

# Mixed Business

Out with ska-punk. In with techno, Highland jigs and the kitchen sink.

## No Doubt

### Rock Steady

INTERSCOPE 4931582149.12 MINS

WHAT A TIMELOCKED couple No Doubt's Gwen Stefani and Bush's Gavin Rossdale used to make — Bush with their militant grunge-is-not-dead credo; No Doubt sustaining that bafflingly popular genre, West Coast ska-punk. But while Rossdale's muse remains unwavering, Stefani (whose recent studio alliances include Moby, Eve and Kelis) has thrown caution and consistency to the wind. On the misleadingly titled *Rock Steady*, it's as if No Doubt have made their musical decisions via tombola. Why have one new direction when you can have 12?

Matters get off to a flying start with a mellifluous

vocal intro ushering in the snarling Hella Good. Co-written by the Neptunes and spraying techno FX, it could be one of the fiercer moments from Kelis's last album. Similarly, Hey Baby's hard-nosed, horny Jamaican dancehall and the trampolining, William Orbit-produced Making Out (roughly, Vince Clarke goes ska) wed barmy sonic adventure to mighty choruses. But by manically pinballing between ideas, *Rock Steady* soon flirts with disaster.

Don't Let Me Down could be the theme to a 1980s Rob Lowe movie, *Start The Fire* finds the missing link between dancehall and Highland marching bands to the delight of no-one and *In My Head* is irksome Bontempi reggae. Dave Stewart co-writes swooning reggae ballad *Underneath It All*

while Prince supplies the tense *Waiting Room* — good songs both, but belonging on different albums. Ric Ocasek, Sly & Robbie and Nellee Hooper complete the unhealthy cooks-to-broth ratio.

Only Stefani glues it all together. Despite occasionally annoying vocal mannerisms (less Debbie Harry, more Transvision Vamp's Wendy James), she has a keen lyrical eye for emotional complexities, half-mocking her own jealousy and paranoia on *Detective* and *In My Head*. It's possible that *Rock Steady* is a harbinger of things to come, as more US bands adopt hip hop's traffic-jam approach to hired help. On this evidence, it's likely to generate several interesting albums but no great ones. ★★★ *Dorian Lynskey*



No Doubt: you're fooling no-one, chap on the right.

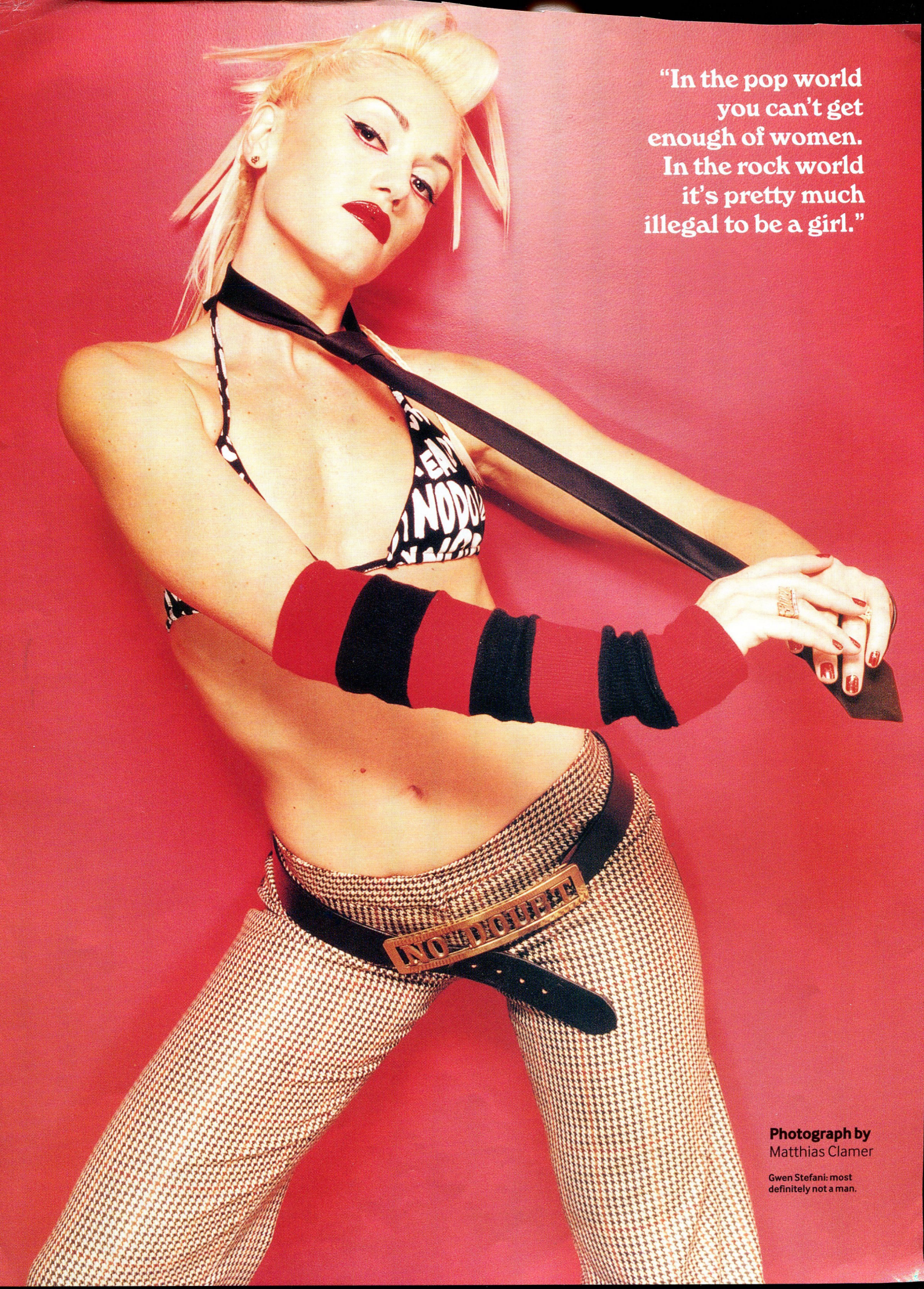
#### ◀ LIKE THIS? TRY THIS...

##### Blondie Autoamerican

CHRYSALIS, 1980

Five albums in, Blondie had a funny turn, calling in the session musicians for a riot of calypso, hip hop and Broadway show tunes. The sheer pop cojones of *Rapture* and *Tide Is High* saved the day.





"In the pop world  
you can't get  
enough of women.  
In the rock world  
it's pretty much  
illegal to be a girl."

**Photograph by**  
Matthias Clamer

Gwen Stefani: most  
definitely not a man.



# Skank Girl \*

**Gwen Stefani** on body odour, the trouble with hip hop and being a “glamazon”.

**How do you feel about being cast as rock’s Mrs Sex?**

I’m sorry, but if someone thinks I’m sexy then alright, cool. I haven’t really felt comfortable with that role until now. I’m a woman. I can actually wear high heels. I don’t know if you’ve tried it before, but if you wear high heels all of a sudden, you feel sexy.

**What’s wrong with being sexy?**

Nothing. I’m saying that as a Catholic girl in Orange County, it wasn’t something I played on. I was in a band with all guys, and all the bands we played with were punk rock bands. I was one of the only girls, so there were a lot of assholes, shout-ing things like, “Show me your tits!”

**Have you found that attitude returning with the rise of bands such as Blink-182 in America?**

Yeah, it’s weird how it goes in cycles if you’re a woman or a girl. Are they popular now or are they out of style? At the moment in the pop world you can’t get enough of them. In the rock world it’s pretty much illegal to be a girl.

**It must have been grim when you started as the only woman in a band with three men.**

I’ve probably missed out on a lot of girl stuff that I’m just getting into now. At the same time, my life is fun. Adrian [*Young, No Doubt drummer*] got arrested last night because he got naked and ran around in the snow. This is the kind of thing I get to see, but of course there’s times when it’s like...

**Disgusting?**

Yeah, the smells, the conversations and things like that.

**Presumably, the smells aren’t such a part of it now.**

There’s still a lot of times when we’re all in the same space. Plenty of opportunities to smell my friends.

**I’ve heard you described as a “glamazon”.**

A glamazon? What’s that? Is that a word?

**It’s two words run together – a Glamorous Amazon.**

A glamorous Amazonian! Well, it’s true that people used to think I was a man.

**When?**

When the Tragic Kingdom album came out, because the way my muscles looked on the cover. And because I was a swimmer I had big shoulders.

**Does spending so much time in London with your boyfriend [Gavin Rossdale, Bush lead singer] ever make your position in No Doubt difficult?**

Actually, it works really well. We recorded our album in America, and then mixed it in London, but I don’t spend loads of time there. So far it hasn’t affected the band, it’s only made it better, I think.

**And you’ve always got somewhere to stay when you’re in town.**

I do, yeah [*laughs*].

**I imagine you have to be quite understanding going out with someone like Gavin.**

Understanding of what?

**Well, he has a reputation as being the ladies’ man.**

People are always going to say what they want about Gavin. It’s just shocking to me. He has some kind of way of making that happen and it’s funny because nobody really knows him, but I certainly do. This is a weird interview.

**What makes you say that?**

We haven’t talked about the record at all! I know you have an agenda of what you want to get out of me and I have an agenda of what I want. I’m so excited about the record but everybody wants to talk about me and my boyfriend. I understand. OK, so when we make out... [*laughs*] Go ahead, dude, I’m here for you.

**Apparently, you’re the dream date for AJ out of the Backstreet Boys. Is that flattering?**

Wow. To be honest, when anyone pays attention to you as a fan it’s flattering, so sure, that’s great.

**You wouldn’t mind his rehab problems?**

Oh, is he the one that had rehab? Poor thing. I feel bad for him. What do you mean, I wouldn’t mind the whole rehab thing? Like I was going to go on a date with him or something? I already have a boyfriend.

**I know.**

I don’t get your English humour sometimes [*laughs*]. You think I would, huh?

**Let’s talk about the record then, Rocksteady. As well as the usual ska, there’s some fooling around with beats on your new album. Was that inspired by your collaboration with Eve [the recent single, Let Me Blow Ya Mind]?**

That was just a coincidence. The Eve thing happened because I wanted to work with Dr Dre.

**How was Dre?**

He was hard. He had something in his head he was hearing, how he wanted me to sound, and I wasn’t hearing the same thing. But he didn’t know how to explain what he wanted to me so I had to keep doing it over and over for, like, two-and-a-half hours, the same four lines. It was exhausting.

**How do you feel about the Proud To Be A Bitch school of women’s hip hop?**

I’m obviously not a hip hop girl and I don’t live in that world. We’re from two different places, you know? To me, hip hop has gone from real-life gangsters talking about the place they came from, to now when they just talk about making money and it’s got boring.

**OK, away from the music, what’s the worst question I could ask you?**

That’s a good way to get me to answer that question, whatever it is. Personal questions can be irritating after you’ve spent a year making a record. Or how come you dyed your hair pink? There’s always things I’d rather talk about, like the making of the music. That’s the stuff that really gets me off.

**That’s not the stuff people are interested in though...**

No, I guess... I guess... I don’t know why. People want to know, like, when was the last time you fought with your boyfriend? I understand, because when Kate Winslet broke up with her husband it was really bad and I was really interested [*laughs*]. We’re humans – we can’t help it.