

AN UNCOMMON ANGST

IN THE SHADOW OF THE MATTERHORN,
NO DOUBT COMPOSED *TRAGIC KINGDOM*

By Susan Christian Goulding

ON THE COVER OF NO DOUBT'S LATEST compact disc, a sun-kissed beauty holds out an orange as if to advertise its sweetness. Her short pleated dress suggests a cheerleader, if cheerleaders wore black fishnet stockings.

She is reminiscent of a World War II poster girl with platinum blond hair and sultry red lips.

The name of the CD is *Tragic Kingdom*, and when you study the picture in earnest, that orange is not so alluring after all—it's rotten. The collage of images mimics an orange crate label from hell. A dead orange tree, fruit still clinging to its corpse, stands spookily in the background.

All of the band's members grew up in Orange County. The lead singer, Gwen Stefani—that fetching blonde, your typical voluptuous rock gal—still lives with her parents in Anaheim. But lately the 26-year-old Loara High School graduate has spent most of her time on the road, thanks to the success of *Tragic Kingdom*.

"Just a Girl," the most popular cut on the CD, is deceptively cheerful—the flip-side of "Girls Just Want to Have Fun"—belted out with a Cindy Lauperlike, Betty Boopish voice. But the lyrics address a serious issue: the physical vulnerability of women, a topic rarely (if ever) broached in pop music:

This world is forcing me to hold your hand...I can't do the little things I hold so dear/Cause it's all those little things that I fear...They won't let me drive late at night...I'm just a girl, living in captivity.

No Doubt has been around for nine years, performing mostly in small Los Angeles clubs. It earned a cult following but little radio play. Band members were on the verge of giving up when

"Just a Girl" caught fire. "We didn't want to be these losers, 30 years old and going nowhere," Stefani says.

Tragic Kingdom reflects the doubt she and her four male collaborators were confronting. "Los Angeles bands look down on Orange County," Stefani explains. "They think there's no way musicians from Orange County could have deep emotions and true-life experiences. We labored under that prejudice for a long time."

Tragic Kingdom has a dark, look-beneath-the-surface quality—the vinyl version of *Twin Peaks*. No Doubt used to practice in the garage of Stefani's grandparents' house near Ball Road. At the time, the band included Stefani's older brother, Eric, a pianist now pursuing a career in cartoon animation. Other members are Tom Dumont, guitar, Tony Kanal, bass, and Adrian Young, drums.

"We made this record in the shadow of Disneyland," Stefani says. "As we were sitting there writing songs, we could hear the Matterhorn in the background. Disneyland is such a happy place, but at the same time it is such a corporate place. And you walk outside the park, and there are all those tacky motels lining the street. Our record is the same way—it's not all fun and good."

Stefani's mom, Patricia, is a homemaker, and her father, Dennis, works in marketing research. He inspired "Just a Girl" by worrying whenever his daughter drove alone at night.

Someday, Stefani might just move into her own place, but she thinks she'll remain in the county that offered so much fodder for her first hit record. "I can't see myself leaving my family. For the longest time, I was almost embarrassed that I was from Orange County. But now it's like, this is where I'm from, and I'm proud of it." OC

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