



BLONDE ON BLONDE

Gwen Stefani has ditched No Doubt in a bid to be the next Madonna. Complete with English husband and questionable movie career.

WORDS: KATE FINNIGAN PHOTOGRAPHER: YOURI LENQUETTE

"MY ALBUM WILL probably end up being called Fuck You or something," shrugs Gwen Stefani and then cackles for a while, shattering the silence of her floor-to-ceiling white suite in the slickly contemporary St Martin's Lane Hotel.

The No Doubt singer is throwing around potential titles for her upcoming solo album, a supposed "side project", as would-be superstars put it when they're still rather embarrassingly attached to the band that made them in the first place (see also Beyoncé Knowles, Justin Timberlake). But she's being disingenuous. The album will eventually be called Love, Angel, Music, Baby, the final detail in a near-military plan for world domination. Why else would the 35-year-old have already bagged a role as '30s starlet Jean Harlow in Martin Scorsese's new Howard Hughes biopic, *The Aviator*?

Naturally, Stefani already has the diva-like retinue of flunkies. She sits stiffly in her chair, trademark red lips blazing, while her over-eager

SNAPSHOT

● **Place:** St Martin's Lane Hotel, London

● **Date:** Wednesday 18 August 2004

● **Vibe:** Gwen Stefani had "just flown in" from New York, where she had been working with Pharrell Williams. The all-white suite (her London HQ for the day) was glowing with perfumed candles.

PR, hair and make-up squad whisper in the adjoining room. The door is slightly ajar – in case of screams, gasps, hissy fits. And she's still pretending that it all happened by accident. "I didn't *want* to think of the idea of doing the record, it just came," she says, her brown eyes wide.

Pull the other one. "No, I never thought of even doing this before. Why would I?" she shrugs, with faux naivety. "I didn't even think about being in a band before I was in one. I don't really feel it's in my hands..."

She will continue to protest a little too much throughout the interview...

You've packed up and gone solo. Why now?

The idea was for me to do an '80s-inspired record for fun, as a side project. Not a solo record, not like I'm going to suddenly reveal "The Real Gwen" [giggles]. Suddenly pour out my heart and soul! It was going to be a fun project and it turned into something... super hard! [laughs]

On the first single, *What You Waiting For?*, you sing, "You're still a super-hot female." Is that how you see yourself now?

I'm not going to do it 10 years from now, am I? I want to do a sexy dance record. I have a list of things I want to do. You start running out of time at a certain point in your life – you're like, "Fuck, what have I done?" Everyone's like, [whiny voice] "What does the band think about this?" This is my fuckin' life, OK? We're not talking about what the band thinks!

What does the band think? Is there any ill-feeling?

As far as I know, no. I mean, >

who knows when it actually comes out what it will be like for everybody, I don't know. But they know I'm a woman and I need to be able to do something for myself. I feel in some ways it's not equal, because their clock is different to mine. Those guys can have babies whenever they feel like it. I want to do some projects but I also want a family.

You worked with Pharrell Williams, Andre 3000 and Linda Perry. Were they all your choices?

Linda Perry was not even on my list of people to work with. I've known her for years because we were the first two girls signed to Interscope, but I never wanted to work with her. She came up to me at the Grammys and said, "We are gonna *do* something together!" And I was thinking, "Oh great. You don't understand the record I wanna make. I'm gonna work with Prince!"

So why did you have the change of heart?

The record company was putting pressure on me to work with her straight off the Rock Steady tour. I cried in my bed [laughs] and then I agreed. We did one song which wasn't right, then the next day I came in and she'd been up all night – maniac – and had this track, What You Waiting For?, and I was so inspired. She's so fast, I would come in and she'd written a song and I was like, "Hey, wait for me! It's my fuckin' record!"

And you had a fight?

No, not like a *fight*, it was all me. I'd never worked with a girl before. I've always had the same boys, so it was a little weird. But there was one day

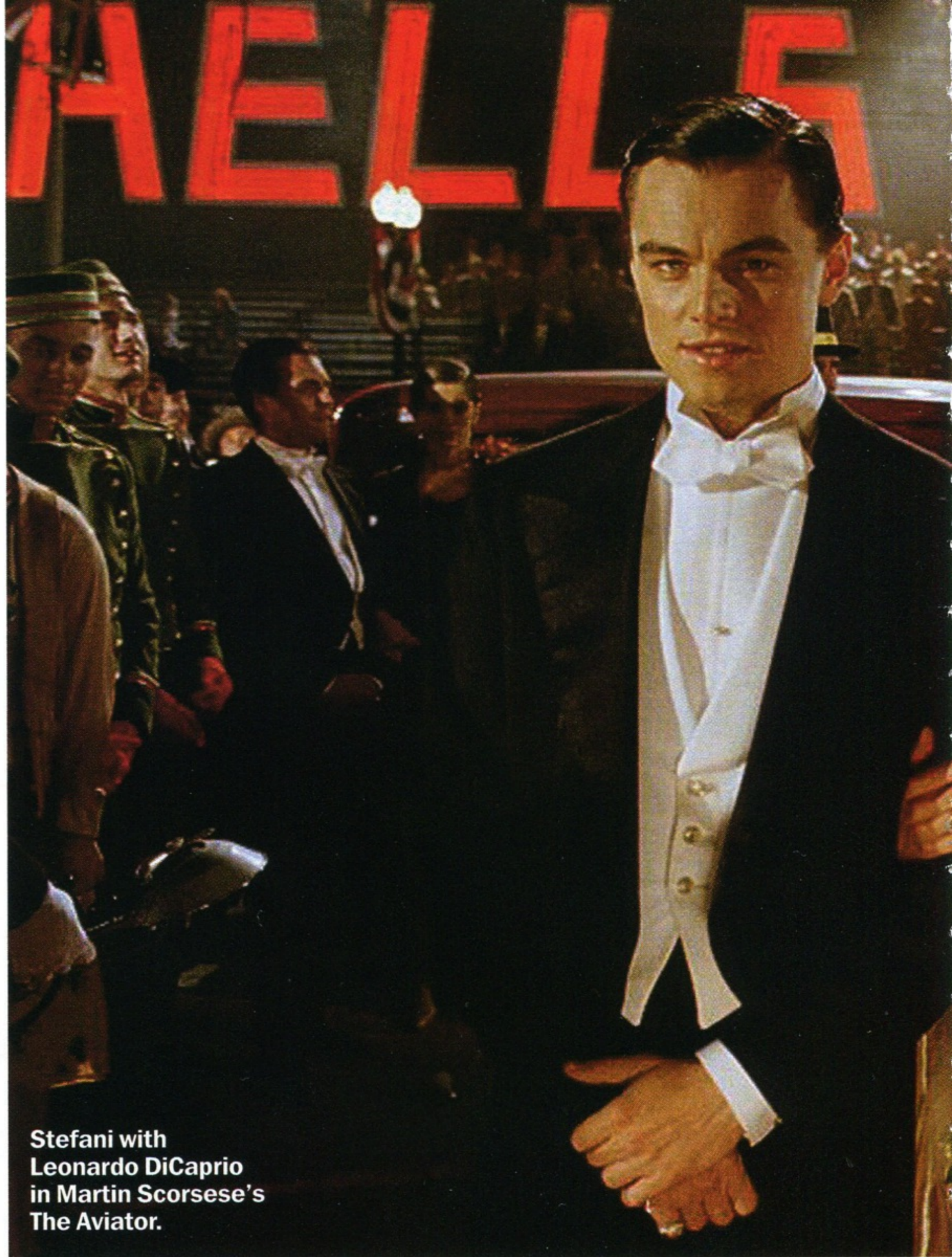
when we were writing this track about the first boyfriend I kissed in high school and he actually... he died and I'd written this song for him and it was really personal. And then Linda gave me these lyrics and I was just getting my period and you know when you're just ready to bust up? I started crying and I was like, "I can't see her, I have to go home! I can't write in front of her." And that was that. I phoned up Tony [Kanal, No Doubt bassist and Gwen's ex] and he said, "Don't worry, we're going out tonight, come over here."

After the Tragic Kingdom tour in '97, you and Tony had split up and your brother Eric had left the band to be an animator for The Simpsons. You then went back to live at your family home. Did you think your life was falling apart?

It wasn't really like that. I went back and I was *rich* – you would think we'd have been a lot richer, but we had a really bad record deal. But I got to buy a beautiful house. And on that album I'd learnt that I could write songs. Before, I never really had big ambitions, I was always in love, I just wanted to be a girlfriend and a mom. But when I found out – "Fuck! I can write these songs and they sound like exactly how it feels" – I felt finally me. I took it so seriously...

How do you mean?

I got into Joni Mitchell and Sylvia Plath and reading and really trying to use words like [they were] colours. I think I wrote my best stuff on [2000 album] Return Of Saturn, although I know it only sold four million – sorry and all that. But I was fucked in that



Stefani with Leonardo DiCaprio in Martin Scorsese's *The Aviator*.

time period. Maybe that was how I flipped out. I was depressed. If you look at my style then it shows.

You mean the pink hair?

The pink hair [raises eyebrows], it really reflected my needs at that time. When I look back at pictures now I'm like, "Wow, you were searchin'!" I was turning 30 and I didn't know who I was.

What's it been like being Mrs Gavin Rossdale?

You know, I'm like, [sarky voice] "I just can't wait to tell the world about my marriage!" Everybody wants to know. And up until I got married I never really had

secrets. But when it comes to getting married, you have someone who you're responsible for. You're a team.

You got married in London – Gavin's hometown. It's hardly neutral territory...

In our lives it was the place. For me, London is like a magical, fairytale land. All the music I grew up loving came from here, all the style I love. This is London Town! So the idea of a wedding here seemed pretty good. I was a little bummed out that everybody couldn't be there, but it was always going to be that way for us, so that's why we had this huge reception in LA which turned into a second wedding.

LIFE MAP Gwen Stefani: the journey so far.

1969

Gwendolyn Renee Stefani born in Anaheim, California.

1978

Gwen sings lead vocals on older brother Eric's first song, Stick It In The Hole, about a pencil sharpener.

1986

Singer John Spence forms Orange County ska group No Doubt with keyboardist Eric Stefani and Gwen on backing vocals.

1987

John Spence commits suicide. The band quits and re-forms days later. Gwen and new bassist Tony Kanal start their relationship.

1989

No Doubt open for the Red Hot Chili Peppers and Ziggy Marley.

1991

No Doubt sign to Interscope but Gwen and Tony still keep their day jobs in a department store. Jimmy Iovine, head of Interscope, predicts Gwen will be a star in five years.

1992

Debut album No Doubt is released. The program director of KROQ says, "It would take an act of God for this band to get on the radio."

1994

Eric Stefani leaves the band during the making of second album proper Tragic Kingdom to become an animator on The Simpsons. Tony and Gwen split, inspiring Gwen to write Don't Speak.

MATT GROENING, REX, MATRIX



ANGEL



'What do No Doubt think? This is *my* fucking life, OK?'

outfit they're like, "You're not wearing that!" and make you go home and change. As soon as I could get away with cutting my shirt this short [*points to midriff*] I did. That was my rebellion. I pierced my nose when I was 25 years old and my mom didn't talk to me for *two months*.

You're about to appear in Martin Scorsese's new movie, *The Aviator*...

I'm, like, *one* minute in it, but it was so fun. The attention to detail, though! I got this call recently saying, "Martin couldn't understand one of the words you said and he wants you to re-do it." So they sent a car for me, brought me in, we have one day of recording for that one line. I was like, "Whoa, this is tedious work you guys and girls do."

What were you expecting? *Glamour?*

Yeah. But I guess that's what it's like in the studio, too. The only difference is, I'm not in charge, Martin Scorsese was in charge.

Are you a control freak?

Control is everything. On this album I've let people in a lot but it's been great. Like the song *Cool*. [*Madonna, TLC and Pink producer*] Dallas Austin heard my song *Underneath It All* and got inspired to write a new song

called *Cool* which he could never finish about his ex-girlfriend and all the bullshit of breaking up and how he wanted it to be OK. We finished the thing in 15 minutes. *I* didn't write all of the melody – I'm *ashamed*, I want to say that I did – but I also know how magical it is that somebody could be so inspired by my song that they write one.

You claim things "just happen" to you without planning. That's pretty hard to swallow...

I don't know, I always thought of myself as a pretty lazy girl. I hate work. So I don't really understand how I get things done. But I guess I'm not the person I used to be. The passion takes over. When you create things and they happen, it's addictive.

GWEN STEFANI uncrosses her legs and gets up quickly, clearly relieved to be back off duty again. She thinks the record is almost there – she's almost nailed the track she's recording with Dr Dre. "So I hope you like it all," she says sweetly. It's a rare moment of self-doubt, her guard dropping for a split-second. Then she pauses and her diva persona kicks in again.

"What am I talking about?" she says, stamping her foot. "Of course you'll love it. It's, like, the fucking wickedest!"

Why did Gavin have his dog as his best man?

[*Puts on a baby voice*] That's Gavin's little friend. He goes everywhere with him.

The best man usually makes a speech. Did he?

[*Smiles stiffly*] No.

You were brought up a strict Roman Catholic...

I didn't know any different. I was really happy about it in a way. It gave me a lot of security and a lot of morals and boundaries. I think it moulded who I am.

So you didn't rebel?

No, I was very passive. I was the peacemaker in the family.

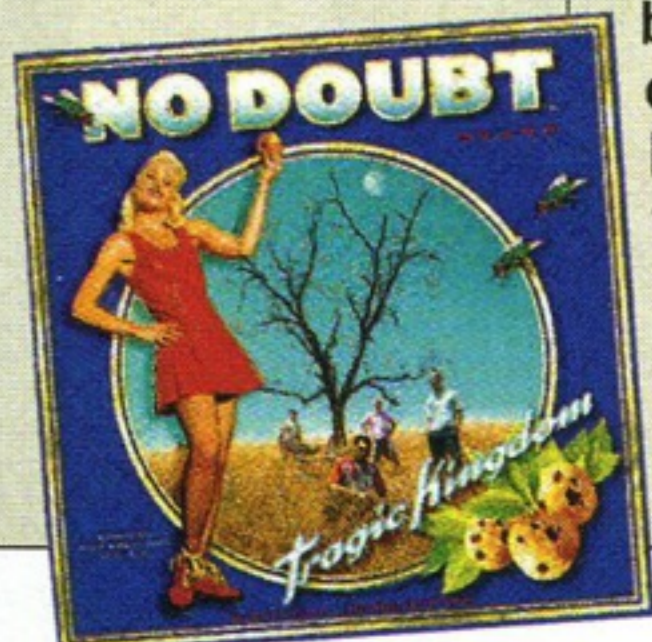
I'm not a fighter. The person I fight with is my husband, poor thing... I hate that when you say something and you think about it and you're like, "That was really bad". But I feel like it [*Catholicism*] was really good for me. I had a lot of spiritual moments when I was a teenager and I want to get back there some day. People in rock'n'roll or music, they always have that kind of bad past – "I was beaten down but that's why I'm still here" kinda thing, but that's really not me.

But weren't your parents especially strict?

Crazy! Like, if you were walking to school in some

1995

Tragic Kingdom is released. Gwen swears during a Virgin Megastore performance. Her mum doesn't speak to her for a week.



1996

Tragic Kingdom goes double platinum in US. As predicted, Gwen is now a star. A zillion blonde, bindi-wearing, midriff-baring Gwen clones are born. Rest of the band get cropped out of photos.

2000

After depression and some intense journal writing, Return Of Saturn is released. Gwen says, "The songs are largely about me."



2001

Gwen goes "hip hop", recording Let Me Blow Ya Mind with Eve. No Doubt releases the chart-friendly Rock Steady.

2002

Gwen marries Bush's Gavin Rossdale at St Paul's Church in London's Covent Garden. And then does it all over again later that month at Jimmy Iovine's house.



2003

No Doubt wins its first Grammy for Hey Baby. Gwen designs a line of bags through her LAMB fashion label and murders all her bandmates in the video for It's My Life. A solo artist is born.