

MeanStreet

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FAME X FORTUNE MADNESS X NO DOUBT SHAKE THE DISEASE

LIVE EX-JUNKIES
STONE TEMPLE PILOTS
METHODS OF MAYHEM

THE NEXT
BRITISH INVASION
PRIMAL SCREAM
TRAVIS
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PUNKS ON THE LOOSE
AGAINST ALL AUTHORITY
DWARVES

"When we made *Tragic Kingdom*, we weren't making a record to try to get on the radio. We were making a record just to make a record and go out there and do the same thing we did on the first record, which was to travel around the country and build our fanbase up. And then it ended up being this huge commercial success."

-Tony Kanal

EVERYONE REMEMBERS THEIR FIRST ROCK SHOW. FOR THE LUCKY FEW, IT WAS KISS IN A larger-than-life arena, row 327, seat F with mom or dad horribly conspicuous in the next seat over, staring worriedly around their immediate proximity at thousands of lighters waving dangerously close to shaggy heads of Aquanet-drenched rock star hair, bobbing loosely behind the seat in front. For an even luckier few, our first rock show was a real *show* show in a small club with two overworked bouncers flanking either side of the scuffed-up stage, too pissed off to deal with the pit filled with body pressed against sweat-drenched body — 200 of them bobbing together in an energetic fit of unified mayhem; the mob anxiously pushing toward the front of itself to get a closer look at a band like No Doubt.

One particular show-goer is 16 years old and has spent \$10 for a pink card stock ticket so low-budget that it can't even afford to bear the Goldenvoice logo. The ticket promised half-hour opening sets from The Goodwin Company and other local talent and the show-goer has hitched a ride early enough to catch it all, squeezed in the bitch seat of a friend of the high school boyfriend's car, already too cramped due to lack of legal drivers. But at last, the 16-year-old arrives, anxious to wait in a line too long to fathom, clutching the pink ticket with sweaty-palmed excitement and no ear plugs to prepare her for the loudest thing she will experience to date, leaving her ears happily ringing for three days after. This was the story of my first rock show.

Five years later, 16-year-olds are still going to No Doubt shows. Only now, tickets cost somewhere around \$30, the band plays in KISS-sized, TicketMaster-sponsored arenas and no way will a little girl could ever manage to push past a dozen bouncers and get close enough to the uberstage to catch those beads of sweat running off Gwen Stefani's infamous abs of steel. Hell, she doesn't even put her hair in pigtails anymore. No Doubt has grown up. The proof? *Return Of Saturn*, the long-prolonged sophomore follow-up to 1995's commercial success, *Tragic Kingdom*.

"In a lot of ways we felt a lot like we were fulfilled after the last record because nobody expected that [kind of success] to happen," says Stefani from her Los Feliz home. She finally relocated from Anaheim ("I just can't deal with that drive!") after two-and-a-half years of touring for *Tragic Kingdom*. "We were in the band because we were passionate; we couldn't help ourselves. We were getting to the point before that record came out trying to figure out what was going on. It was like, we felt guilty. We were still in this band, thinking, 'What are we going to do when we grow up? We kind of have to get on with our lives; this is ridiculous. It's been nine years,' you know? And the success [of *Tragic Kingdom*] just kind of validated that, and took away that guilt, and then we were in this position where we were like, 'OK, all you have to do is make an amazing album that shows some kind of evolution,

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some kind of growth, and some kind of effort and maturity."

The trouble is, *Return Of Saturn* is so mature, it's almost hard to imagine that this is the same No Doubt who, back in 1987, used to open their shows with classic ska covers. But those were the old school Orange County days, when the band wasn't even old enough to buy cigarettes, and horn-heavy skankin' numbers dominated their set. No Doubt's first Hollywood gig was at a defunct dive at Santa Monica and Vine called Gino's. That night, 16 year-old Anaheim High School Jazz Band bassist Tony Kanal was bluffing his way through his first show ever.

"I had a week to learn all this material," Kanal recalls. He had been asked to join No Doubt when their original drummer had approached him about a "new band" some kids at Loara High [in Anaheim] were putting together. "Back then we were playing a lot of covers to start off with, like Madness and the Specials and things like that. So I had to learn these songs, and I get up on stage and I can't remember anything. And [original keyboard player] Eric Stefani is trying to help me, playing the bass line on keyboards, and we're playing in front of, like, 50 people, but it's just the funniest thing to listen to. Here I am, trying to remember my bass parts live, and it was just so classic; such beautiful times back then."

THEY MAY HAVE HAD A ROUGH START IN THEIR EARLY GARAGE BAND DAYS, BUT NO DOUBT quickly earned a reputation as putting on one of the most energetic live shows in their locale — with a hot lead singer, besides. "I'm so happy that we got to experience more than Orange County," Stefani admits. "It's a weird place to come from, and after seeing the rest of the world, you realize what a strange city Anaheim is."

Especially when "Just A Girl" hit the radio waves, it was clear that No Doubt was growing out of its ska roots and into mainstream rock shoes, far too big for little Anaheim. One of the most requested songs of 1995, the single took the band to MTV and back, launching a landslide of interest in O.C. bands. Reel Big Fish exploded. Save Ferris exploded. The Offspring, The Vandals... Suddenly, the media was paying attention. But nobody could keep up; everyone was eating No Doubt's dust. In the course of six months, the tight four-piece quickly rocked its way past the hype of *Tragic Kingdom* and went on to international fame.

So was mainstream media success a goal all along? "No, no, no," Kanal defends. "We never strove to become any kind of band; it just naturally happened. When we made *Tragic Kingdom*, we weren't making a record to try to get on the radio, we were making a record just to make a record, and go out there and do the same thing we did on the first record, which was to travel around the

TEXT BY LAUREN VIERA • PHOTOS BY LISA JOHNSON

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DOUBT

country and build our fan base up. And then it ended up being this huge commercial success around the world. And of course it's a great thing and we're very grateful for it, but we were never only focused or motivated by that one factor."

In the past few years, however, No Doubt has had to search for motivation to move forward. Toward the end of their touring, the band was caught in a rut. While the success of *Tragic Kingdom* ensured a steady flow of income and popularity for years down the line, dozens of months of nightly shows were taking their toll and living on a tour bus was beginning to get old. Late in their 20s, the members of No Doubt found themselves asking the question that so many young adults approaching 30 begin to wonder: What the hell am I going to do with my life?

"I think that people in general have to get lost in their lives," says Stefani, who as the main songwriter on *Return Of Saturn* was forced to reveal more of her emotions than anyone else. "I think it was my time to get lost and try to find myself, and I don't know if it had to do with the past few years, being 28, 29, 30. They say the whole Saturn returns thing — the astrology term — is that it takes Saturn 29 years to circle the sun. So from the time you're born to the time it returns, you have this period of a kind of a reassessment and you start to second-guess everything about yourself and about people around you in your life. I don't know if I was going through that, but it sure sounded good. It sure was nice to kind of find the title of the disease I felt I was suffering from."

THE ALBUM, APPROPRIATELY NAMED FOR THE TRANSITIONAL "DISEASE" THAT STEFANI SPEAKS OF, time capsules the swarm of emotions she was feeling during its conception. "Those years, for me the last two, have not been my favorite," she recalls. "They were definitely the dip, and they were confusing. I've never felt that way before. I've always been kind of a happy-go-lucky, easy, passive person. I never really get depressed; I usually feel great. I used to tell Tony when he was depressed, I was like, 'Get over it! Have some chocolate; you'll be fine.' But I definitely felt confused, and I was definitely writing about that confusion."

For the rest of the band, the transition between *Tragic Kingdom* and *Return Of Saturn* wasn't quite as harsh, though they all had their difficulties. "I feel like I went through it a few years ago actually," says Kanal of his own return of Saturn. "It came a little early for me. It's a weird thing; I think it's much more extreme for Gwen. These last few years have been completely intense for us, completely life-changing. So getting home from that 27, 28 month *Tragic Kingdom* tour, and kind of getting perspective again — becoming a little bit more grounded — I think it was a period of reassessment for all of us."

And it shows. *Return Of Saturn* boasts rock numbers, ballads and crafted songs, not just the catchy pop tracks that defined No Doubt's first early releases and *Tragic Kingdom's* easy accessibility. The new album is the band's most solid effort, and it's about time: The band turned 13 last month.

"We wrote this album as if it were our last," says Stefani, "in the sense that that's the kind of effort that we put into it. I'm not saying that we're breaking up or anything. This is all icing on the cake, so we don't really look further than the now. And the now is just getting out there and hopefully playing around the world and playing songs for people, and that's the part that we really, really get off on, that we really love to do. We're not going to assume that we're going to continue to make records and be able to make records. As long as people want us to make 'em, and we're having fun doing it, we'll do it. But we're not assuming. This record feels like we're starting over again."

Now that the record is done, the band has had the chance to look back on their transitional period in a retrospective way, and then get over it. The sing-songy No Doubt of yesteryear is no longer. They've grown out of writing songs like "Just A Girl" and have taken more leads from the success of ballads like "Don't Speak" to point their repertoire in a new direction. There isn't one bubble gum, sing-song track to be had on the new record. Stefani's vocals sound grown-up, the band's accompaniment is toned-down, and their revamped live show is likely to appeal to a slightly older audience than the 16-year-olds bopping along with matching Stefani pigtails. *Return Of Saturn* is a mature record, and it's no wonder: it took two years of self-evaluation to polish into something attainable — something we can all relate to.

"I feel like I've completed this huge personal goal in making this album," says Stefani, "and taking advantage of this amazing opportunity to grow as an artist. I never could really call myself that before, but I think after this album, after being able to write a couple songs completely on my own, I've been able to do that. I feel so light. I feel like I've been through this huge transition, and I'm out on the other side and I'm still all like energized and recharged and ready to share it with everyone. It's like I've been pregnant for two years, and it's finally out."

No Doubt has survived its return of Saturn. Now they're ready to release the album that proves it.

No Doubt will make an in-store appearance at the Virgin Megastore in Costa Mesa on April 13, starting at 6 pm. No Doubt will also headline a show at the Universal Amphitheatre in Los Angeles on April 14 (The Suicide Machines and Fishbone are opening). For more information and up-to-date No Doubt news, log on to www.nodoubt.com.

