

California D

In 1992 LA ska-punks **NO DOUBT** released their debut album and no one noticed. Five years later, they're the biggest band in America and singer Gwen Stefani can't leave the house without getting mobbed. "I have to get people to slap me in case it's all been a dream," she tells Paul Brannigan...

EVERY TIME the pretty blonde ventures outside her parents' Orange County home she elicits the same response from the mall rats and the skate kids. And their slacks-wearing parents. And the old folk smelling faintly of wee. "Hey!" they cry. "Does anyone ever tell you that you look like that girl?"

By 'that girl', they mean Gwen Stefani, effervescent frontwoman with Californian ska-poppers No Doubt. The Gwen Stefani who's been peering out from all the hip magazine front covers; the sassy, sexy singer who has taken up squatters' rights on MTV and who's currently sitting pretty at Number One on the nation's album chart. And the pretty blonde just shrugs and walks away with a smile. Because in the last 12 months, being 'that girl' has never been so much fun.

For the first nine years of their career, No Doubt were in their own words "illegal". They released their debut album in '92 and no one even glanced up from their 'We Are Hairy-Arsed Angst Ridden Males' albums. Pissed off and not a little embarrassed, they retreated to Gwen's Dad's garage and knocked out a self-financed album entitled 'The Beacon Street Collection'. Even their record company didn't give a toss. At the beginning of '96, the dogged quartet — completed by guitarist Tom Dumont, bassist Tony Kanal and drummer Adrian Young — stuck out 'Tragic Kingdom' and hoped for the best...

YOU PROBABLY know the rest: the arena tour with Bush, the three smash hit US singles, 'Tragic Kingdom' hitting the top spot on the album chart just before Christmas, where it has remained ever since, selling a whopping six million copies.

Now, things are set to get seriously stupid.

This week, Gwen Stefani wanted nothing more than to re-unite with her current beau, one G. Rosedale, on holiday in London. Sadly, the demands of pop stardom being what they are, she will spend large chunks of this ostensibly free time chatting to journalists. As will Tom Dumont back at home in California. Because No Doubt aren't just a one-woman band, remember...

At various points in our fat-chewing session, Tom and Gwen will describe their success as "weird", "brilliant", and "fun". They're pleased, then?

"So many good bands never even get in the charts, never mind get to Number One," Gwen says in her sugar-sweet drawl. "So for this to happen after all the years of being a cult underground band is incredible. I have to get people to slap me across the face in case it's all been just a dream."

Self-confessed "nice middle class kids", both Gwen and Tom are extremely polite and pleasant. And frankly, you could forgive a little rudeness or arrogance from the pair,

"I don't know how I know we're hav

given that recent K! appraisals of the band have ranged from 'lightweight mock-rock' to 'fronted by the most irritating woman in rock'.

"That sort of criticism still hurts," Tom says. "I don't think we're incredible artists, but I think we have some redeeming qualities."

"Whatever," is Gwen's placid response. "Critics aside, it feels so cool for us to be getting some respect from our peers after all this time. We were playing one festival and I noticed that a lot of the other bands were watching us from the side of the stage, and I was like 'Wow!'."

"Before, we were the nerd band from Orange County, and even people from LA looked down on us because we were uncool and suburban and didn't

take drugs. People laughed at this kind of music when Nirvana were huge."

BACK THEN, No Doubt were more of a pure ska band, kicked into life when Gwen's brother, the band's ex-keyboard player Eric, brought home his first record by Camden nutty boys Madness.

"Our whole family got into it and it was kinda embarrassing," Gwen giggles. "At Thanksgiving, we watched these old videos that my Dad had shot when we were kids, and there was one where the four kids recreated a

reaming



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ng fun... GWEN STEFANI

NO DOUBT: the band that killed male hairy-arsed angst rock dead

Madness video. I just looked so awkward and stupid in front of the camera.
"It's funny to think that 15 years later I'm still doing stuff like this and people actually take me seriously."
America takes ska-punk very seriously now too, thanks to the success of No Doubt's fellow So-Cal skankers Rancid, Sublime and Goldfinger.
"The whole ska scene in America used to be so underground, and we were happy initially just to imitate British ska bands seven years after they were really happening," Gwen

laughs.
"But the ska-punk people are so strict with their rules. Our whole attitude was to play whatever makes us feel good. We just steal from everyone - like, 'Hey, let's stick that Nirvana chorus with that Specials riff' - to make this big salad of sound."
This 'big salad of sound' has proven very appetising to American record buyers. Gwen and Tom are extremely modest about their success, claiming they were just in the right place at the right time, as music fans tired of "male-orientated hard rock" sought out something fresher and poppier.
"I still take out the trash and clean the toilet just like everyone else," shrugs Tom.
But then Tom doesn't get recognised

as much as 'that girl'...
"I still live with my parents, which is embarrassing I know, and Dads will drop their kids off at our house with a camera and their No Doubt stuff," she giggles. "I'll casually open the door and all these little girls will be there, like Trick Or Treat or something. It's kinda rude and weird, but I know it won't last forever and so I just try to enjoy it."
Oh, stop being so self-effacing...
"We don't want to be dicks," laughs Tom. "Coming from that punk scene in California, we're really careful not to get too full of ourselves."
SHOW have your friends and family reacted to No Doubt's nine-year overnight success?
"We're pretty lucky because our parents are super-proud for us," Tom laughs. "My parents have always been really supportive, but now they're just crazy. They think that they're stars."
"Mind you, I haven't seen my friends for ages, so they probably think, 'Asshole - now he's a big rock star, he

THE ORIGINAL SKANKERS

The five great British ska pioneers

MADNESS - Camden's own magnificent seven. Dominated the pop charts in the early '80s with inspired good-time romps like 'Baggy Trousers' and 'Our House'.



THE SPECIALS - Best known for the bleak, anti-Thatcherite dub lament 'Ghost Town'. Started the seminal 2-Tone Records label which released albums from leading ska acts like Madness and The Beat. Classic pop moments included 'Too Much Too Young' and 'Free Nelson Mandela'.

THE SELECTER - A multi-national, interracial seven-piece from Coventry. Fronted by Pauline Black, an early role model for No Doubt's Gwen Stefani. Their finest moments came on early recordings like 'Too Much Pressure' and 'Three Minute Hero'.

THE BEAT - Rocking just as hard as they skanked, they boasted the toasting skills of the marvellous Ranking Roger. Mutated into General Public who benefited from the guitar skills of ex-Clash man Mick Jones on their debut album.

BAD MANNERS - Fronted by hulking baddie Buster Bloodvessel. A colourful riot of horns, ridiculous dancing and DM boots. No home should be without the extraordinary 'Lip Up Fatty'.



has no time for us'."
He'll have even less time for them this year, as No Doubt are set to tour the world relentlessly. But right now, Tom just wants to chill out, maybe fix up the two classic cars he picked up recently, or jam along with the Weezer and Sublime albums on his "amazingly beautiful" new guitars.
While Gwen, who admits to being "so tired I can't breathe", simply wants to cuddle up to Gavin and "pretend I have no life".
"For 10 years we were the band sat in the garage making fun of everyone on TV and radio. To be in that position ourselves now is a real trip," she concludes. "I don't know how good we are, but I know we're having fun." ■