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Melody

March 1, 1997 85p

Melody **Maker**



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Setting the charts
on fire!

MAN SUN
hit Number One



NO DOUBT
Not maybe,
definitely!



Melody **Maker** MAN SUN photographed by TOM SHEEHAN / NO DOUBT photographed by PAT POPE

She already is. Gwen Stefani's ska/rock/ballad band NO DOUBT have the Number One LP in the US, and the Number One single in the UK with 'Don't Speak'. And she and current beau Gavin Rossdale of Bush are the Kurt'n'Courtney of post-grunge. So what has she got to prove?

"AAAAA!!!! Nooooo! What is this shit? Tell me it isn't true he's going out with GWEN!!!!!"

Thus e-mails one female flower of America's youth, shrieking down the fibre-optic lines as self-styled Bushgirls contemplate the horrifying rumour that No Doubt's vocalist Gwen Stefani is now half of America's Premier Rock Couple (TM various American gossip columns). The other half, in case you wondered, is Gavin Rossdale of Bush.

Of course, you don't need to be 14 and in love with Gavin to decide that 27-year-old Gwen - let alone her chart-topping band No Doubt, recently risen from cheerful obscurity in the last two years of their 10-year career - is just, like, *sooo* unfairly lucky.

"Argh! I could just hate her," wails their UK press officer Maree, in what appears to be a moment of job-endangering candour, "if she weren't so gorgeous, talented, and the sweetest person I've ever met!"

I'VE already met No Doubt,

so I know exactly what she means. A band whose five-million-selling album "Tragic Kingdom" and pop-monster Roxette/Berlin/Lauper-style ballad "Don't Speak" have topped the US album chart and the UK singles chart, respectively, simultaneously. And yet whose male three-quarters - bassist Tony Kanal, drummer Adrian Young and guitarist Tom Dumont - wrestle Maree to pay for her cinema ticket on a night out. A band whose - let's be frank - mind-blowingly gorgeous singer is prone to calling herself a "dork" or whipping up her sweatshirt to demonstrate, laughing, that Grammy nominations may be hers but "abs of steel" are a distant dream. A girl who, upon discovering that today's make-up artist has met (and, who knows, perhaps powdered) Suggs of Madness, demands, eyes twinkling, "God! Can I like, touch you?"

A band, moreover, whose latest video not only demonstrates that the heartrending "Don't Speak" was inspired by Stefani and Kanal's messy break-up, but presents a fictional yet plausible photo shoot in which the (amiable) Boys pose behind the (incandescent) Girl, only to be cropped right out of the resulting picture seconds later.

I don't think I've ever interviewed anyone who's Number One in the Big Charts before, I begin.

"Eight weeks," says Tony, almost coyly.

"Isn't that funny?" cracks Gwen. Erm, funny?

"We laugh about it every day," says Tony, and you

GWEN WILL I BE



'Yippee! We're "top" of the "pops"!

almost believe him.

"It's just so ridiculous!" Gwen continues. "We're like, 'HA ha HA - us?' It's hard to even say, 'Isn't that great?' We never bragged about being in a band. At school, I'd just be too embarrassed; it's pretty much like admitting, yeah, I'm a total loser. 'Hey! I'm in a group! I think I'm going to be a star!'"

Clearly Anaheim, the suburban wonderland from which No Doubt hail, is, mentally, more than 28 miles from Hollywood.

THIS may be why No Doubt would rather talk about anything but the five million

'When we play, all these girls come and they are pumped and they f*ing go away feeling strong' - Gwen Stefani**

copies' worth of sales hanging over their heads like the Acme anvil hovering over Wile E Coyote.

Tony Kanal, for instance, is unfolding a page written in a neat, mum-like hand. His mother's given him a lengthy list of London relatives to contact: born in India, he lived here until he was 11. Now he wants me to tell him about

White Town, since, along with Soundgarden's Kim Thayil, Tony's one of very few Asian faces in the US charts.

"It's an interesting career choice for an Indian - doctor, lawyer, engineer is more what most families have in mind," he smiles, adding: "I'm never sure what I am. I'm a British citizen, a resident of the States and my parents are from India.

So it's a little confusing."

He's still got a few English traits, he admits.

"Yeah, I'm really bad at assessing myself. I hold stuff in I should probably let out. So what do girls do over here, then?" he grins. "Move to America?"

Tony's not the only No Doubt ingredient imported from England. In among the ballads, punk-pop and dizzy new wave of "Tragic Kingdom", there's a chequered past, too.

That's chequered as in... ska. Never mind the South Pacific cargo cult that worships Prince Philip as a god: in the mid-Eighties in California, Tony

tells me, there was a scene of hundreds of California kids who sacrificed pork-pie hats in tribute to... well, Suggs.

"The ska situation?" begins Tony, taking a deep breath. "It's a label we've been trying to avoid since 1988. When we started in '87, we were a 2 Tone ska band. Yeah, we wore suits; covered Specials and Selecters songs. Fender's in Long Beach was the place to play; the coolest punk-ska venue in the world - the *shit*. I was 16, Gwen was 17, and we'd stand watching hundreds of scooters drive up and we were like, 'Wow, they're coming to our show!'"

FAMOUS?

To an English reader, Cali-ska seems as bizarrely geographically displaced as Japanese rockabilly.

"Sure. Totally right," agrees Tony, a man of Zen-like calm. "You could also say you can't play rock unless you're black, because of Chuck Berry and Little Richard. So how far do you want to go back? I don't think anyone said, 'We're the true ska,' since 2 Tone ska came out of England, and the real authentic Jamaican stuff out of Jamaica in the Sixties."

Anyway, it's a moot point for No Doubt now: not a pork-pie hat in sight most nights.

"Even within that first year, we were experimenting with different sounds. We love ska, we all listen to it, but we're not trying to be it; people are only going to be disappointed."

And that other three letter word, pop?

"I was really hesitant about the label," says Tony, "but I'm more used to it now. Pop, in America, is Toni Braxton, Celine Dion: pop divas. But when we became familiar with the English press, where pop was used to describe Supergrass and Blur, bands we admired, it's easier to accept. What is pop short for? Popular music. What does popular signify? You've sold some records. I guess that's us."

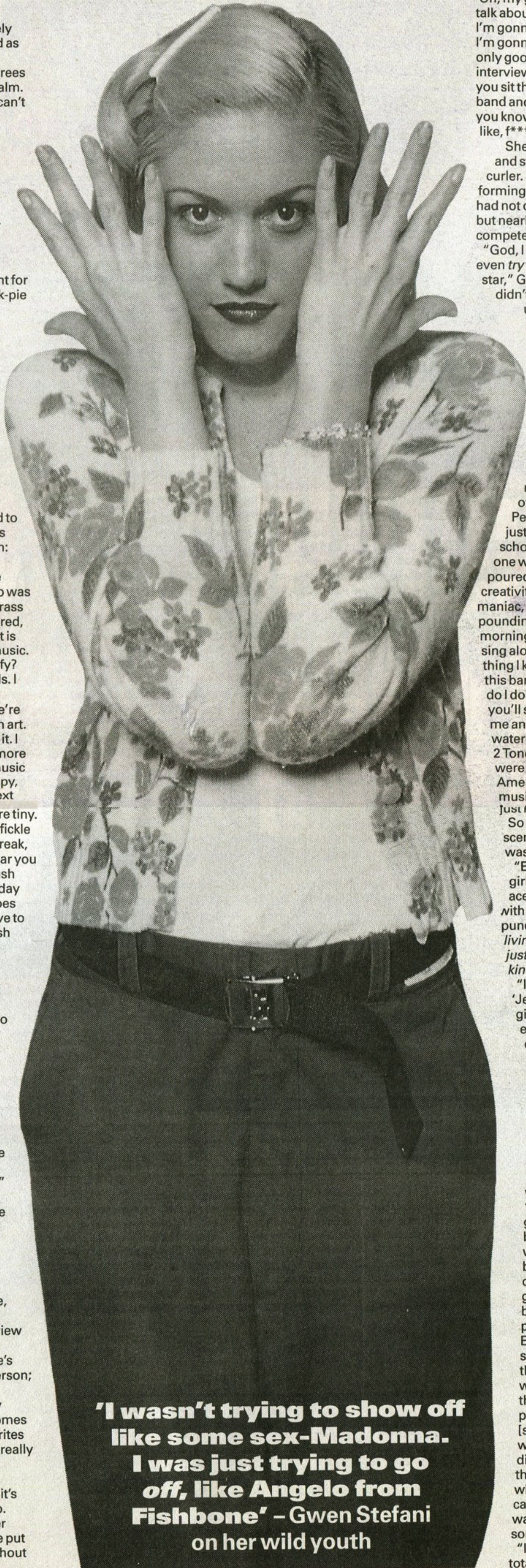
"Sure," he decides, "we're more entertainment than art. But art is what you make it. I hope eventually we fall more on the art side, writing music that's still making us happy, cos the chances of the next

record selling as many are tiny. The music industry is so fickle that, one, you feel like a freak, and two, the more popular you become the more backlash there's going to be. One day you're hot, and then it goes away, and you might have to contend with the backlash the rest of your life. Our philosophy is to hope for the best, prepare for the worst, and not take it too seriously."

So how did No Doubt do it this time? Tony looks over at his ex-girlfriend – for better or worse for the band, she's usually the face on the magazine covers – and answers with a generosity few band members, let alone male egos, could muster for their more "marketable" frontperson.

"The biggest difference between the first album and this was that Gwen wrote 90 per cent of the lyrics for 'Tragic Kingdom'," he says, frankly. "On the first one, the lyrics were [Gwen's brother] Eric's point of view and Gwen was singing them. Whereas now she's singing from the first person; a completely different viewpoint. It's definitely more sincere when it comes from the person who writes it. Now, the songs have really come alive."

SMALL wonder, when it's Gwen we're referring to. I talk to her and wonder how anyone could have put words in her mouth without a shoehorn. Anaheim's



'I wasn't trying to show off like some sex-Madonna. I was just trying to go off, like Angelo from Fishbone' – Gwen Stefani on her wild youth

one-woman answer to Kenickie – a mixture of slangy süss, sheer confidence and wry self-deprecation – rolls her eyes and starts to talk. And talk. And talk.

And I end up in stitches. "Ugh! Yesterday I had four long interviews, and I was like, 'Oh, my god, if I hear myself talk about me one more time, I'm gonna puke on myself! I'm gonna go uuuuugh!' The only good thing about doing interviews alone is cos when you sit there in front of the band and tell your little stories, you know everybody else is like, f***, not that again."

She rolls her eyes again and stabs a pin into a hair curler. It must've been hard forming a band where you had not only the rest of rock, but nearby Hollywood, to compete with.

"God, I don't think I could even try to look like a movie star," Gwen protests. "And I didn't grow up in LA, I grew up in Orange County. Everybody's like,

'Wow, LA, is it really as sleazy as they say?' The more I've seen, I realise it is. It is Hollywood, and people are fake, and it is pretty nutty. "When we started," she continues, "I'd never even thought of being in a band."

Personality-wise, I was just lazy, just going to school. My brother was the one who was like, oops, God poured a little bit too much creativity on him. The guy's a maniac, a genius, but a freak; pounding on the piano every morning and forcing me to sing along. I was 16, and next thing I knew we're starting this band and I was like, what do I do? And he was, like, you'll sing, too. So it was me and John doing this watered-down version of the 2 Tone anti-racist themes we were trying to copy over in America. We imitated the music we loved. And we just kept doing it."

So Cal's macho punk scene doesn't sound like it was a hotbed of girl action. "Exactly!" agrees the girl who penned the acerbic lines, delivered with a giggly sugar-sharp punch, "I'm just a girl living in captivity... I'm just a girl, guess I'm some kind of freak."

"I remember thinking, 'Jeez, there are no other girls!' One of the first experiences I had from other girls was when I had stayed up all night long sewing cos we were going to play at a backyard party," says the girl who unashamedly admits to "playing with Barbie dolls – and enjoying it."

"Being a ska girl was hard," she adds. "There weren't many girls to copy, and besides – what do you wear? OK, I thought, black and white, gotta obey the rules, I'm going to make these black and white stretch pants – it was the Eighties, you know. I stayed up all night laying the stripes out. And when I got to the gig, there were these two punk girls who were like [she adopts a tone of withering disgust], 'Ugh, did you see the chick in the pants?' I felt awful, but when we played, I didn't care. It was rad! There was a pit! We played three songs and the cops came! "I remember feeling totally out of place being a

OVERNIGHT SENSATIONS! (NOT) NO DOUBT'S RESISTIBLE 10 YEAR RISE

1987: Anaheim Madness fans Eric Stefani and John Spence form No Doubt, a "backyard garage" ska band, inspired by their 2 Tone heroes. Eric coerces his 16-year-old sister Gwen into backing up John's lead vocals. Tony Kanal fills the bass slot; he will go on to be both Gwen's first serious boyfriend and the band's DIY-days "pseudo-manager".

In December, Spence commits suicide. "That death is still so relevant to the history of the band and I don't try to make it seem any less significant than it was, especially as it happened when we were all so young," says Tony.

1988: Alan Meade takes over briefly as singer; his departure leaves Gwen as sole lead vocalist. Former metal guitarist Tom Dumont takes over on axe. No longer strictly a ska band, No Doubt begin building a local following.

1989: Drummer Adrian Young joins, plucked from No Doubt's audience.

1991: Ex-Stiff A&R man Tony Ferguson signs No Doubt to Interscope. Famously, Interscope boss Jimmy Iovine predicts Gwen will be a star within five years. "Five years was just a figure! I can't believe she remembers that!" he protests,



modestly, to Spin.

1992: "No Doubt", the band's debut, appears and is almost instantly "de-prioritised".

1993 - 1994: Band makes endless demos in the home studio they have time to build as The Man hems and haws. "We nearly had enough time to go to law school or raise families!" jokes Kanal. Various incarnations of "Tragic Kingdom" are contemplated; it's given the green light at the end of '94. During this time, Gwen and Tony split. Eric leaves the band to work as an animator for "The Simpsons". "He practised on me," says Gwen. "I was chubby in high school; the whole time I was a teenager he was drawing pictures of me as a pig."

1995: "The Beacon Street Collection" appears independently in January. "Tragic Kingdom" appears in November on new label Trauma, home to London's America-storming foursome, Bush.

1996: A first tour of Britain includes T In The Park, a support slot with the Red Hot Chili Peppers, and the opportunity to see Madness at Finsbury Park. "I couldn't believe it! I was crying the whole time they were playing!" exults Gwen. No Doubt tour America relentlessly, including a series of dates with Bush. Thanks to singles like the pep-pop "Just A Girl", "Tragic Kingdom" hits Number One in the Billboard charts by the end of the year.

1997: By mid-February, "Tragic Kingdom" has sold 5,000,000 and spent eight weeks at Number One in the US. Mega-ballad "Don't Speak", their second single release in the UK, debuts at Number One.

girl in a band. Automatically assumed to be the tagalong slut girlfriend groupie. Like, "Do you have a wristband?" she mocks, tilting her head to imply sarcasm.

"That was a long time ago, and it's all changed, but back then I could never compete with the guys. Our band would never be cool enough or tough enough, cos I was the lead singer."

"Then this weird thing happened: instead of girls being, like, 'You bitch, what are you doing up there trying to show off?' it changed to, 'Wow!' I wasn't trying to show off like some sex-Madonna. I was just trying to sing a song and go off, like Angelo from Fishbone. Of course, I could never be as cool as him but I tried."

"My little brother used to come to our shows; I remember him saying to me one night, 'That was a fun show, but duuuude...' she drawls the words. "He said, 'Dude, your pits are going soft!' There's so many chicks in there you can't even float any more!

You've gotta be careful and shit!" Eventually, it became this bonding thing with the girls coming to the show. Which is so cool to have happen. And now we're all one big happy team," she says, eyes shining.

GWEN'S right. Their live performances show it's not just hype behind the assertion that the author of "Just A Girl" is the girl American girls most wanna see have fun. Except in the case of a very few Bush fans, perhaps, who might wanna see her married. To someone else.

"I'm almost 28, and when we were growing up, who was there? Everybody always asked, 'Who's your influence?' 'Uh, Julie Andrews in "The Sound Of Music"... and Angelo and Suggs!' Aside from Pauline Black from the Selector, it was all guy bands that I was into, really." Still, Gwen admits, "The one person you always get compared to if you're a female singer is Madonna. ▶

It makes sense. Even though she used sex to get there, she did make a mark.

"But for me, personally, I'd never feel comfortable with that. I'm a Catholic girl," she laughs, overlooking Ms Ciccone's background.

"I grew up in a nice Brady Bunch family; I would feel really uncomfortable even saying those words!

"When the Riot Grrrl thing started to bubble up three or four years ago, I can honestly say I felt threatened. 'Wait, that's our thing that's different - we have a girl! You guys can't have girls, too!'" She makes a jokey-pouty face.

"But I got over it fast. For the longest time it felt like this full-on man's business. At home I didn't usually run into problems, cos we had an underground cult following that was really into us. But when we started touring more, I'd be onstage and guys would be like, 'Sit on my face! Show your tits!' That's when you start to doubt yourself and think, 'What am I doing up here? Am I totally asking for it? Like a whore?' That is the worst feeling. You think, 'What's wrong with me that I want this attention?' You know, why am I cutting my shirts off?"

"Just being a chick overall is so weird," says Gwen. "For any girl. You're walking down the street and some guy's hanging out the window yelling at you. And you're like, 'Do they think I'm gonna like, go hang out?' And the next day, you walk down the street and no one says anything and you're like, 'Augh! I must be ugly!' That's what you're



No Doubt, waiting for Suggs (l-r): Tony, Adrian, Gwen and Tom

'Eight weeks at Number One. Isn't that funny? We never bragged about being in a band. It's pretty much like admitting, yeah, I'm a total loser'

-Gwen Stefani, the modest megastar

a little special kinda handshake and a little look."

Gwen shudders.

"And, hey, what do you do?"

This is the guy who has the power to play your song! It's really freaky; the first few times it happened it was like, 'Ugh! This is creepy, this is Hollywood shit!'

"I never really got shot down all those years, cos the only people who knew about us were the people that thought we were unique. And when we got signed, at first we got a lot of good press: 'Oh, finally someone fresh who's not afraid to wear make-up; who likes to be a girl.' But as soon as you sell a lot of records, that's when you feel like you're being called a slut. We just had this Newsweek article written, and it was like, 'This girl is a skank.' That's what she said! That I'm only in it for the money and I'm totally bad for women. The same old stereotypical Girl Selling Her Body story." Gwen rolls her eyes. "It's so weird. God, for so long I felt like I was on the other side of the fence, and I'm now getting accused of something terrible because I like to be a girl." She shakes her head. And shrugs.

"But I just have to look at it and think, I've obviously done something right. Nobody can take away the fact that when we play, all these girls come

conditioned to think. Of course, you want to be sexy; you want boys to like you. But it's the difference between someone thinking you're sexy because of the way you are, and someone saying, 'I just wanna f*** you.'"

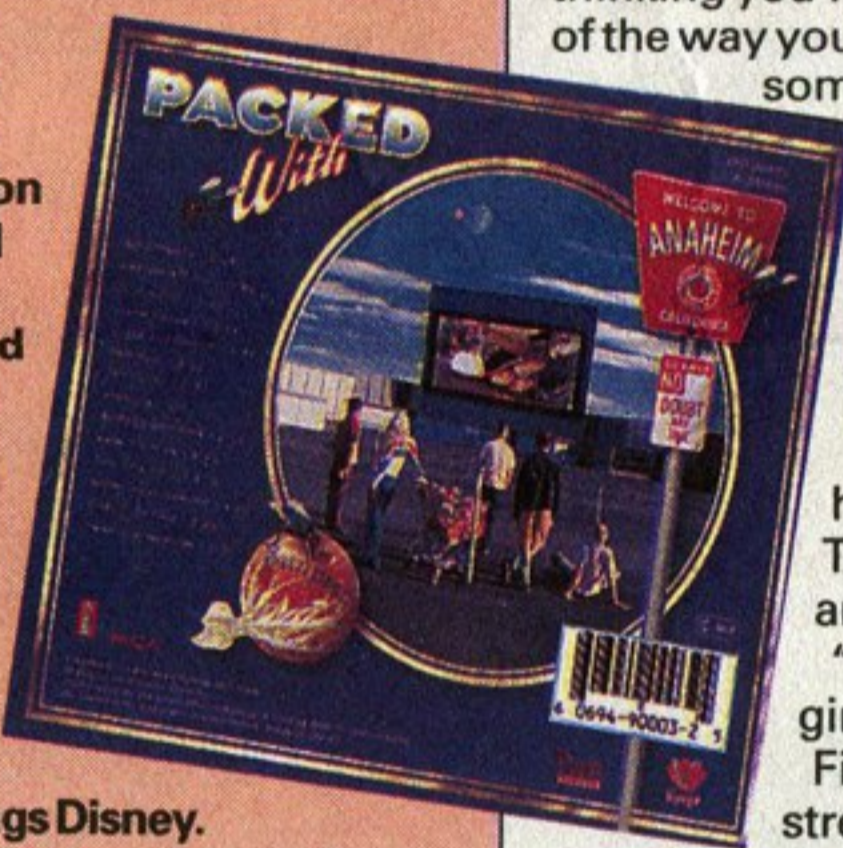
"That's when you start thinking, 'OK, here's animals.'"

Gwen puts her hand on the floor. Then moves it up an inch.

"Here's being a girl..."

Finally, she stretches her arm above her head.

"... And here's being a boy! You actually feel like you're a lower human being! Certain times after we got signed, we'd be meeting important radio DJs or whatever, and they'd meet everybody in the band - 'Hey, dude, wassup' - but then they'd meet me and there'd be



Behind The Orange Curtain

NO DOUBT SAY, 'WELCOME TO ANAHEIM!'

WITH a population of 285,477 - some of whom are *not* in Offspring - Anaheim "is not a suburb of the city of Los Angeles", according to the Anaheim Tourist Information Office. It is, however, home to a professional ice-hockey team called The Mighty Ducks. Back in the 1890s, German settlers purchased land for \$2.00 an acre in what would become California's first major wine-growing region. That was about it for excitement until 1955, when enterprising young Walt Disney opened a theme park. "Tragic Kingdom", whose slyly technicolour sleeve depicts (on closer inspection) a world of rotting oranges and blighted trees, could be taken as an affectionately sarcastic tribute to all things Disney.

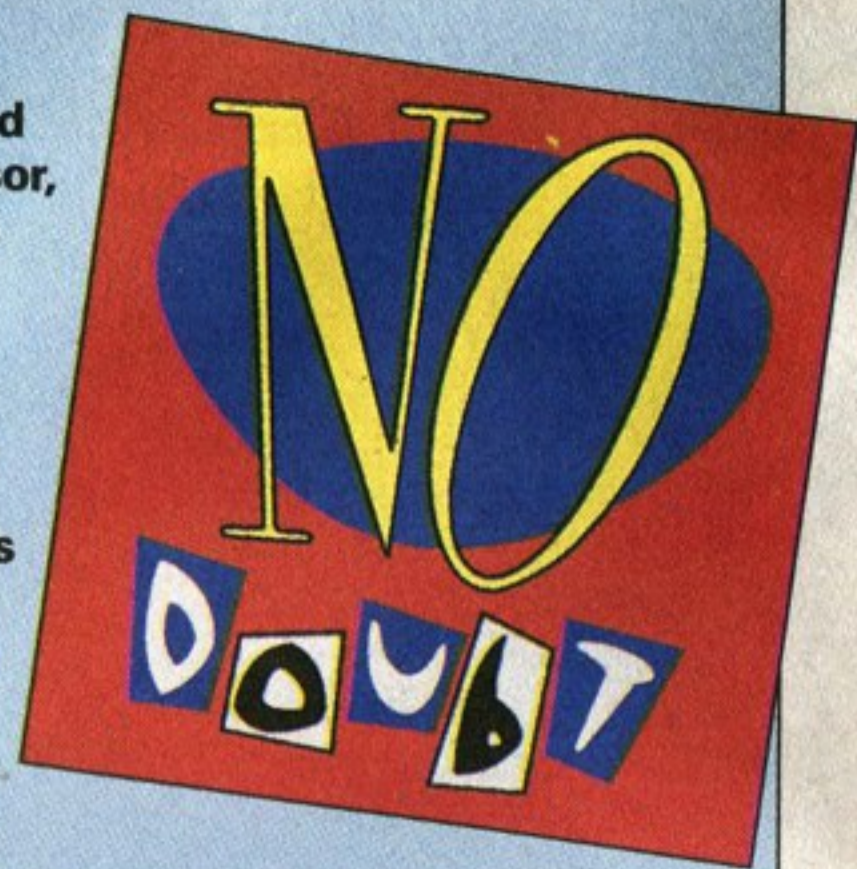
"With the success of local bands now, it's not so embarrassing to be from behind the 'Orange Curtain'," says Gwen. "People from LA always said, 'Oh, you're from the full-on conservative rich area - like, how could you even write songs? You haven't even had a life!' LA bands were always the cool bands like the Chili Peppers; bands that were doing drugs and getting together to jam onstage. We always felt like the nerds. But then a surf-punk scene grew up here, basically because, sure, there might've been a lot of conservative people in Orange County... but they had a lot of kids!"

DOUBTOGRAPHY

NO DOUBT

(Interscope/MCA, 1992)

CURIOSLY less punk-inspired than its chart-topping successor, or at least less reflective of the band's live energy. Sonically (neon) light years from its grunge-era carbon-dating, it's shiny, jazzy and peppy, its bottom end replaced with a hatful of horns. Features songs about toothache, chickens and luggage from Eric Stefani. Vocals courtesy of Gwen, who sounds like she's about to burst into "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy". The standout is, tellingly, the ballad "Sometimes".



THE BEACON STREET COLLECTION

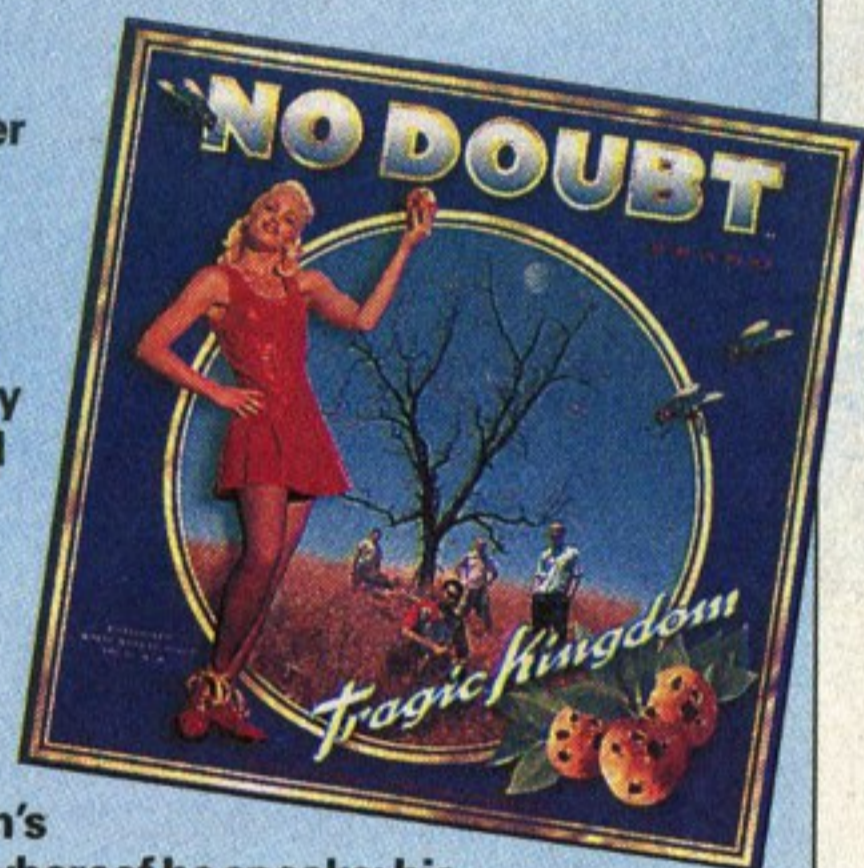
(Beacon Street, 1995)

"WE got tired of waiting for the label to decide what to do with us, so we just said, 'F*** it, we're putting out our own record'," remembers Tony. "We didn't really ask permission, but the label went along with it, probably because they realised they'd rejected all these songs. It's 10 songs - all different styles going off in every direction. It's really a collection of B-sides, in a way. We still sell it via mail order, concerts and small distributors. It's funny: in the charts in the last issue of 'Rolling Stone', 'Tragic Kingdom' is at Number One, the Reader's Choice poll has us at Number One, and then in the alternative chart, at one record store in Milwaukee... there's 'The Beacon Street Collection'!"

TRAGIC KINGDOM

(Trauma/MCA, 1995)

"WAS it you at Melody Maker who said 'Don't Speak' is the 'Time After Time' of the Nineties?" demands Gwen, enthralled, the minute we meet. The adoration is rightly due Paul Lester, but I wish I'd thought of it: "Don't Speak" is one of the reasons Gwen Stefani and No Doubt "have captured exactly the audience Cyndi Lauper had 15 years ago." (This assessment courtesy of Bush's Nigel Pulsford, who knows whereof he speaks: his sister plays with Lauper.) "Tragic Kingdom" recalls both Lauper's big-romantic-number class and, in the incandescent punch of "Just A Girl", the endearingly assertive goofiness of "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun". If there's a Nineties difference, it's that Stefani writes her own lyrics. Which is probably why "Spiderwebs" and "Sixteen" have girl-world believability in spades to match the giggling, staccato, bloopy synths and funny guitars. It's got the infectious poppiness of New Wave and cargo-cult skank of a sort that Suggs (respectfully approached for comment, but reportedly "busy doing a bunch of things") probably never dreamed would mutate into someone else's chart-topping House Of Fun.



and they are pumped and they f***ing go away feeling strong. Like they can go to a show and go off. They don't have to be in love with the lead singer; they can just go there for the music and have a good time."

SITTING at home a million miles away from Anaheim and the tragic kingdoms of the pop charts, I'm transcribing Gwen's words. Listening to her laugh, crack jokes, speak bright

breathless gulp-loads of sense and pull goofy faces that are practically audible on tape. I'm typing like a deadline automaton, but I can't help laughing.

I send some e-mail to the Bushgirls, since I don't have Newsweek's address.

"Hey, never you mind about Gwen," I say. "I've met her, and listen, she's one of us."

'Tragic Kingdom' is out now on Geffen

