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Gwen Stefani

“It’s hard to describe this crazy journey”

Award-winning singer-songwriter Gwen Stefani opens up about how heartbreak has inspired her latest work, and how she’s stronger than she’s ever been

WORDS RICHARD ALDHOUS/INTERVIEW HUB PHOTOGRAPH SMALLZ & RASKIND/CONTOUR BY GETTY IMAGES

Selling 30 million albums worldwide and being named recently as one of the top 100 Greatest Women in Music, you might expect Gwen Stefani to be bold or maybe guarded, but far from it. She doesn’t hold back when it comes to opening her heart, and she speaks with a surprising candour that leaves you with the impression that you’re tapping into her deepest feelings.

We catch up with Stefani in Los Angeles. She has been on an emotional rollercoaster over the past year. Following her traumatic split from Bush frontman, Gavin Rossdale, she found love again with country star, Blake Shelton, while working on *The Voice* together. Now, 20 years after the debut of Stefani’s band No Doubt [that she started with her older brother Eric], and a successful solo career, this three-time, Grammy Award-winning singer-songwriter has released her third solo album – *This Is What The Truth Feels Like* – inspired by coming to terms with the end of her 14-year marriage to Rossdale. The album shot to number one upon its release. Stefani is one of only five

women who has a number-one album as both a solo artist and as a member of a group.

Now that she’s about to end her North American tour, with rumours of a possible European leg, Stefani is anxious to show her fans that she’s ready to begin a new chapter in her life.

‘It’s super emotional,’ she says. ‘I did those concerts with No Doubt last summer when I was in the middle of hell in my personal life, and nobody knew, just my parents and the people that were right around me.’

She adds: ‘I’m revisiting all those emotions I had back then that are relevant now. It’s incredible to be in the position to be able to be a songwriter and share your story with people, and have them relate to it. It makes you feel so much better about yourself in your own life, and comforted.’

The sassy, outspoken frontwoman is also enjoying her time with Shelton who not only helped her rebuild her life after her marriage breakup, but also inspired portions of her new album. She now lives on her sprawling >>>



>>> Californian estate with her three children, Kingston, 10, Zuma, eight, and two-year-old Apollo.

The interview

This past year has been a tumultuous one for you, but things have worked out in your personal life and career. What are your thoughts about everything that's happened? It's been tough, but putting together the album has been a blessing. I never expected it to happen the way it did, but things just work out for a reason. Sometimes good things are the result of bad things going on in your life and that's how *This Is What The Truth Feels Like* came about.

This is all part of my life journey. I'm so happy to be able to do this tour and show my fans how much I love them, and share this music with them.

Would you describe working on the new album as a cathartic process for you?

It's been so healing, the process of writing it and sharing it. It means a lot to me... to be able to go face-to-face with the people that have actually supported me all these years, and through this year especially.

How important was it for you to be able to put together this new album while your personal life was in such turmoil?

I feel that I was blessed with this opportunity to write music again after such a long while. I have gone through two great heartbreaks [Stefani dated No Doubt's bass player, Tony Kanal, and penned their hit single *Don't Speak* after splitting from him] in my life and, even though that can be so crushing, this record has helped me get back to what I love so much.

You've described the process of songwriting as traumatic. Was that all the more so on your new album?

The first time I started writing songs for *Tragic Kingdom* [No Doubt's third album], I was in a very bad place. My heart was cracked and I had to write to help get me through that terrible time. But I decided that, instead of feeling sad and sorry for myself, I needed to put my feelings into music, and that's how I've always approached my work.

I still don't know exactly how I do it, but writing songs just comes to me and it feels so beautiful and rewarding – to be able to write a song that touches people and connects you to audiences all over the world.

“It's gratifying to be able to go through those difficult feelings and use them to create something positive”

Do you ever wonder how the melodies and lyrics come to you when you are suffering emotionally, or going through the end of your marriage, as was the case when this new album came about?

I feel like God just handed these songs to me as a kind of Band-Aid, to help me through this crazy time in my life. And it's all about finding your talent and then sharing it. I think of being able to pour my emotions into songs as a gift. It's very gratifying to be able to go through those difficult and negative feelings and use them to create something positive.

I was aching to be creative again, so this has been inspiring and comforting, because I was feeling insecure about my work. Now I feel I've got my confidence back.

Did you have an idea beforehand about the kind of sound or feel you wanted for the album?

No, I just wanted to write songs that expressed what I was going through emotionally. That was the inspiration and force behind the album. It was really hard, because I just wanted to get under the covers and eat a lot of pizza and cry. But I went to the studio.

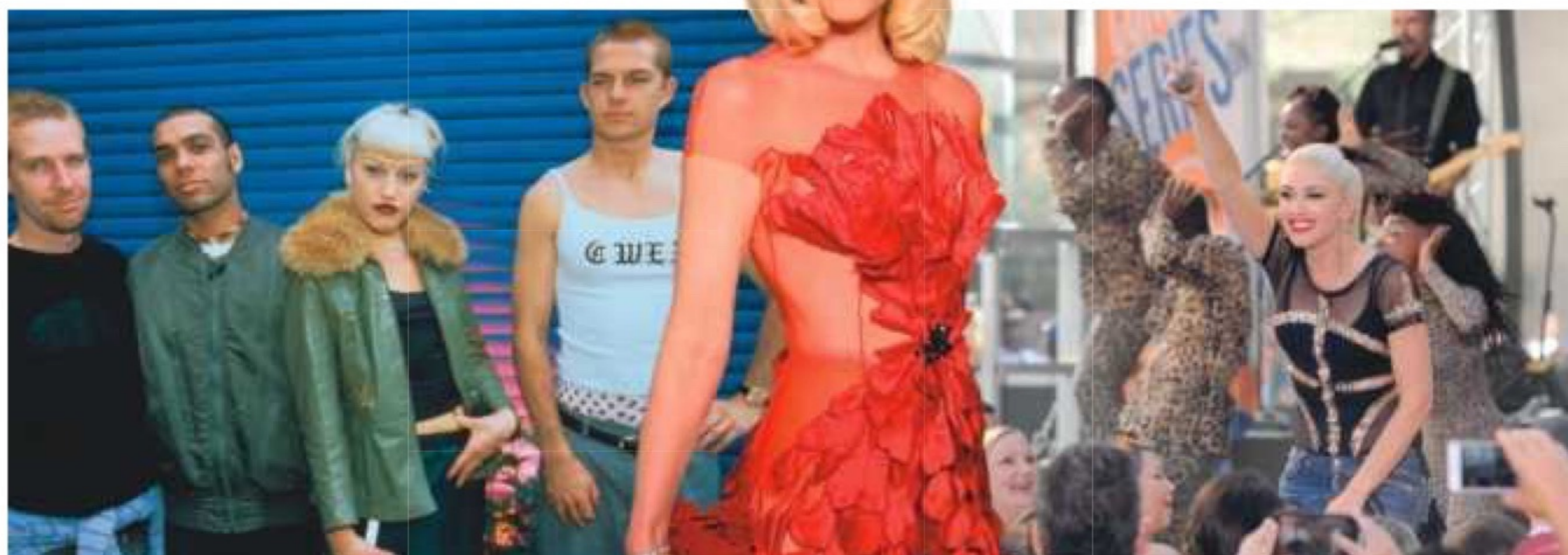
How long did it take you to finish the album?

It came together a lot more quickly than I expected. It took me eight weeks, and sometimes it's taken me three years to finish an album. I wrote *Used To Love You* [the first single to be released] and, two weeks later, it was on the air. It was like this was all happening in real time.

Sometimes there are these miracles that happen to you. Falling pregnant with Apollo was one of them, and then getting *The Voice* [Christina Aguilera

THE HIGHLIGHTS

- 1969 Born 3 October in California
- 1995 Releases album *Tragic Kingdom* with band No Doubt
- 2002 Weds musician Gavin Rossdale
- 2004 Launches fashion line L.A.M.B. and first solo album, *Love.Angel.Music.Baby.*
- 2006 First son, Kingston James McGregor Rossdale, born 26 May
- 2008 Second son, Zuma Nesta Rock, born 21 August
- 2012 Reunited with No Doubt
- 2014 Third son, Apollo Bowie Flynn, born 28 February; joins *The Voice*
- 2015 Rossdale and Stefani split
- 2016 Plays DJ Suki in film *Trolls* and collaborates on soundtrack, out now



Gwen Stefani and her No Doubt bandmates, from left, Tom Dumont, Tony Kanal and Adrian Young

Performing in New York this summer at the *Today Show* Citi Concert Series



On stage at the MTV Europe Awards in Rome, with the Harajuku Girls

With beau, Blake Shelton, a fellow judge on *The Voice*, and, left, at the Vanity Fair Oscar Party this year

was on leave from the show, as she was pregnant, when Stefani got the call] was another. You just never know what's in store for you.

Looking back, was making the album the best thing you could have done for yourself while you were going through a lot of personal turmoil?

It was like a wake-up call. When things started to unravel in my life last year, I thought to myself, 'Get back on track and stop being insecure about writing and what you're here for. Stop being selfish and share what you've got.'

Have you found the tour emotionally exhausting, especially because the songs from your new album are so deeply personal?

Touring is really draining, but it's also satisfying and

healing, and it's going to be something that will make me feel super empowered. Every time I go out on stage, I have to do my very best. You can't just walk through it. You have to be in it, and it's exhausting.

I think that's one of the reasons I haven't toured [solo] in seven years, because the last one I did almost killed me, after having those two babies, then going on tour and nursing an infant. Doing those No Doubt shows [in 2015] were super physical!

How do you feel these days?

I'm in a great place now. This record was a lifesaver. It's hard for me to describe this crazy journey I've been on this past year. I never expected any of this. I feel like this music just dropped out of the sky.

Gwen Stefani's album, 'This Is What The Truth Feels Like', is out now