



SOMETHING NEW

[“When the moon is in the seventh house” — Fifth Dimension]



From Left:
Gwen Stefani, Tom Dumont,
Adrian Young, Tony Kanal

Starstruck

No Doubt's Gwen Stefani survives the return of Saturn.

“Why do the good girls always want the bad boys?” Gwen Stefani whispers at one point on No Doubt's new album, *Return of Saturn*.

Gee Gwen, why do they?

“Well, why do good boys like nasty, slutty girls?” the singer counters. “I guess girls are attracted to bad boys that they think they can improve. Like they're gonna make this person love them so much that he's gonna become good. It's never gonna happen, of course. People don't have that power over each other.”

Such blunt observations on the female condition have helped establish Stefani as a kind of Alanis for the fashion-conscious — someone who serves up girl power and confessional lyrics without the granola self-righteousness. Stefani's also got a band that rocks like a rowboat in a hurricane. All these factors combined to make No Doubt's 1995 release, *Tragic Kingdom*, one of the biggest albums of the late Nineties. *Return of Saturn* finds No Doubt ranging even farther from their roots in the Orange County, CA, ska scene. There's still the occasional skanking horn chart and muted guitar figure, but this time out the group also takes on everything from trip-hop groove science to torchy balladry. And where many of the songs on *Tragic Kingdom* were about the breakup of Stefani's seven-year relationship with No Doubt bassist Tony Kanal, *Return of Saturn* chronicles a different kind of emotional crisis.

“The last few years have been the hardest in my life,” she says. “No Doubt was on the road for two and a half years. And when we finally stopped touring, I started having fits of depression. I went through this passage of growing up from age 28 through 30. And that was the time when I wrote all the songs for the album. People kept telling me, ‘You're just going through the return of Saturn.’ And I was going, ‘What is this return of Saturn thing?’”

It's astrology, actually. The planet Saturn returns to the same position in people's

charts that it held at the time of their birth just about when they turn 30. It's a time of reckoning, when the cosmic forces ask, “What have you done with your life?”

“I'm not really into that astrology scene,” says Stefani. “But it was good to have some way of making sense of what I was going through.”

The album's first single, “Ex-Girlfriend,” is a hard-driving track sung from the perspective of a jilted, jealous girl. Since Stefani is such an autobiographical songwriter, one can't help but wonder if any of *Saturn's* troubled love songs are about her turbulent four-year relationship with Bush lead singer Gavin Rossdale.

“Of course they are,” she replies. “They're all about my life. They're real. And he's my boyfriend. We have a bit of a high school relationship, where we sometimes break up with each other and get back together, just for the thrill of it.”

In making *Return of Saturn*, No Doubt also weathered an identity crisis of a musical nature. “We felt like we'd outgrown everything we did before,” says Stefani. “I think the hardest part was finding what style we were going to be. There was a real conscious effort to make the music reflect the mood of the lyrics. But it took a long time — two years!”

Stefani still found time during that period to be guest vocalist on forthcoming new songs by Fishbone, The Artist Formerly Known as Prince — “he doesn't walk, he glides” — and Brian Setzer: “That's the guy in the Stray Cats!” Gwen enthuses. “You don't think I wore a poodle skirt in the seventh grade because of him?”

At long last, *Return to Saturn* was completed, with a little help from Glen Ballard, who, ironically, is also Alanis Morissette's producer. “I just feel lighter now,” says Stefani. “I feel like I really accomplished something.”

A happy ending. . . at least until Saturn's next visit. “They say it happens every 29 years or so,” Stefani cautions, “and that if you don't deal with it the first time, it's going to be even more difficult the second.” ✨

— Alan di Perna