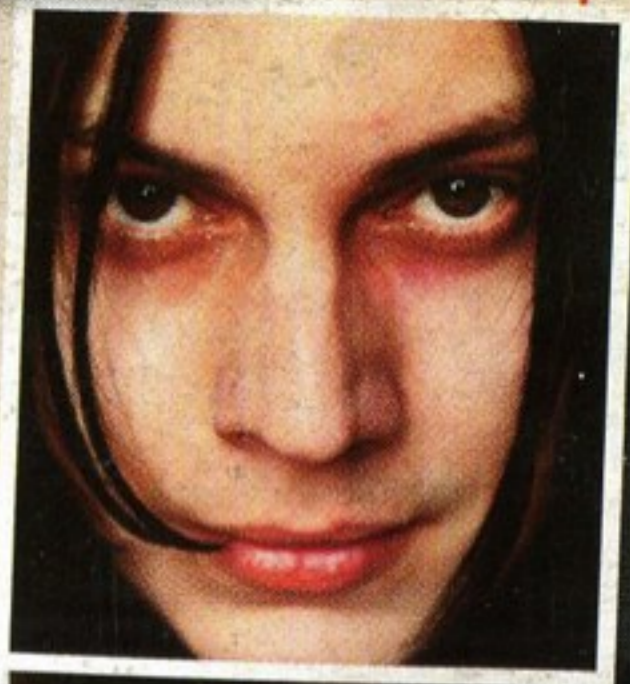


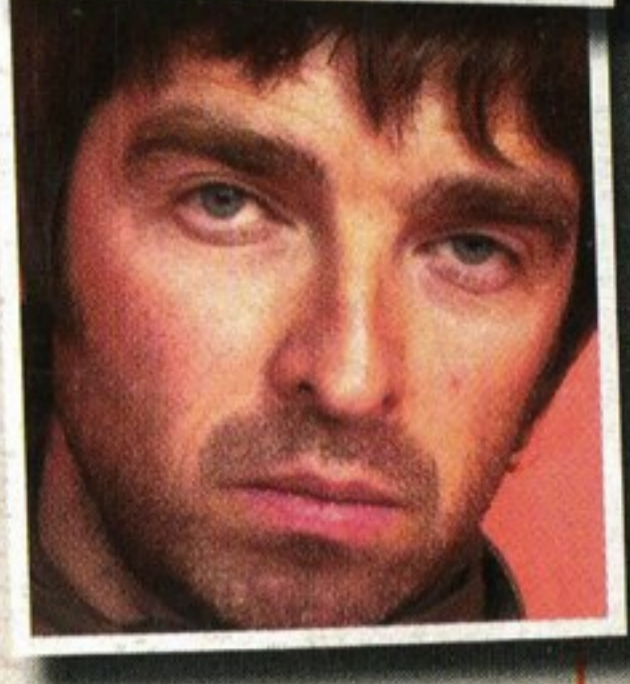
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# Gwen Stefani

From ska-punk survivor to queen of the world!

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"Clean out Vivienne Westwood in my Galliano gown"



Everyone has a view on **Gwen Stefani:**

she's a punk-rock pin-up

a female David Bowie

the new princess of pop

a style icon

a hip-hop superstar

a movie starlet the red-carpet goddess

a cultural chameleon.

Just don't call her a faker. ...

**“W**hat I would say to those people,” spits Stefani in her helium-tipped Cali-purr, “is do your research. I was in a band with all guys since I was 16 years old. I’ve been in a fucking rock band touring the fucking world for 18 years. So if you’re gonna try and erase that, then I’m going to stick my finger right up in your face. ‘Cos you know what? I did it. And you try to be a girl and do that in 1987.”

“I know what it’s like to be up onstage with anyone from a stupid, fucking wannabe punk rock band with a bunch of fucking wannabe punk rock kids in the audience to, like, opening for U2, opening for The Rolling Stones. I mean, we’ve shared the stage with so many different kinds of groups. We played the fucking Warped Tour! I was one of the first females to do that – it was like (*tampon-flinging girl grungers*) L7 and No Doubt!”

A pause for breath and a flash of that winning Hollywood smile: “You can tell I get a little bit angry... No, not angry, but I feel a little bit like, y’know what? I don’t need to hear it.”

The truth is, Gwen Stefani is whoever the goddamn hell she wants to be. The other night she was Rock Gwen, accompanying her husband and Bush frontman Gavin Rossdale to see heavy-metal headfucks Helmet on tour (“That was pretty scary”). Earlier today, she was Fashion Gwen, emerging airbrushed-immaculate from three hours in hair and make-up to work the camera like a seasoned catwalk pro while wearing pieces from her very own clothes label, L.A.M.B.

And then suddenly she’s Street Gwen as ‘Rich Girl’ – the pop-ragga track she’s worked on with two of hip-hop’s most celebrated heavyweights, Dr Dre and her old sparring partner, Eve – blasts through the photo studio speakers and she lip-synchs along, pulling gangster poses and giggling at herself.

In her astonishing 18-year career, Gwen Stefani has proved she can turn her attention to anything – bindis, Two Tone, ‘80s clubbing, Japanese styling – and instantly make it the coolest thing in the world. For anyone with an ear for cross-pollination and an

eye for fun, she is the only 21st-century superstar that matters any more.

Contrary to popular stereotyping, Gwen Stefani was not the token pretty girl drafted in to give parochial, Orange County new wavers No Doubt an MTV-friendly face and send them on their way to mid-’90s stadium success. Sure, she gave them that, but that was just the beginning. As a 16-year-old tomboy, it was Gwen who knew her stuff better than the boys, and first turned her hopelessly un-hip disco-loving bassist and boyfriend Tony Kanal (perhaps more famous as the object of her lost affections in No Doubt’s 1997 breakthrough ballad ‘Don’t Speak’) onto what was to become their signature sound.

“I was into ska, like, hard ska. Like I was really into Madness, The Specials and The Selecter and all these groups you didn’t get to hear on the radio over here,” babbles the astonishingly warm (she’ll compliment us on the sundress we’re wearing numerous times over the course of the day and ask us almost as many questions about ourselves as we

**“I’ve been in a fucking rock band touring the fucking world for 18 years”**

ask her) and beautiful (for a 36 year old, she could put many of pop’s pubescent pin-ups to shame) Stefani, sitting down in post-cover shoot spivs, to talk about her debut solo album and much-hyped career break from No Doubt.

Named after her fashion line, ‘Love Angel Music Baby’ is so crammed with celebrity cameos that Stefani prefers to call it her collaboration record (“It would be a little too greedy and untrue to call this my solo record”). With Andre 3000, The Neptunes and New Order just some of the ice-cool names on board, the album has crossed over to become – like Beyoncé, Justin Timberlake and OutKast – the pop

record of the year it’s OK to like. From the opening bars of super-kitsch and self-berating bubblegum anthem ‘What You Waiting For?’ (just as likely to be heard on a hip indie dancefloor as it is on *CD:UK*) through to the style-obsessed Japanese Harajuku girls that litter the lyrics and artwork, it is the totally credible, up-to-the-minute sound of now now now.

Actually, according to Stefani, it’s the sound of ex-boyfriend Kanal’s much-derided high-school music taste and her own best-forgotten nights out at Disneyland in the ‘80s.

“I used to go dancing at Disneyland, embarrassingly,” she blushes, “because there was a club in there and I lived across the street so I’d sneak in! I love all that music even though I couldn’t admit it then. Imagine, like Madonna had just come out, no-one had ever seen her before; it was like, ‘Who the fuck is that?!’ And Depeche Mode, imagine that music for the first time – you’d never heard that kind of music before! I wasn’t into all that at the time – Madonna and Depeche Mode – but as I grew up I realised that all that music, the stuff that was popular at the time, was the backdrop of my life.”

“So I wanted to take that music and make it into a modern record that made me feel good but make it with modern people from the clubs today like Dre and Andre 3000 and Pharrell.”

Dre’s input metamorphosed into ‘Love Angel Music Baby’s latest single ‘Rich Girl’. “I kind of played him early hip-hop, almost embarrassing hip-hop – but y’know, great stuff really! – like Salt-N-Pepa and all that shit. He’d basically roll his eyes at it all, like, ‘Naahhhh!’ He was actually the one who came to me with ‘Rich Girl’. I was like: ‘Really?! How am I gonna make that lyric work for me?’ ‘Cos, y’know, I don’t see a white girl from Orange County singing that!’ And he’s like, ‘Ah, you’ve got to play characters.’”

Meanwhile, Andre 3000’s involvement spawned two collaborations – the co-written cartoon Prince parody ‘Bubble Pop Electric’ and ‘Long Way To Go’, a politically charged duet in which Stefani and 3000 play the parts of a stigmatised mixed-raced couple.

“Andre was on the top of my list because if I could be a boy, I would be Andre. I was always excited





Words: **Krissi Murison** in LA  
Photographs: **Dean Chalkley** in LA



about coming into the studio to see what he was going to be wearing. Even on his dress-down days, he looked fucking fabulous. I was definitely like, 'Hmm, what am I going to wear for him today?'

What began life as a passing fancy to make "a stupid little dance record" quickly began sprouting countless star turns. Suddenly, Stefani was hooking up with everyone from Courtney, Pink and Christina collaborator Linda Perry to *NME* Godlike Geniuses New Order.

While Hooky and the boys were too busy recording their own album to write an entire track for her, they did find time to record the instrumental parts for the Linda and Gwen-penned New Order homage 'The Real Thing'. When she wasn't being followed around by four mute Harajuku girls every time she appeared in public, Gwen celebrated the completion of her fantasy-party album by dressing up as Alice in Wonderland at every available opportunity. "It was very magical, that's where the Alice in Wonderland thing came up 'cos it just felt like I was falling down this hole and plopping into this world, like, 'OK, go here next, do this next.' It was very surreal, y'know, it was like a maze and I had the clock just ticking in my ears, like, 'I need to get this shit outta me 'cos I wanna do another No Doubt record, I wanna have a baby, I want to do all these things' and it was, like, time is not on my side!"

Baby-envy is a recurrent theme in Stefani's conversation (the 'tick-tock' refrain of recent single 'What You Waiting For' is, she says, the intense clattering of her biological clock). Needless to say, the revelations that she shares a step-child with Supergrass' Danny Goffey (husband Gavin Rossdale recently discovered he has a 15-year-old love child with Danny's missus and Sadie Frost's best mate Pearl Lowe) have not been enough to satisfy her brooding. Especially when the US tabloids picked up on the story, giving her and Gavin's marriage the kind of week-in, week-out gossip column coverage usually reserved for supermodels and their crackheads. While legal restrictions prevent Gwen giving her version of events, she is more than ready to ride-out the latest red-top rumours about her and Gavin splitting over the strain.

"Oh, we're still together. We're married!" she shrieks, thrusting her wedding ring before our eyes, convincingly aghast, "Marriage is forever, y'know, and, um, he's great. He has a new record coming out and it's wicked!"

Does he get pissed off by the fact that you're much cooler than he is? "Well, I mean, that might be your opinion and I should probably slap you because



## "I know what it's like to be onstage with anyone from a stupid, fucking wannabe punk band to U2"

you're speaking about my husband and you better watch your mouth, girl!" she says, suddenly getting all rude girl on our ass. "He's got so many amazing gifts and he loves me way! So y'know, there is no competition."

Maybe so, but like Rossdale, whose first movie role proper is in Frances Lawrence's *Constantine* which opens in the UK this week (March 18), Stefani has also recently turned her hand to acting. Following unsuccessful auditions for *Girl, Interrupted* and Helena Bonham Carter's part in *Fight Club*, she finally got her much-hyped, big Hollywood break last year when Martin Scorsese cast her in a blink-and-you-miss-it cameo as Jean Harlow in his Howard Hughes biography *The Aviator*.

"I've been trying to do films for years. Yeah, it's hard, it's very competitive, they're very specific about what they want and I think also for me it's doubly hard because I don't want to do anything that will fuck up what I've done already because people know who I am."

So now that she is a fully paid-up member of the north London rockstocrisy (well, she does own a mansion in Primrose Hill and is practically a blood-relation of Camden's most ubiquitous Britpop ligger, Danny Goffey, these days), it's time to test

Gwen on her indie credentials. Who's your favourite band right now? "I do love Franz Ferdinand, I really like that, though I haven't got the record yet. The thing about me is that - and I admit this! - I'm a bit of a singles girl. I like hits and it's very rare I'll give a record a whole listen. The Keane record, that was the last record where I really listened to the whole thing. I got turned onto it because someone at my label wanted me to write with those guys."

Really?

"I wish I did it! I'm really happy for them that... actually I'm happy for me that I've found a record I can listen to the whole of! I love the Coldplay record too, the last one (*suddenly starts laughing at herself*), but they're kinda like similar, huh? What other British bands are there..."

Well there's The Libertines, but they've split up?

"The Libertines have split up? Haven't they only been together a few minutes?" They sure have. And have you heard the latest about your mate Kate Moss and Pete? Apparently they're back together again, it's all over the newspapers. "I know Kate Moss vaguely, I've met her a couple of times... ooh, you love it (salacious scandal) over there, huh? *You guys!*" Stefani should know: when it's not her private life racking up column inches, then it's her professional one. Recent months have seen all kinds

of speculation as to what Stefani's solo move means for the future of No Doubt.

"This record, for me, is exploring some more of my musical, theatrical side that I would never have dared put my band through the torture of. Y'know, like, for me to be able to be Alice in Wonderland and have little Japanese accessory girls run around with me!" she giggles, "But I miss those guys." Does it ever bother you what people say about you? "No, not at all. I mean, what am I so worried about? I've been beyond the scope of dreams, I have a really fancy life and I have everything I ever dreamed of. So no, I'm not going to worry about what other people think at this point really." Our time is up. Gwen stands up, compliments us on our outfit one last time and turns towards the door, readying herself to walk straight into a high-profile TV interview. Suddenly she pauses, and turns back to face us.

"Y'know someone one time called me a cheerleader, *negatively*," she smiles, arching one perfectly groomed eyebrow. "And I've never been a cheerleader. So I was, like, 'OK, fuck you. You want me to be a cheerleader? Well, I will be one then. And I'll rule the whole world, just you watch me.'" ♥

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Go to [NME.COM/VIDEO](http://NME.COM/VIDEO) to check out the video for Gwen's latest single 'Rich Girl'