's Jean Harlow, which is just so frickin' weird,' she laughs, shaking her head.

Stefani's father, Dennis, in town on business, turns up to wait for his daughter to finish the shoot. As soon as he arrives, Gwen, standing in the grounds in a transparent chiffon Lacroix skirt, starts to act the little girl. 'I forgot to put my skirt on Daddy, don't look,' she shrieks. Between shots, she pleads with him not to read the gossip about her on the internet. 'They even say I've had a boob job,' she says, looking at her flat chest in horror. 'You mustn't read it, Daddy.' Theirs is a close relationship, and he appears quietly protective of her, despite her age. 'I feel very stable because of my Catholic upbringing,' Gwen has said. I ask Stefani Snr if his daughter has always been a star. 'No, she's always been regular. She never dressed sexy as a teen, not like Christina Aguilera. She had a ska tomboy look,' he says. 'She only got style when she started getting famous.' He smiles, proving that even celebrities have embarrassing parents.

For now, Stefani is happy – creatively fulfilled and settled in her marriage. She has even befriended fellow Londoner Madonna, although she doesn't necessarily see herself as the same kind of feminist role model. 'I always respected girls who were tough and could stand on their own. But I wasn't making a stand. I was just a normal girl who didn't know what was going to happen next; the normal one, over there, with the fat butt,' she laughs loudly, pointing to an imaginary, plumper Gwen in the corner. The self-deprecation is difficult to accept from someone so assured. It's far easier to believe the sass and ego of her lyrics in 'What You Waiting For?': 'Look at your watch now/You're still a super-hot female/You got your million-dollar contract/And they're all waiting for your hot track/What you waiting for?' Gwen's face splits into a scarlet smile as she hears her own words. A super-hot female? 'Dude, you'd better believe it.' □  
*'Love Angel Music Baby'* by Gwen Stefani is released on Polydor on 22 November. Her single, 'What You Waiting For?', is out now. 'The Aviator' goes on general release on 26 December.

### 219 ◀ ON WITH THE SHOW!

infinitely more rosy. *Jerry Springer: The Opera* has unearthed an audience avid for wickedness, energy and razzmatazz. *My Fair Lady* at the National Theatre has confirmed the public's half-forgotten love of a classic big night out. We're suddenly spoilt for choice – hurrah! *A Funny Thing Happened...* opened at the Lyttelton Theatre in the summer, to wild acclaim. *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* has been such a successful exhumation, someone just had to try to resurrect *Mary Poppins*: it opens at London's Prince Edward Theatre in time for Christmas. Mel Brooks' excruciatingly funny bad-taste extravaganza, *The Producers*, a smash revival on Broadway, recently opened at the Theatre Royal Drury. Michael Grandage is bringing *Grand Hotel* to the Donmar Warehouse, starring Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio. And, if you thought for years you'd never see another film musical after *Grease*, here comes Joel Schumacher's version of *The Phantom of the Opera* with Minnie Driver, to continue the revival begun by *Moulin Rouge!* and *Chicago*.

Just look at this array of emoters and hoofers – it's like an anthology of classic musicals brought together for our inspection, a blissful reconsecration of that sacred territory where music, wit, pizzazz and naked emotion (the lonely spotlight! the climactic kiss! the cascade of white rose petals!) come together to lift your heart and send ferrets up and down your spine, like Michael Crawford's white rat. Long may they shimmy across the stage of our lives, adjusting their bowler hats and flashing their fishnets. □