

ALICE IN CHAINS LIDSVILLE DUST BROTHERS WORD ON THE STREET

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NO DOUBT

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NO DOUBT

DO YOU BELIEVE IN TRAGIC?

IT'S A CRISP, CLEAR AFTERNOON in San Francisco's Tenderloin district, but the three members of No Doubt present are having a hard time facing the daylight. Escorted in the dim safety of their massive tour bus, one by one they roll out of their bunks, rub the sleep from their eyes and make their way towards the front.

Singer Gwen Stefani is the first to appear, slipping on a fabulous shag coat over her tank top, she plops down in the driver's seat and waits for the guys to awaken. Guitarist Tom Dumont's mohawked-head is the next to peek out, he wanders into the bus' lounge area, makes a circle around himself and offers no one in particular a beer from the cooler. Then, the group's bass player, Tony Kanal steps out, looking slightly dazed, but not entirely out of it. Absent is the group's drummer Adrian Young, who is apparently off pursuing a female interest. The group's internal clock, it seems, has been disrupted since the release of No Doubt's second proper album *Tragic Kingdom*.

"It's pretty intense," Kanal says of the group's newfound daily routine. "Our schedules get really messed up because we go across time-zones. We usually go to sleep really late, like 4 or 5 in the morning. Then we wake up anywhere between 1 and 4 in the afternoon. But today, we had a radio interview so we had to wake up at 6 a.m.," he pauses, resisting a yawn. "But we love it. We're not complaining at all."

Kanal's anxious tenacity has presumably been nurtured by No Doubt's recent ascent to alternative stardom in the wake of *Tragic Kingdom*'s debut single "Just A Girl," which the night before made its MTV debut on "120 Minutes." Before we make our way out onto the streets of San Francisco, Stefani slips in tape of the video and the tour bus' television monitor speakers come alive with the song's frantic riffing and spiky melody. Meanwhile, Kanal pulls out a copy of a recent issue of *Bam* from one of the overhead compartments and points to the cover which the band majestically graces. These are encouraging signs that success is finally catching up with Orange County's most charming purveyors of the ska-punk groove.

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Things weren't always so rosy for No Doubt. Three difficult years have passed since the release of the group's self-titled debut on Interscope. Shortly after the

album's delivery, the record label mysteriously pulled its support for the project, leaving the band to finance a tour on its own. Undaunted, the group spent the first part of '93 working on new music, turning out roughly 50 fresh songs. They found a producer to work with, approached the record company with all their ideas and were indefinitely put on hold.

"The label said they're going to think about it," Kanal recalls, as we settle into a crowded restaurant in Chinatown. "And over the next two years all we got to do was record in spurts, one song here, a couple songs there. There was time in between everything. It wasn't like we got to go in and do whatever. It was really frustrating, and it was due to lack of focus from, because the label was expanding. The people that signed us there moved on to other projects, so there wasn't focus on our project. We were screaming for it, and it wasn't happening. But we stuck it through, some of us went back to school, some of us got jobs. During that time, we toured by ourselves, we did whatever we could to keep the name alive."

Fate finally caught up with the band late last year when they got down to mixing the new record. The person the record company had elected to mix *Tragic Kingdom* also happened to be the co-owner of the Interscope-distributed independent Trauma Records, which made its impact with Bush's debut album. Seeing the bum predicament No Doubt was caught in, he arranged to have the band switch over to his label for the new album's release, confident he could give them the attention they deserved.

"To make a long story short, we switched over to Trauma and it's really great for us," Kanal says. "Because now we have to focus and the attention of a small, indie label, and we have the distribution and money of Interscope. We have the best of both worlds."

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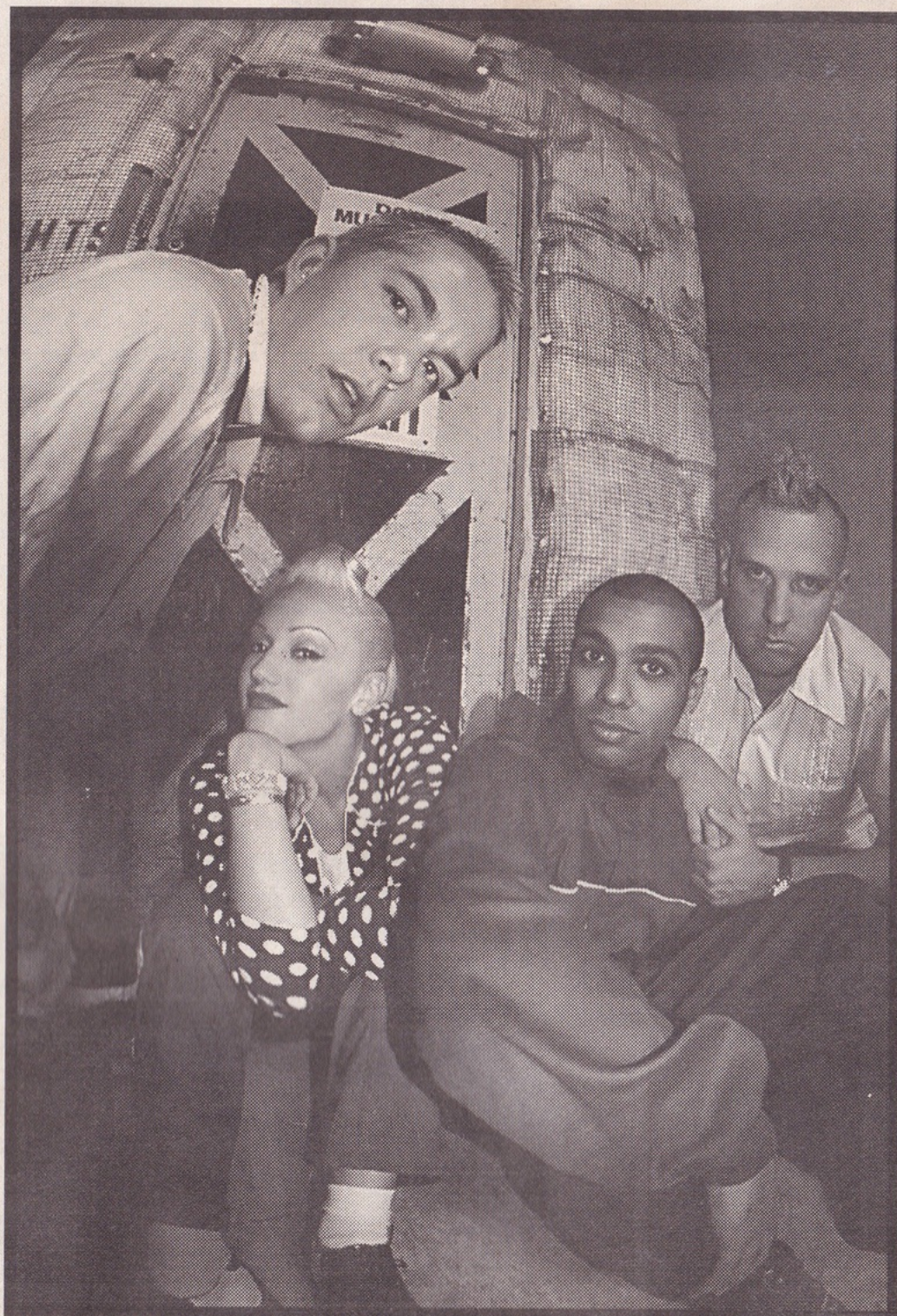
While all the record company business was going down, No Doubt's primary songwriter and keyboard player Eric Stefani decided to leave the band. His exit hit a nerve, especially with his sister.

"We were supposed to leave on tour, and the night before he was like, 'Guys, I can't do it,'" Stefani recalls. "He was going through a lot of personal problems. It was horrible to see someone so full of energy and creativity

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NO DOUBT FINALLY PUT OUT THEIR SECOND ALBUM THIS YEAR. WHAT WAS THE HOLD-UP? NOTHING REALLY... ONLY A LOUSY RECORD COMPANY, THE DEPARTURE OF THEIR MAIN SONGWRITER AND THE END OF THE LOVE AFFAIR BETWEEN THE GROUP'S LONGEST LASTING MEMBERS.

BY **AIDIN VAZIRI**



NO DOUBT MACH '95: ADRIAN YOUNG, GWEN STEFANI, TONY KANAL, TOM DUMONT

VERN BREITENBUCHER

be so low. He was so down on himself when anyone would have traded places with him because he is so talented."

"There was a point where we knew Eric was leaving and we had to ask the question, what are we going to do?," Tom says. "We had put six or seven years of our life into this thing, and we just didn't want to give up. I think Eric would've been really bummed if we stopped. I think he felt like he had to get out of the way if he wanted us to move up. It was like he was a big tree in the forest, and we were all the little bushes in the shade. We weren't getting any sunlight. So by him stepping out of the way, we got a little light and we were able to grow ourselves."

"I think it was hardest on me, because he's my brother and was all of my inspiration," Stefani says. "I would never have been into a band called Madness if it wasn't for him. He was my main influence. When I got in the band, I learned everything from my brother."

Yet, as evidenced on *Tragic Kingdom*, the remaining band members adjusted wonderfully. No Doubt's music sounds like a melange of juicy, striking new wave charm and punk rock chaoticism. There are bits of everything in the mix, yet the songs are still tight, effervescent bursts of pure pop irrelevancy.

"The last year of songwriting brought us together," Kanal says. "Eric left, but we felt really strong about keeping this going. We had patience. And somehow we persevered."

"At first I was feeling kind of guilty, because I'm in the band still, and he wasn't," Stefani says. "But now it's feeling normal again. He's feeling really happy about it. Everyone thinks that now that everything's happening Eric's feeling regret. But he's not, he's so stoked."

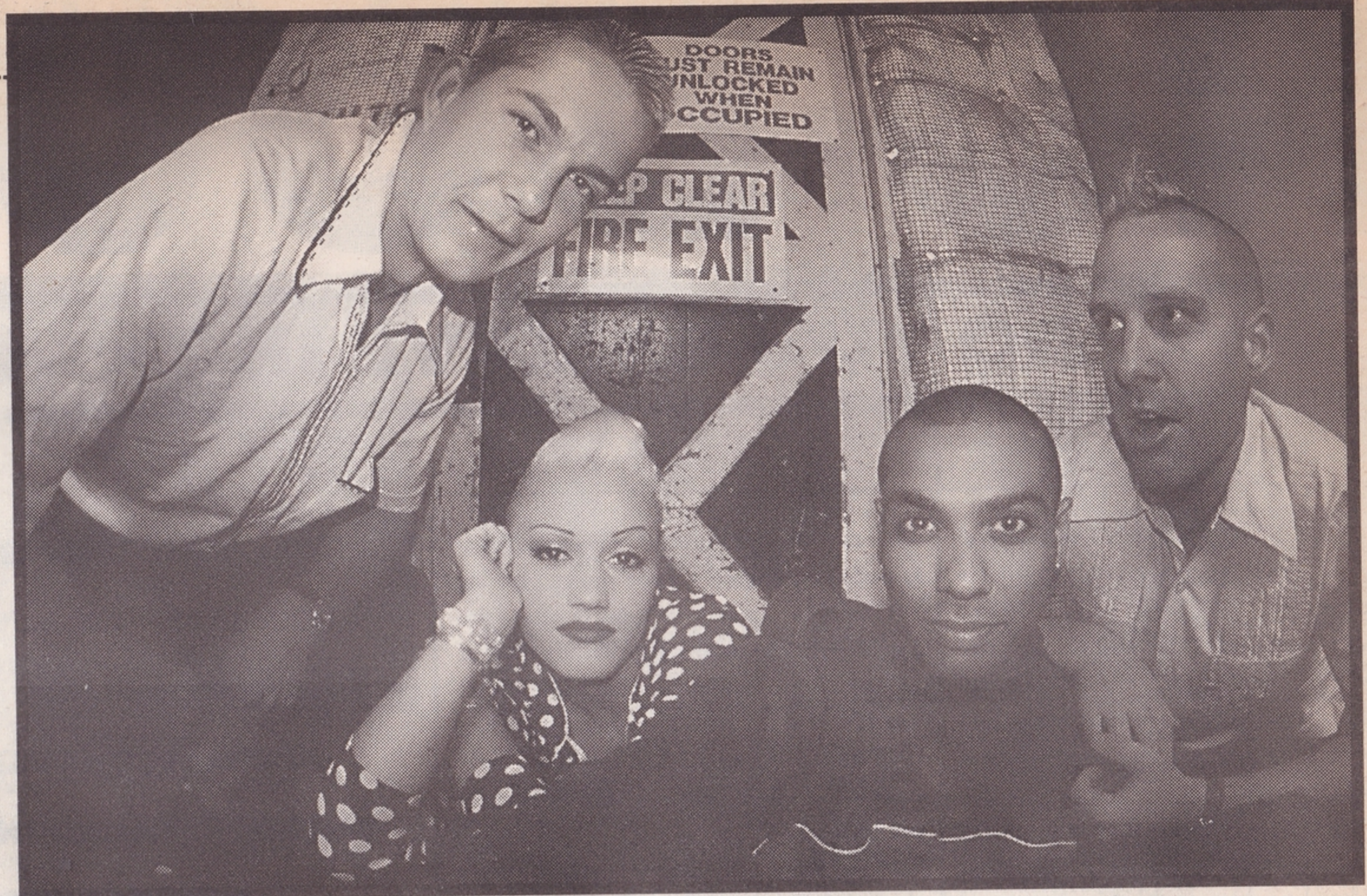
"The bottom line was that we weren't able to put out music for three years," she adds. "It really made it hard for us. We were at the point where we didn't want to write songs any more. We lost a member. We went through a lot of problems. We're over it now. Now our situation has changed, and we're enjoying every day."

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Which brings us to *Tragic Kingdom*, a crushingly stark album. The product of Stefani and Kanal's failed love affair, its most forlorn songs "Happy Now?", "Don't Speak" and "End It On This" belie their cheerful exterior with the somber air of desperation.

"Let's face it, my whole life fell apart last year," Stefani says. "My brother left the band and Tony broke up with me; the two most important things in my life. But at the same time, you get the good with the bad. *Tragic Kingdom*, the album, every song is about Tony basically. There's some really cool songs that came out of the break-up."

"Our whole relationship had become, to



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me, convoluted and intertwined with the band," Kanal says. "There was just no space, everything was tied together. I wasn't happy, and I don't think she was happy. I don't think I was treating her like she deserves to be treated. It's like when you're in a relationship, everyone says you shouldn't go out with someone you work with. That's totally true. It doesn't work out."

There's only one problem.

"I still love him so much," Stefani says. "I'm in the worst situation."

Given the circumstances, the title *Tragic Kingdom* takes on symbolic weight.

"It can apply to the album, it can apply to our lives, it can apply to Orange County," Kanal says. "That name just makes so much sense for where we were at. We went through so many hard years."

"I think what has gotten us through this whole thing is the focus on the band," Stefani says. "The last year we really had to struggle to get the album out. To me, the whole thing with the relationship has gotten so old, we've been through this so many times that the most exciting thing in my life is the band. Things are going so good, that's all that we really care about right now. Of course, once in a while, I'm really lonely and I want to crawl into his bunk and grab him but, whatever, that's not important right now. Our little baby is here, *Tragic Kingdom* is here, let's work on that. That's where we're at right now."

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And where No Doubt is at right now is an enviable position for any band coming off the release of its second album. "Just A Girl" is still making inroads on alternative radio stations all over the country, the group has a hectic touring schedule ahead and MTV's warming up to the song could hold unknown benefits. Still, the group remains hesitant to

embrace its sudden success.

"We've been doing it for so long that we can't stagnate or be unrealistic about," Kanal says. "It's not like we just started, that's why we can appreciate it. We don't take it for granted."

"I think I'd be lying if I said I didn't get excited the first time I heard our song on the radio," Dumont says. "What we're really about, though, is playing live shows and it's what we've always been about. Having a song on the radio just makes it easier for us to keep doing that. It makes it easier for us to get a lot of people at the shows, and when they get there we do our best to make sure they have a great time. Radio is like smoke and mirrors, it's like fool's gold. What is real is playing shows. You can grasp onto it and know there's something there."

"It's also like, we're on the radio, but that's today," Stefani says. "It could be gone two days from now. The best part for me is playing live and seeing people in the front singing the new songs. It's so awesome, I can't even explain it. The fact that you know these people had to listen to this album a few times to know the words, it just makes you feel so good. The live show is our thing."

"A lot of people say, 'Now that ska's on the radio, we think it's your time,'" Kanal adds. "We don't see that. We don't see ourselves as a ska band. We see ourselves as a rock band that plays ska and punk and reggae. We mix everything up, that's always been our style. We've always been confused about what we are. We don't see ourselves as riding any kind of ska wave, it's just a matter of timing."

As the waiter brings the check to the table, everybody gets up and heads out the door, ready to get back on the bus and proceed into uncharted regions of success. "It's the weirdest thing," Stefani smiles. "Suddenly everyone's into our loser band. It's awesome." •

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