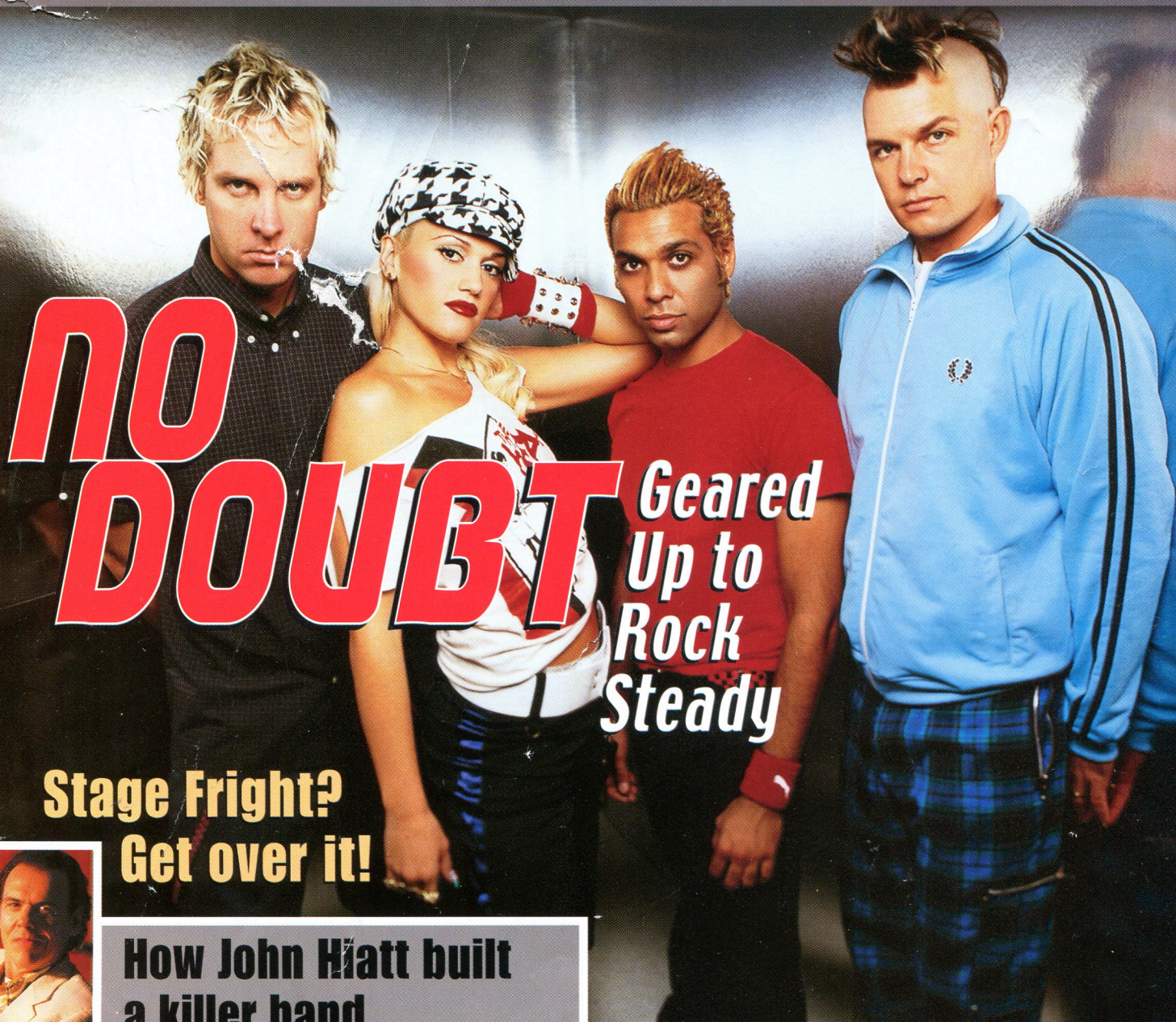


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NO DOUBT *Geared Up to Rock Steady*

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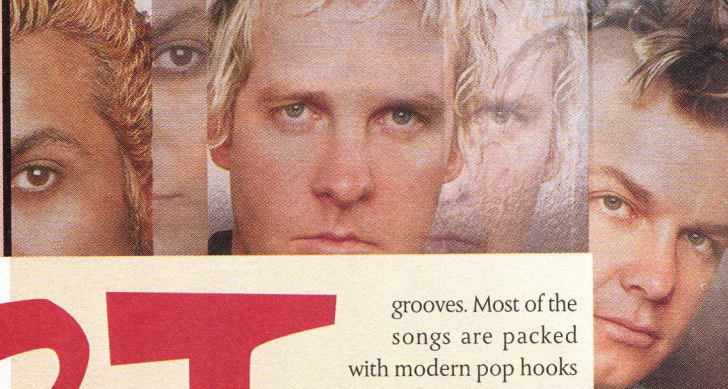
Tony Bennett
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NO DOUBT



grooves. Most of the songs are packed with modern pop hooks reminiscent of Madonna's *Ray of Light*, and the rhythms incorporate new wave, techno, hip-hop, reggae, and pop. The sound is like a spirited hybrid of Blondie, Daft Punk, and Shaggy. To match the vitality of the songs, No

A touring rock band has to evolve and adapt to survive. Fans might embrace a group's original style and image for a while, but if a look and sound remains constant for too long, a band can become stale, its music bordering on self-parody.

The members of No Doubt are keenly aware of that phenomenon, which is why the band's live performance over the years has changed as much as its music. In 1987, No Doubt was a high-octane ska/punk band armed with simple staccato songs, delivered by musicians who pogoed as they performed. Not long after, the band added '80s pop melodies to their music and began playing with a sharper stage focus. In 1993, they downplayed the pop elements and amped up the punk-rock anger, reflecting the alternative angst of the time. The band began turning heads with its powerful concerts and the onstage energy of its front woman, Gwen Stefani.

But although anxiety and agony were at that time mass-marketable tools, No Doubt felt insincere thrashing with rage. They made their most successful album, *Tragic Kingdom*, in 1994; it reemphasized the group's ska and new-wave influences within a framework of post-grunge rock. In turn, the band's live show became more celebratory. Stefani started wearing an Indian jewel on her forehead and within months had helped trigger a new fashion trend.

No Doubt toured the record for more than two years, building up a core following by returning to the same cities two or three times. By the time they began writing their follow-up, *Return to Saturn*, in 1998, the band members were veritable celebrities, but they were also road-weary and burned out. Being away from significant others for months at a time took its toll, which is why *Saturn* songs such as "Simple Kind of Life" and "Ex-Girlfriend" seem to sting with intimate melancholy.

When No Doubt toured for *Return to Saturn*, they followed a less rigorous agenda, scheduling fewer promotional activities and making the most of their precious downtime. "After the shows, we'd have these dance-hall reggae parties, and we'd really enjoy dancing," says bassist Tony Kanal. "That really made touring a lot more fun. So even though *Return to Saturn* was a more depressing album musically and lyrically, the tour was really great."

The No Doubt dance-hall parties paved the way for the band's new album. *Rock Steady* downplays guitar rock in favor of primal dance

Doubt brought in an all-star cast of producers, including modern pop guru Nellie Hooper, new-wave pioneer Ric Ocasek, electronica wizard William Orbit, vintage reggae greats Sly and Robby, and dance-hall reggae heavyweights Steelie and Cleevie. The group also signed on hip-hop masters Dr. Dre and Timbaland for a pair of tracks that never made the record but may surface in the future.

Just a few weeks after completing *Rock Steady*, No Doubt opened for U2 on a handful of dates. Because the new CD is heavily keyboard based and full of electronica elements, the band members have had to change the way they do things onstage. Four members are now playing keyboards at various points in the show, and for the first time, they've incorporated backing tracks.

"There's a lot more sequences and stuff to deal with," says Kanal. "So we're rolling around with quite a few keyboards onstage, which is great. When we were writing this stuff, [guitarist] Tom [Dumont] and I said, 'You know, if there are songs where I'm not playing bass and you're not playing guitar, it's no big deal. We'll do whatever's best for the song.' So there are a few songs where we're all [except drummer Adrian Young and Stefani] playing keyboards—including Stephen Bradley and Gabriel McNair, who

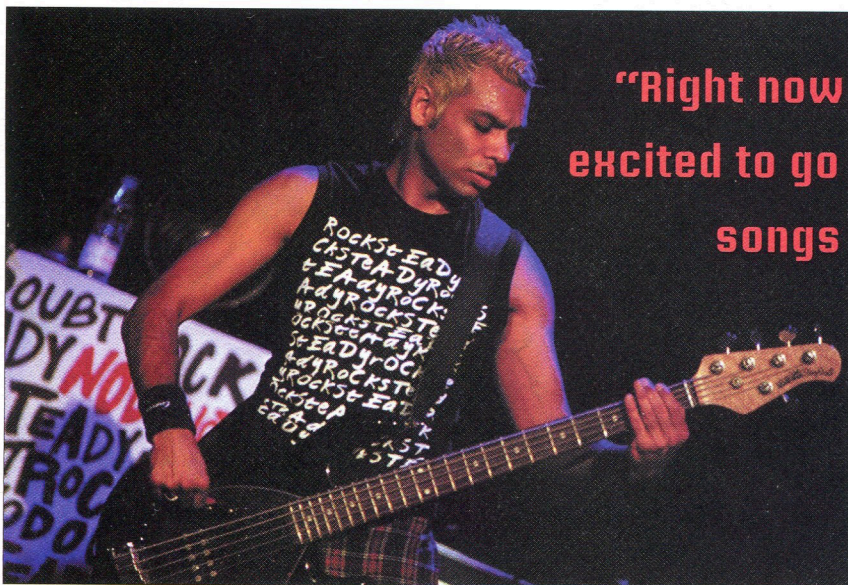
Geared up to rock steady.

BY JON WIEDERHORN

join us when we play live—which is pretty spectacular."

After the U2 tour, No Doubt will concentrate on promotional appearances until they begin a headlining U.S. tour this spring. *Onstage* spoke to Stefani, Kanal, and Dumont about the new CD and the challenges of playing it live.

NO DOUBT



“Right now we’re just so excited to go out and share these songs with people.”—Tony Kanal

KELLY A. SWIFT

Tony Kanal with his Music Man Sting Ray 5-string.

Rock Steady sounds like such a fun and spirited record compared with your last album, *Return to Saturn*.

Gwen Stefani: It is. We were in a really great mood when we made it. I had such a great year. And the band and I made some decisions when we decided to do another record. We wanted to clean house as far as all the rules that had built up over the years. We just wanted to experiment and see if we could have fun making the record and not have any kind of restrictions.

Tom Dumont: We wanted to make a record that would work well, for example, in dance clubs. You can really dance to every song. At the same time, there’s a lot of variety in the record, just like on our last record. We got really inspired by contemporary dance-hall reggae, which has almost a hip-hop kind of beat to it. Some stuff is really synth-pop ’80s new-wave-sounding stuff; a couple of things are kind of just straight-ahead rock. It’s much more keyboard heavy, the result of me and Tony sitting around in my little Pro Tools studio with our keyboards, just noodling around to come up with some weird sounds.

Tony Kanal: Just the headspace we were at least itself to what we were making here. *Return to Saturn* took two years because I think we felt the need to prove ourselves as songwriters and musicians. This one was more about just letting go and having fun with it. We started working on it in February, and it came out in December.

Stefani: It’s weird how it came together so fast, and we worked with so many amazing people, and it was so spontaneous. And the next thing I know, it’s done, and we love it. I couldn’t be more excited.

You’ve released four albums, including *Rock Steady*. But before you became a

successful recording band, you developed a reputation as an exciting live act.

Stefani: Oh, in the past, playing live for us was everything. We were just learning how to make records, and we were already experienced at performing to a crowd, so we focused on playing live. It’s so different being in the studio. And I feel like we’re just starting to learn how to use computers and Pro Tools, which made this record so much different.

Has No Doubt’s emphasis on playing live changed?

Stefani: It has, because the recording process and the writing process are becoming more and more fun and we’re better at it, and the touring process is becoming harder and harder. Really, it’s harder to

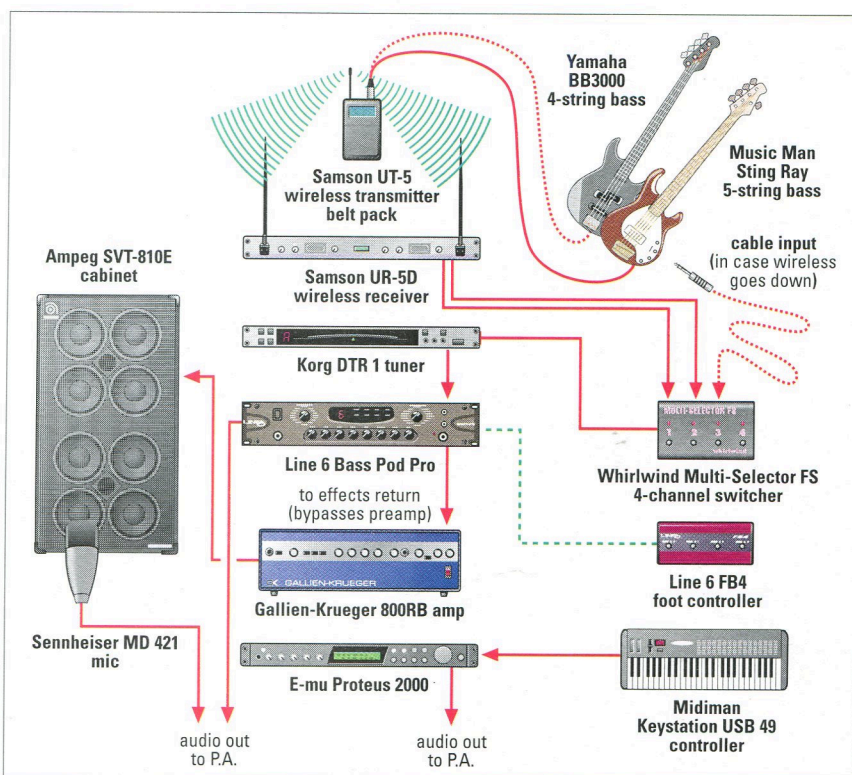
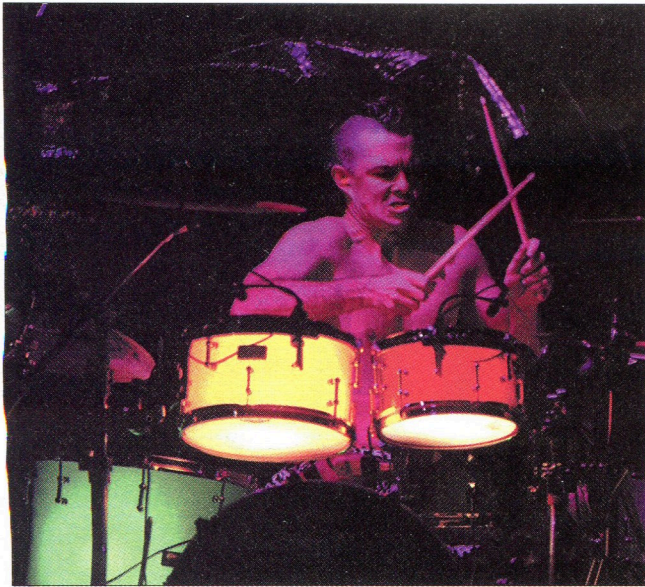


FIG. 1: The components and signal flow of Tony Kanal's stage rig.



Adrian Young's customized OCDP kit features translucent shells and a different colored light mounted in each drum.

Besides keyboards, Gabriel McNair plays trombone and sings backup.

live the lifestyle once you've done it for a long time. Leaving home and being away from and not seeing your family, it's just such an extreme way to live. I still look forward to touring; I just wish we didn't have to do it for so long. It's like too much of a good thing, like if you love to eat choco-

late but you just eat too much of it and you get sick. That's kind of the way touring is for me.

Kanal: Doing it for too long is tough, but I love the fact that we're touring in a different way now than we ever have before. It's such a challenge to play with keyboards

and sequencing, and I have to say, I really enjoy it. We can play older songs completely live and then also play the new stuff with sequencing. We get to do it all, and it's just so much fun.

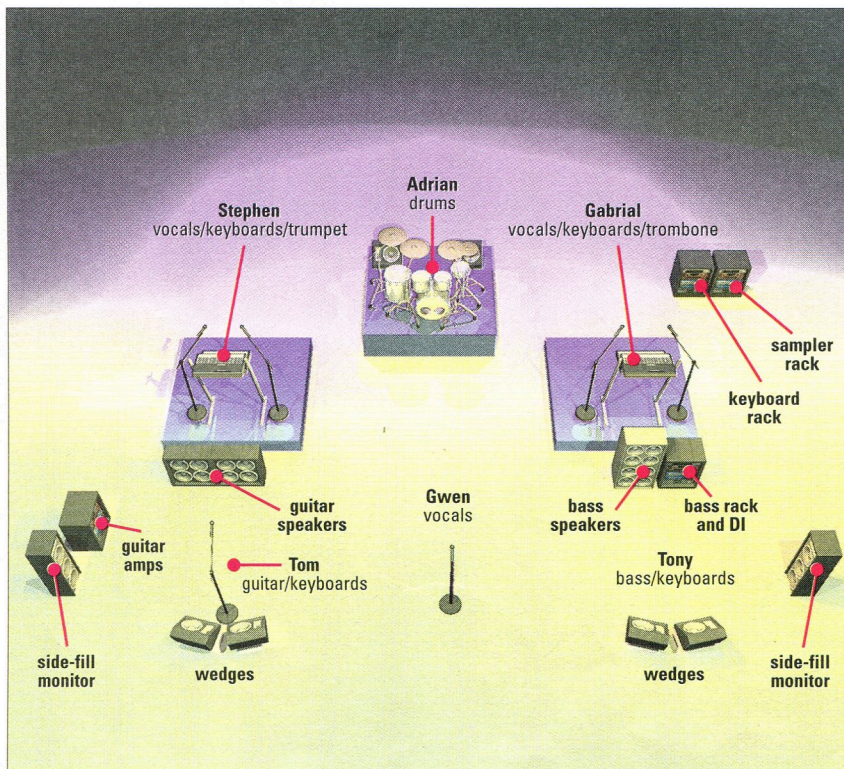
Was it somewhat overwhelming to go from being a completely organic band to one that mixes in recorded material onstage?

Kanal: No, because we structured the sequencing so there's as much live stuff being played as possible. It wasn't a situation where we're using the sequencing as a crutch to make the songs work. I think that for the most part, it's still very much of a live performance, with a few things augmented with the sequencing.

Dumont: It is a little bit weird for us because playing along with a track is somewhat awkward. We don't want to break up the spontaneity of what we normally are able to do. But for the four or five songs [that we use backing tracks on], it works pretty well. The songs really kind of call for it.

Gwen, as a singer, what was it like for you to perform in this different musical framework?

Stefani: It's hard to describe. I think I just try to perform each song the way the song wants to be. I'm not real conscious of what I'm doing onstage. Music just makes you



This stage plot shows the positions of the band members and their gear.

No Doubt's Gear

Stephen Bradley: trumpet, percussion, keyboards, vocals
 E-mu EK4 keyboard
 Yamaha trumpet
 assorted hand percussion
 Sennheiser MD 421 mic (trumpet)
 Wireless Shure SM58 mic (vocals)
 Ultimate Ears in-ear monitors
 Garwood receivers and transmitters for in-ear monitors

Tony Kanal: bass, keyboards
 Yamaha BB3000 4-string bass
 Music Man Sting Ray 5-string bass
 Gallien-Krueger 800RB amp head
 8x10 Ampeg SVT cabinet
 Line 6 Bass Pod Pro (for fuzz and synth sounds)
 Samson UT5 wireless (for bass)
 Korg DTR1 rackmount tuner
 Whirlwind Selector (A/B/C/D box)
 MIDIMan Keystation USB 49 controller keyboard
 E-mu Proteus 2000 (for bass sound on "Hey Baby")

Thanks to Luc Stampleman and Will Alexander from the No Doubt crew.

Tom Dumont: guitar, keyboards
 Hamer Standard guitar
 Hamer Artist Korina guitar
 Hamer Vector guitar
 Takemine acoustic
 Soldano SLO100 head
 Fender 4x12 cabinets (2)
 Shure SM57 and Sennheiser MD 409 mics on cabinets
 T.C. Electronic G-Major processor
 Line 6 Echo Plus processor
 Roland AX-1 keyboard controller (controls Stephen Bradley's EK4 keyboard)

Gabrial McNair: keyboards, trombone, background vocals
 Clavia Nord Lead synth
 E-mu EK4 sampler
 Roland Jupiter 8 synth
 Alesis 12R mixer (located offstage)
 Line 6 Echo Plus delay
 Olds trombone
 Sennheiser MD 421 mic (trombone)
 Wireless Shure SM58

of us will have a drink or so before we go on. Nothing more than that. It helps take the edge off. And this is a weird thing: I've noticed that if I chew gum during a show, or at least at the beginning of the show, something about having to play guitar and chew gum takes my mind off anything else. It's the weirdest thing, but it helps.

What have you learned about playing live that you didn't used to know?

Stefani: That it's about what's inside and the spirit of the music that counts. On *Return to Saturn*, I wanted to do more of a "show" show. I wanted to have these elaborate costume changes and incorporate more dynamics, and it didn't really work out. I don't think people wanted that from us. And we had two weeks of hell onstage before we kind of worked it out.

So it's changed for this tour?

Stefani: I've learned that certain songs require certain things, and it's fun to run around on certain tracks, but it's also

Gwen Stefani: vocals
 Wireless Shure SM58 mic
 Ultimate Ears in-ear monitors
 Garwood receivers and transmitters for in-ear monitors

Adrian Young: drums
 Orange Country Drums and Percussion (OCDP) drums:
 22" kick
 12" snare
 10" and 12" rack toms
 16" floor tom
 timbale
 Gibraltar hardware
 Zildjian cymbals:
 13" Newbeat hi-hats
 14" Sound Edge crash
 18" A Custom Projection crashes (2)
 20" Rock ride
 18" China Trash
 12" Splash A Custom
 ddrum triggers for kick and timbale
 E-mu ESI 2000 sampler
 Alesis DM5 (for trigger inputs, not for sounds)
 Pintech trigger pad
 Metrophone headphones
 Aura shakers (2)
 QSC 1,000W power amp (for shakers)
 Kit mics:
 kick: Shure SM52 and SM91
 snare: Shure Beta 57 (top) and SM57 (bottom)
 toms: Shure SM98As
 timbale: Shure SM57
 hi-hat: Audio-Technica AT3031
 overheads: Audio-Technica AT3035s

okay to just stand still and sing. It's like a journey. I want to take people to different places when they come see the show.

Kanal: If you have confidence and give 110 percent every night, things usually go pretty well. You've just got to portray that confidence and have fun. And we definitely have fun when we play onstage.

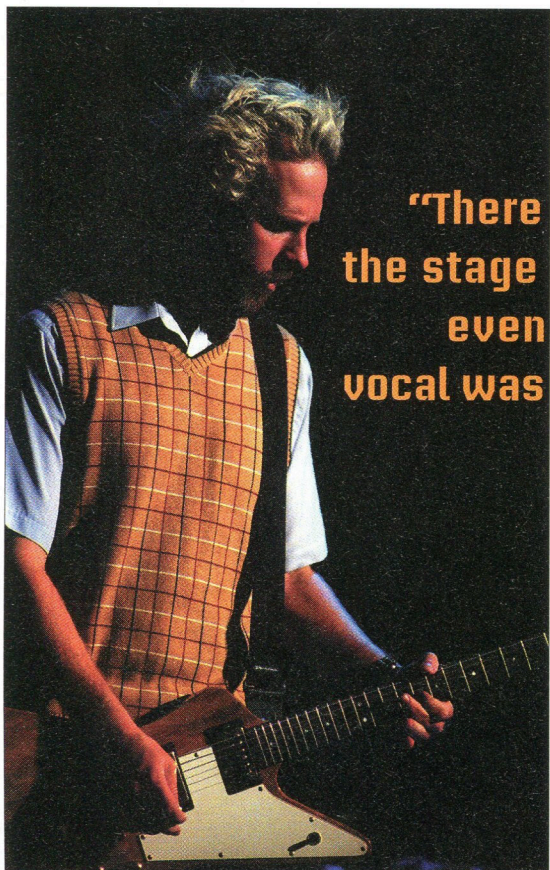
Do you use in-ear monitors or wedges?

Dumont: We're kind of split in the band. Gwen and our keyboard players/horn guys [Stephen Bradley and Gabrial McNair] have

react the way you're gonna react, and I just react to what I'm feeling when we're playing it. When we first tried to learn the new songs live, it was so hard. It was like a nightmare. But it was fun. It was especially rough because it was very hard to get back in the swing of it. We hadn't done it in a year. And the first show we had to do was opening for U2 at Madison Square Garden. I was freaking, dude. It's one thing to have a couple of warm-up gigs, but we had none. The closest thing to a warm-up gig was having my mom and dad come down to hear me sing the songs.

Is nervousness an issue before big shows?

Dumont: Every show is a little different. Generally, as long as the stage sound is good, the bigger shows are pretty easy. We've done enough of them now that it feels pretty comfortable. Usually a bunch



“There were sections of the stage where I couldn’t even walk because her vocal was so loud.”

—Tom Dumont

Why did you stop using them?

Dumont: I felt too disconnected from the show. I could certainly hear my playing with a lot of precision, could hear all the nuances, but I felt disconnected from the audience. At the end of shows, I was feeling like, “Did I play a show?” The kind of physical experience was taken away.

Kanal: I tried them but felt

kind of restricted because I like to move around a lot and I always found they were falling out. No matter what I did, I couldn’t keep them in my ears. So I prefer traditional wedges and side fills.

Has having Gwen and the other singers on in-ears helped with the stage volume?

Dumont: In the past, before in-ears, Gwen needed a lot of stage volume to hear herself and sing in tune. In those days, there were

sections of the stage where I couldn’t even walk because her vocal was so loud.

Since she went to in-ears, her stage volume is down to a really nice level, so I can hear everything pretty well.

Tony, are you doing anything different with your stage gear now that your music has taken on a more danceable, poppy feel?

Kanal: I’ve always had a very simple rig, just an amp and a speaker cabinet. Now it’s a little more complicated, but it’s still pretty simple [see Fig. 1]. I’m just using one kind of effects rack to emulate more of the Jamaican dance-hall keyboard kind of bass sounds that we’ve recorded on this record.

Guitarist Tom Dumont prefers to keep his guitar rig simple with the shortest possible cable runs.

KELLY A. SWIFT

Filling Out the Sound

Even with four members of No Doubt playing at least some keyboards, several songs on *Rock Steady* had too many elements to comfortably pull off live, so the band decided to incorporate backing tracks into certain parts of their show. They decided that rather than trying to trigger samples from a sampler, it would be more effective to play the supplementary tracks back onstage using a portable multitrack recorder—in this case, a 24-bit Tascam MX-2424 (see Fig. A). “We actually play to the track live,” says Tom Dumont. “We just press play on the machine and play along. It kind of just fills out the sound, and we use it as a click track.”

The band actually uses two MX-2424s synced together, each with the identical tracks on it. “The idea is if one breaks down, they just flip a switch and go to the second one,” says Dumont. “The cool thing is, if both break down, we can still finish the song out. It’s not like the whole song is running on the thing. The core of drums, bass, and guitar will still be going strong.”

The band sifted through the original master tapes, found the tracks they wanted to include, and mixed them into stereo pairs on the MX-2424. “We went through the record and picked out parts that really couldn’t humanly be played live,” says bassist Tony Kanal. “And those are the only things that actually go to sequencing. The rest of the stuff is played live.”

As is often the case in backing-track situations, most of the band does not have to play to a click. Instead, they simply follow the tempo of drummer Adrian Young, who hears it through a set of headphones. “So far it’s been pretty good,” observes Dumont. “Adrian tells us that he can feel us kind of pulling fast a little bit. But for the most part, we keep it in mind to stay pretty locked. The songs we do are pretty groove oriented, so we can just lock in and go. We’ve talked about trying to pull the tempo up maybe 2 or 4 bpm on those tracks to make it a little better live.” —Mike Levine

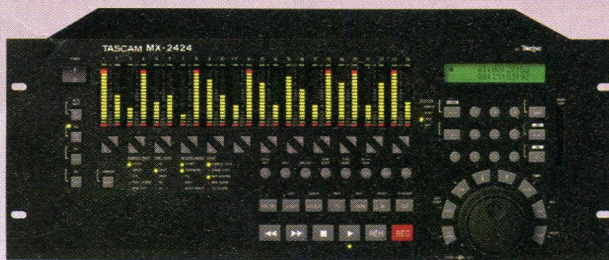


FIG. A: No Doubt’s backing tracks are played back from a Tascam MX-2424 multitrack.



KELLY A. SWIFT

Stephen Bradley's trumpet playing, vocals, and keyboards are integral to No Doubt's live show.

And for the first time, I'm actually playing some keyboards onstage, too. I'm just running a MIDIman keyboard into an E-mu Proteus 2000 and getting some really cool sounds.

Tom, you're playing keyboards as well?

Dumont: Yes, on one song—"Hey Baby." I play one of those portable keyboard units [Roland AX-1], hanging on me like a guitar. It's kind of a novelty thing, but I'm definitely enjoying it. I'm not a great keyboard player, but I am good enough to handle the part.

Has your setup changed for this tour?

Dumont: I'm really into simplicity, and this is the first time I've ever used a rackmount effects processor. I've always used stompboxes. I'm using a T.C. Electronic G-Major.

It's cool, and it's new for me. I'm having fun programming it, figuring it out. The big reason I use it is that I'm really anal about signal loss, cable length, and stuff. This thing sits next to my amp, and it just goes to the effects loop with the shortest cord possible.

Who puts together your live arrangements?

Dumont: We do it pretty much as a group. And Gabriel, our keyboard player, has been helping out a lot lately in sorting things out. He has a really good ear, and it's good to use him as an objective helper. On this particular album, he didn't really play much, so he can come and listen and say, "Okay, what about

this way or that way?" And then Gwen, she gets really into the vocals and she works a lot with those guys on trying to harmonize certain parts of the album. And it sounds different from the album, because on the album she harmonizes everything with herself. She had like ten tracks or whatever going of herself. But live, she's really good with the two of those other guys getting the harmonies right and rehearsing them.

Your new single, "Hey Baby," is about the groupie scene. Is that something you've experienced firsthand?

Stefani: I have a weird point of view on that because usually groupies are these girls that are going after the guys in the band to seduce them or be with them so they can tell everybody they were with them. That is something that's been going on forever. But since I'm the female in the band, they can't really do that to me. So it's just a weird perspective to have because I don't really have guys coming up to me trying to hook up, yet I see it happening

with the guys all the time. So I just wanted to write a song about a fun version of being backstage and seeing all of the stuff that goes on back there.

Your boyfriend, Gavin Rossdale, is the front man for Bush. Is it weird knowing that the kind of thing that you see backstage also goes on with Bush?

Stefani: Of course. I go out with them once in a while, and I get to see it firsthand, and it's crazy. But music is so powerful, and it's such a gift, and it just really makes people react funny. People really love having music in their lives. And for girls, music has a sexuality to it. So everything kind of all emerges together, and they can't help themselves.

Your music is definitely fun and lively. Is partying a major part of the No Doubt experience?

Kanal: Yes, but moderation is extremely important, and you just kind of learn as you go. You just start to realize that you're going to exhaust yourself if you're not careful.

Where do you see yourselves at this point in your career? Do you think *Rock Steady* will pave the way to the next evolution of No Doubt?

Kanal: We just take each record as it comes, and on this record we got to do everything we wanted to do. We're not the kind of band that writes music on the road. We need life experience, and we need to feel the urge to create music build up before we can do anything new. So it's really hard to say what's gonna happen next. Right now we're just so excited to go out and share these songs with people, that's all we're really thinking about. I don't know how long we're going to keep going, but right now things are extremely good.

Jon Wiederhorn is a New York-based music journalist.

onstage hotlinks

www.nodoubt.com

The band's official site.

www.ndifc.com

The No Doubt Unofficial International Fan Club offers lyrics, photos, and a discography.

For more of the No Doubt interview, go to www.onstagemag.com and click on **ONLINE EXTRAS**

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