

# Just A Girl

## No Doubt's Gwen Stefani heads down under

**D**ecked out with her trademark bright pink braids that reach her waist, the heavily made up Gwen Stefani – frontwoman for ska/pop crossover act No Doubt – is lounging on the sofa of her hotel room in Los Angeles discussing the follow-up to the million-plus selling debut, *Tragic Kingdom*. Having spent four years working on the new album, the band will visit Australia for the first time amidst rumours that this record will be their last. Stefani spoke with JUICE about life, fans and love with Gavin.

### **Is it difficult to be creative musically when you're already established?**

No. Our world has broadened since we've been able to travel the world. None of us had travelled very much, other than Tony [Kanal, guitarist], who was born in England and he's lived in different places in America and he's been back to India. But for the rest of us, this is what we know now and that's what was reflected on the last album. This time we had all this information that we soaked up from all these cultures that we have been able to experience, so all of that will reflect in the music that we're making. It's helped us to become more creative and more excited about the fact that all those other pressures – like having to have a normal job, paying the rent, worrying about whether this record is ever going to come out – all of that, and this and that. So now that all those pressures are gone it's actually a little more pure and focused.

### **Speaking of different cultures, what was your recent experience like in Japan?**

The crowds were great, but the strange thing was that in between songs there was silence. They were just listening and paying attention – it was very different. At one point when it was silent, one guy screamed out, "I want to fuck you, Gwen!" [laughs]. And that made us laugh hysterically, because I don't think that guy knew he'd be so loud and clear. But it wasn't said in an aggressive testosterone way, it was said in an innocent display of affection. It was bizarre.

### **Do you feel vulnerable when the lyrics reflect your emotional state at that time?**

I don't feel vulnerable. I don't think about it when I'm doing it. You can't. I mean, I can't write something and then wonder if the person in Australia is going to understand what I'm talking about. A song like "Simple Kind of Life," which was written on the last tour before we went in to record, we never even played it live before we went in. It was there on the page. And it was one of those things where, you look back on it later and it's saying way more to you than you ever thought it said in the first place. You don't even know where it really came from, but suddenly your life is on the paper.

### **Does it frustrate you that your looks are often talked**

### **about more than your music?**

Ever since I hit puberty I've always expressed myself though whatever I was going to wear that day. Like today I thought I'd wear this (opens her jacket to reveal a pink T-shirt with 'Love' written inside a heart), because I'm in a happy and loving mood [laughs]. It's an extension of your personality. Everyone in my band has a unique style and we get a laugh amongst ourselves.

But in a lot of ways we've never just been shoe-gazers. We really go out there and put on a good show and have a good time and have a lot of energy and do whatever it takes to make sure people have a great time and walk away going, "Damn! I'm going to remember that for the rest of my life!"

I love looking through fashion magazines. We just made a video and that's eye candy for everybody. I feel very fortunate that in our absence over the last couple of years, the magazines have talked about us, fashion magazines have printed little things, I feel grateful for it. It's a fun part of the world but it's not quite as important as us having amazing chemistry and writing this record that shows 13 years of growth and friendship.

### **What's the biggest surprise about fame?**

There's a lot of giving that you do when you're famous. I don't think you realise it until it happens, but especially when you're touring, you're spending the whole day on how you're going to make it through the show and what you're going to do, how much are you going to talk on the phone – all these things contribute. You try and do things for yourself but at the same time there's a lot of giving. And at a certain point you're exhausted and you have all these people around you – you don't want to shatter anything that they might have built up in their head about you. That's their thing. I know the bands that I loved, like Madness, I can imagine if I'd met them then and they were mean to me, I'd have been crushed. I'd be like, "You don't understand, when I wake up in the morning and go to school, your face is all over my wall and all over my school books!"

### **Did that ever happen to you when you were a kid?**

I met Sting when I was in the 8th grade and he was really mean. But I recently had dinner with him and I told him and he said that he was a really a big asshole and he was sorry. He said he did the same thing to Christy Turlington or Cindy Crawford [laughs].

### **Are you very conscious about being a role model?**

No. You can't take that responsibility.

### **Would you stop yourself from smoking a cigarette in public, that kind of thing?**

We've had complaints when some of the band have been nude onstage. It's part of the performance. It's a rock show. Even though we're not a hardcore band, they're not going to see Barney. Technically we're a rock band and

sometimes, when you go to rock shows, things happen. But rock & roll is about living on the edge. Role models are a parent's responsibility. Our audience changed a lot when we got popular. We look out and see a dad with an eight-year-old girl on his shoulders and I'm yelling, "Fuck you, I'm a girl!" and she's doing it too, and there's a minute when you go, should I change my show for whoever is turning up? But I don't think we should change to become role models. But to watch the parents when their daughters are singing that, it is awkward... but that's the point. Girls aren't supposed to say that. Like my mom would be mad at that because, [scrunches face] I'm a lady. We just live a simple life of writing and expressing ourselves and whatever happens after that...

### **What else would you be doing if your career hadn't taken off?**

I'd be running a daycare centre for kids. I hate that question because I never thought I'd be doing this for this long.

### **Is it difficult being half of a celebrity couple?**

I don't really buy the celebrity couple thing, but it's difficult being so committed to the band. The commitment we have is that I'm practically married to these guys, and it's the number one thing in my life. So sometimes my relationship suffers from that. The lyrics on this record reflect that kind of balance. It's really hard, that part of it, but not the celebrity couple thing, because the only time I ever see that is when you open a magazine. But in real life, it's just a relationship like anyone else. It's complicated because we live in different countries and we're both in bands and we both have something that we're passionate about that takes up a lot of time.

### **Some refer to you as the new Kurt and Courtney.**

Oh, I hope not. I plan to be around for a while.

### **Can you talk about working with The Artist?**

We had played a show in Minneapolis and he came down, and afterwards he invited us to Paisley Park. We had a few jam sessions and walked away thinking, "Did that really happen?" [laughs] You don't walk away thinking, "Oh he's just a normal guy like everyone else." You walk away saying, "That is the Artist Formerly Known As Prince. He plays every one of our instruments ten times better than us." So that was crazy. And then I got a call that he was making his album and wanted to know if I'd do a song with him. No money, no contract, just pure art. And I couldn't believe it. We had this song that we'd written and we could never get it going, so we sent it to him and he flew the band out to Minneapolis. I got off the plane and said, "Dude, what's happening with the song?" He's like, "Oh I had to rewrite it," and what do you say to that?

MICHELE MANELIS

**RIGHT** No Doubt (l-r): Adrian Young, Tony Kanal, Gwen Stefani, Tom Dumont

