

IN THE
STUDIO

NO DOUBT

WHERE: THE PASS STUDIOS, HOLLYWOOD; A&M STUDIOS, HOLLYWOOD;
THE MIX SUITE, SANTA MONICA

PRODUCER: MARK "SPIKE" STENT

SONG TITLES: UNDERCOVER, SETTLE DOWN, EASY, DREAMING
THE SAME DREAM, HEAVEN, ONE MORE SUMMER

DUE: LATE 2011

On a gorgeous, sun-drenched Santa Monica afternoon, No Doubt can be found hunkered down in the dark expanses of The Mix Suite studio, where they've been working on their as-yet-untitled, very much unfinished new album since the beginning of the year. "We're sure our management have arranged this interview to shock us into hurrying up," says frontwoman Gwen Stefani. As the LA four-piece beaver away on their first full-length record since 2001's *Rock Steady*, they're rapidly tiring of fielding one question: What took you so long? "It seems almost offensive to hear because so much stuff has happened in that 10-year period," says the singer, visibly narked. "We've toured twice, released a Greatest Hits, I've had two solo records, two clothing lines, two babies... There's been a lot coming out of me - literally!"

NO DOUBT ALBUM DNA



- '80S ONE-HIT WONDERS
- DANCEHALL
- DEPECHE MODE AND THE CURE
- UNNAMED MYSTERY GUEST
- "PROMMUSIC"
- INCESSANTLY CATCHY CHORUSES
- "HEART ON THE SLEEVE" LYRICAL CONTENT

Stefani may have a point, but for the three blokes in the band, there does seem to have been some time spent twiddling thumbs. Bassist Tony Kanal worked on much of Stefani's solo output and, alongside playing for bands including The Vandals and Maroon 5, drummer Adrian Young's golf game is much improved. "Really, it doesn't feel like we've been away that long," says guitarist Tom Dumont. "I enjoyed surfing and hanging out. I got married and had kids, produced a few things. I actually am a pretty lazy person."

Fifteen years ago, the Number 1 hit *Don't Speak* propelled No Doubt to mainstream stardom. Its video featured a scene in which a photographer ushers out each member of the band except Stefani. In the 2000s, that's essentially what happened. As the bottle-blond bombshell carved out a solo career, Stefani's brand outshone that of No Doubt. A short break



No Doubt at work in Santa Monica (main pic from left, Gwen Stefani, Tom Dumont, Adrian Young and Tony Kanal) and (above) the band share ideas: 'Tony, you do know Doubt has a 'U' in it?'

from the cycle of recording, promotion and touring soon turned into a long hiatus. Did it cause tension? An awkward silence from the male contingent is broken by Stefani herself: "There was a time when I was touring and it probably was frustrating for them because it went on way longer than we ever talked about," she says. "But we always planned to do another No Doubt record, we never talked about splitting up."

Whether impatiently or not, the three men in the band began songwriting without Stefani in 2007. Putting her solo career to bed the following year, Stefani rejoined to find her band had grown rusty. "I couldn't get any perspective on what we were doing," says the singer, who was pregnant

just praying that something comes out," says Stefani with notable self-deprecation.

A focused songwriting process was a necessity of the band's unforgiving schedule. With young families to take care of, work would begin at 5pm and end around midnight, meaning there was no time for messing around. "By 5pm, I've already had a full day of being a mom, working on my two clothing lines and working out," says Stefani. "That's the horror of any creative person - to have to be creative between certain times."

The band then took to the Santa Monica studio owned by Mark "Spike" Stent, their longtime producer, in January 2011. Here, they play two new tracks: One More Summer, a beat-driven

"PRINCE SAID TO ME, DO YOU EVER TRY TO WRITE A HIT SONG INSTEAD OF TRYING TO BE ALL ARTY ABOUT IT?" GWEN STEFANI

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at the time. "Maybe it was the hormones."

In frustration, they hit the road on a 57-date US tour in 2009. When they returned, they wrote a track named Undercover that finally let the genie out of the bottle. "Once we had that song under our belts we knew it was going to work," says Kanal.

Writing throughout the rest of 2009 and 2010, the chief aim was to pen a pile of ultra-catchy tunes. "Prince once said to me, Do you ever just try to write a hit song?" name-drops Stefani. "You know, instead of trying to be all arty about it?"

Beyond that there's no grand plan, no overarching theme, not even a concern for where No Doubt's blend of dancehall reggae, '80s pop and '70s new wave fits into a musical landscape that's been levelled and rebuilt since they last popped their heads above the parapet. "We wish we were good enough to craft it and have a vision, but our songwriting process is sort of desperate - we're

electropop track with a soaring chorus, and Settle Down, a raucous dancehall number that neatly updates No Doubt's Rock Steady reggae sound. Other tracks include potential single Easy and Dreaming The Same Dream, which Stefani describes as a "prom song". Though mixing is expected to commence in July, there's no set release date beyond "this year". Even at this stage, Stefani's celebrity lifestyle interrupts the process - the band recently took a break while she filmed a L'Oréal advert in Cannes. But for this unhurried foursome, it's all about the process. "We don't even need to be making this record," says Stefani. "We just wanted to make it because of the process of writing songs, recording them and touring them around the world - it just feels right."

And then? Can we expect another 10-year gap? Stefani fires daggers across the room: "Don't even think about asking us what comes next..."

ALSO WORKING



THE KOOKS

WHERE: THE SOUND FACTORY, LOS ANGELES; SARM STUDIOS, LONDON

TITLE: JUNK OF THE HEART

PRODUCER: TONY HOFFER

SONG TITLES: ROSIE, ESKIMO KISS

DUE: SEPTEMBER 2011

While not quite a Kid A-style reinvention, The Kooks' third album sees the band taking a more experimental approach. "We wanted to make something more modern than what we'd done in the past," explains singer Luke Pritchard. "I started writing a lot without a guitar - just putting it down and getting a beat together. We were experimenting with things we'd never done before." Recorded mainly in LA, *Junk Of The Heart* was influenced by some unlikely artists. "I was listening to LCD Soundsystem, Soulwax and Lykke Li," says Pritchard, "which inspired the lyrics and production. We're very happy with the direction we're going musically."