



Republica: (from left) Andy Todd, Saffron, Tim Dorney.

# Republica

Adopted by MTV, Baywatch and the New York Rangers, London dance-rockers "do" America.

"We've just gone in at Number 58 in Germany. It's exciting, isn't it," enthuses Saffron, Republica's Nigeria-born, South London-accented singer. The five-piece shifted 200,000 copies of their self-titled debut album in America on the back of their "hit" single Ready To Go (peaked at 57, had a five-month shelf life) but the frontwoman still beams at the thought of minor advances in European territories.

"I just hope people over here will give us a wink, you know, because we're up there giving it some," says Saffron. A wink would make a nice change, since UK reviewers have been less than complimentary.

"There was one reviewer who said we were diabolical before she'd even heard the album," she continues. "What had I done, flushed her head down a toilet when we were at school?"

Formed three years ago, Republica signed to dance label DeConstruction after writing only one song, a big house number called Out Of This World. At the time they were a three-piece consisting of former ballet dancer and N-Joi vocalist Saffron, producer Andy Todd and ex-Flowered Up keyboardist Tim Dorney. This dance-friendly triumvirate gradually developed a more indie-based technopop style around Saffron's voice – part Siouxsie Sioux, part Toyah Willcox.

"I don't mind a bit of Toyah," confesses the 28-year-old. "I have to say I've got some of her earlier albums. I always gravitate towards people that everyone else hates because I think there's something interesting going on there."

Republica's line-up fattened up into a five-piece last year with the addition of Johnny Male (who co-wrote Ready To Go) and drummer Dave Barbarossa, best known for his new wave sticksmanship in Bow Wow Wow. This outfit toured America constantly in the second half of last year, during which Ready To Go was played 2,000 times a week on American radio, ice hockey team the New York Rangers adopted the song as their pre-match anthem and it soundtracked a scene of sand-kicking slow motion running by a bevy of breasty Baywatch women. Republica's scheduled follow-up, Drop Dead Gorgeous, is already MTV

rotated and plays all the way through a scene in slashmeister Wes Craven's current horror blockbuster, Scream. "The television advertisement for it uses our song and has more of our video in the clip than the movie," reveals Dorney.

Meanwhile, Saffron, who has sung on a cover of an L7 song (Fuel My Fire) for The Prodigy's forthcoming LP, is eager for progress in the UK, where Ready To Go is re-released after stalling at 43 last year. "We don't want to be part of a big grey mass that people quite like," she sighs. Only love or hate, it seems, will do.

Steve Malins



Currently available: Republica DeConstruction LP, 1997

# No Doubt

Ska-flavoured Californians fronted by the noo wave Madonna come good after a decade of misfortune.

"It was such a feeling of relief, because after you've done something for ten years, you start feeling guilty," frets No Doubt vocalist Gwen Stefani. "Like, What I am doing this for? Why for so long? I'm getting old now, I need to get a life... Why did we carry on? Because we loved it."

Five million sales and frantically counting for their 1995 album Tragic Kingdom, US ska-rock outfit No Doubt are finally in a position to look back with a comfortable feeling of vindication. Like Pulp, their Brit counterparts in longest-overnight-sensation stakes, the Californian quartet are too busy enjoying their current successes to dwell on past frustrations. Frankly, though, their history suggests they could have kept an army of analysts working overtime.

First, co-vocalist John Spence committed suicide in 1987, the year No Doubt initially made good on their collective love of 2Tone (and specifically Madness). Second, their eponymous debut album coincided with the grunge explosion ("We were deemed absolutely illegal," Stefani recalls). Interscope were reluctant to promote the album, let alone fund another, which eventually took three years, two producers, 10 studios and one prolonged fight to complete.

Meanwhile, Stefani's elder brother and keyboardist, Eric, departed (he's now an animator on The Simpsons), while the singer and bassist Tony Kanal, separated after a seven-year relationship. No Doubt's run of bad luck and the proximity of their studio to Disneyland ("It seems so innocent, but there's gang-banging and sleaze going on down at the other end of the street") prompted the title Tragic Kingdom.

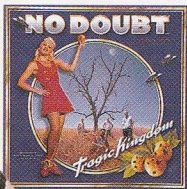
By the time of the album's release, Green Day were massive and Rancid had

made ska a hip commodity. Perfect for No Doubt, whose reputation for upbeat, celebratory shows kept them going through the wilderness years before MTV jumped on the Just A Girl single. "It makes such a difference having a record company behind you," says Kanal. "Because it's such a political game, getting on the radio and TV."

If Kanal's attitude betrays a certain cynicism, it's because No Doubt have been around too long to have a greenhorn's rose-coloured vision of the music industry. The sorest point is the media's treatment of Stefani as the new wave Madonna (she's a blonde, at least), shoving her solo onto magazine covers in spite of the band's decade of democracy.

"But what kind of decision do you make after being in a band for so long?" Stefani ponders. "Do you pass such milestones by or do you compromise? But at least these are issues that we're lucky enough to be able to contemplate."

Martin Aston



Currently available: No Doubt Tragic Kingdom Interscope LP, 1995

No Doubt (from left): Adrian Young (drums), Gwen Stefani (vox), Tom Dumont (guitar), Tony Kanal (bass).

