

# MeanStreet

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA'S NO. 1 MUSIC MAGAZINE

VOL. 12.06 | DECEMBER 2001 | FREE

GARBAGE  
THE COUP  
DEATH CAB FOR CUTIE  
GWAR



CYPRESS HILL



**NO DOUBT**





# NO DOUBT

BY MARYVETTE

fect speech is marked by a plethora of "you know?" and the occasional "dude." In essence, she is a real slice of Orange County. Likewise, when guitarist Tom Dumont speaks, he is sincere, gracious, given to laughter and shares in Stefani's sentiments about No Doubt's success.

"When *Tragic Kingdom* came out in '95, we had been together for eight years not because we were extremely successful, but because we had a really strong friendship.

"The cool thing about all

the fame and stuff after *Tragic Kingdom* is that we're still here and we still have the same friendships and still enjoy being together," he reveals. "It's cool that we've made it without hating each other or becoming drug addicts or anything bad, you know what I mean? The analogy I use is that we're like brothers and sister. There are moments when we drive each other crazy, but at the same time we're really tight and have this deep connection. No matter what I do to piss off Tony today, tomorrow we're gonna be hanging out drinking and playing tennis."

It's been little more than a year since No Doubt released a new album, and just in time for the holidays comes *Rock Steady* — a danceable collage of ska, reggae, dancehall and new wave synthesizers bobbing within a sweet pop bubble. Rerouting themselves from the slightly dark departure they took on *Return Of Saturn*, No Doubt is feeling fine and ready to share the love.

"We were in a really good mood while making this record and it was probably one of the most magical times in the group," gushes Stefani, waiting for sound check at the Staples Center before she and the group open for U2 on their current Elevation Tour. "The last record was like our growing pains record. We came off of *Tragic Kingdom* and we made a record that we took very seriously. Everybody took it on like a huge responsibility to prove to themselves that they could become better songwriters and all that stuff, so it was definitely a darker phase for us. And after completing that goal and going on tour with that record, we felt that we really did it. We love that record. It just set us up for this really great space to be in. Our friendship and chemistry is, I don't know..." she pauses for a moment, "just better than ever! Which is just so mind blowing after all these years."

From the smooth, tropical "Rock Steady" and the new-wave "Making Out" to the Elastica-meets-Garbage vibe of "Platinum Blonde" and the perfectly percolating reggae-synth of "In My Head," No Doubt has audibly delved into a new multi-layered, somewhat experimental sound that is as sonically diverse — everything from laser gun noises to Jamaican dancehall beats — as it is unifyingly upbeat.

"It's been a record where we just sat down and said, 'well, if we're gonna make a record, we've gotta clear the slate and be really free; be able to do whatever we want.' So it was a real experimental record in a lot of ways," remarks Stefani.

And like mad musical scientists, the group spent the last year honing their experiment at home in Southern Cali, in Jamaica and in London. As Stefani recalls, "We found this music called dancehall, which is a Jamaican [type of] music that's basically the evolved, modern version of ska [and] reggae. And that's what we've always loved. I mean, we started our band as a ska band. So when we started making this record we said, 'let's make a record that we can dance to 'cause we wanna be in a club and hear our song come on.' So we just sat down and started writing and ended up recording in Jamaica with legendary Sly and Robbie, Steely and Cleve and just these hardcore dancehall producers. We had a real magical time there and it just set up the whole vibe for the record."

Adds Dumont, "Some of the stuff was inspired by contemporary Jamaican dancehall music. But accurately, there is this huge cultural difference between what dancehall music in Jamaica is doing right now and what we're doing." Which is? "Well, we've got a white girl singing, not a Jamaican singer doing more of a rap thing," he laughs.

Another fresh element of *Rock Steady* is the inclusion of more electronically inclined components in the songs. As Tom explains, "As far as the electronic thing, it didn't happen on the whole record, but it did on a lot of the record. It's kind of me and Tony, deciding out of our own tastes, to lay down our instruments to experiment with keyboards. We

## "WHEN AM I HAVING THE KIDS, WHEN AM I GONNA GET MARRIED?"

just got a bunch of synthesizers and started messing around with making songs that way. So like on 'Hey Baby' Tony played half the bass line on the keyboard, and all these weird Star Wars sounds and laser noises that you hear were just us having fun with it. Right now, for me, using all these new elements to push music forward is really exciting."

Moreover, with the ProTools program, the technological savvy Dumont was able to transform his Mac computer into a full-blown recording studio.

"ProTools is really expensive, but once you have it, it's so amazingly powerful. Like on a lot of the songs all the vocals and keyboards were recorded in my living room," he enthusiastically recalls. "It opened us up creatively in this amazing way because it was just us being creative all day long with a microphone. So when we had about six or seven songs we were like, let's go to Jamaica and record these things. Then we came back and recorded more at my house again and when we had about 15 songs that we really loved, we went to England to record them and we were done. That's how this album came about: writing and recording in bits and pieces with things that were exciting and inspiring to us."

*Rock Steady* signifies another first for No Doubt: outside collaboration. In addition to Jamaican producers Sly and Robbie and Steely and Cleve, the group enlisted the help of other celebrated artists like Rick Ocasek (The Cars), Orbital,

It's not often that a band can withstand its founding member departing, increasing creative uncertainty, weak record sales, mounting industry pressure and loads of internal (and extremely personal) tension. But that's exactly what O.C. darlings-turned-world-famous wunderkinds No Doubt have done — and they've got their very own episode of VH1's *Behind The Music* to prove it. Together now for almost 15 years, chances are many of you *Mean Street* readers got to experience the group's kinetic live shows back in the day when Anaheim was known simply as Disneyland's epicenter and Gwen wasn't touted as a diva in fashion magazines; a term the gregarious lyricist laughs about. "I think of Aretha Franklin when I hear that word. I don't wake up in the morning and go, 'you diva!'"

But now that frontwoman Gwen Stefani, guitarist Tom Dumont, bassist Tony Kanal and drummer Adrian Young have sold a gazillion albums (okay, maybe only multi-millions), have toured the world over and are international superstars, circumstances have changed tremendously; the band, however, remains much the same.

"As far as all the fame and celebrity stuff, that really is a strange part. But it doesn't really soak in. It doesn't enter the real world of four best friends who make music together and get to have this extended childhood and go around dancing onstage for people," reveals Stefani. "We feel very, very blessed to be doing this still. Everything after *Tragic Kingdom* has just been borrowed time. None of us expected that we'd still be doing this, you know?"

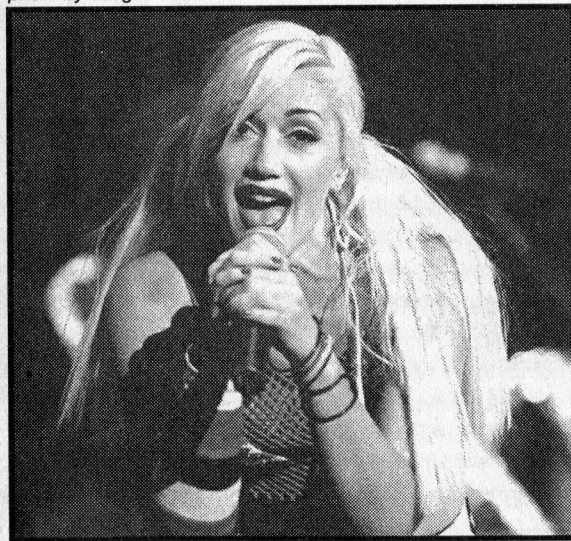
When I finally get the chance to begin the interview, a PR associate warns that Stefani is feeling a bit under the weather and must be very careful about saving her voice for the show. This lowered my expectations slightly as I envisioned a truncated discourse where Stefani might not be too enthusiastic about yet another scribe badgering her for details about everything from musical inspiration to favorite lipsticks (she loves *The Sound of Music* and the staining power of Anna Sui lipstick, by the way). But once she starts talking, one would never guess that the fashion-forward singer is battling a cold with only "two bites of salad" in that oft-bared tummy of hers. Perky and genuinely friendly, Stefani's manner is warm and welcoming while her unaf-



Dave Stewart (The Eurythmics) and Prince. As Stefani readily offers, "We decided to open ourselves up to other people that we respect, because for the 14 years we've been a band we always made records with just us four and nobody else. Our success has afforded us to work with some incredible people, and we did that because we had the opportunity to. Can you imagine if we just said, 'nah, we're not gonna let anyone inside our world.' This record was all about letting people into the No Doubt world and I think it reflects it. We don't get sick of it or jaded by it. I mean, we're on tour with U2 and it's intense!" she declares with amazement. "It doesn't get old."

Dumont agrees. "It's kind of like going to music school 'cause we're sitting with people like Prince and watching how

photo by Vaughn Youtz



they work and learning from them. Or working with Dave Stewart on "Underneath It All" was literally just us and a guitar for a half an hour and [coming] up with this really pretty, sweet song with a reggae vibe. When you collaborate, you're filtering your creativity through someone else's sensibility, so you come up with a different result than you would if you were just working by yourself."

Stefani can't help but express her enthusiasm for the new album and all that went into making it.

"I've been in the band since I was seventeen, and just to get to this point where we can make a record that we're all in love with and work with all these people is amazing. This record was done so quickly, it was almost a miracle for us to get it done in a year. If you would've told me a year ago that I would be sitting here talking about this record coming out I would have said no way!"

But despite all the opportunities afforded by fame and success, life in the public spotlight is often just as much about adulation and respect as it is severe scrutiny and judgment. Stefani candidly reveals. "I wrote a record called *Tragic Kingdom* and it was all about Tony and me and our split up. I certainly didn't think that that record would come out and I certainly didn't think that 16 million people would hear it. And then I didn't think that I would go on tour for two-and-a-half years and every day having people pick at my wounds. That was definitely challenging for me and for Tony, but we're very open about it. I don't really have that much to hide. I'm really a regular, normal person. I have the same problems that everybody else does and for some reason, the way I put it down with the melody people can relate to. That makes me feel great and even more normal."

Perhaps an anomaly in the world of entertainment where artists go to great lengths to ensure privacy, Stefani doesn't attempt to shield her deepest thoughts and feelings. "I don't censor myself at all when I'm writing, even now that I know people are going to hear it. I don't really consider anyone else when I'm writing, just my own thoughts. The only other person I usually consider is the person I'm writing about. I can see how with Tony a song might hurt, and I never want to hurt anyone. Or when writing about Gavin, I know that people are gonna read into it. So there's been a couple of songs I may have changed some of the words here and there, but only because I don't want to hurt my boyfriend or anyone [else]."

So what about a song like "In My Head" that carries the verse, "*Let's talk about the future/ Let's talk about the wedding*"? Is that truly what's in Ms. Stefani's head at the moment? She laughingly replies, "Dude, that's been on my mind since eighth grade! It's like, uh ... when am I having the kids, when am I gonna get married? I mean, every girl thinks of those things all the time. That's the thing: It's only 12 songs at two minutes each and if everyone thinks they know everything about me from that they're crazy, you know? It's only a snapshot of one night or one idea, so I feel like I am sharing a lot, but yet I'm not." She pauses, "I just think that I've been really blessed. Me and Gavin are totally in love and anything that we don't have control over — like all the stuff that's written about me or the band or our music — is something that I can't really think about. My job is to try to write great songs and try to put on a great show."

Signaled that it's time for sound check, Gwen Stefani and Tom Dumont are off to do just that.

On the web: [www.nodoubt.com](http://www.nodoubt.com)