

No Doubt

"We followed Our Dreams..."



Photograph : Sohail Akbar

"It's no doubt they're the best," gushed a fan at the No Doubt concert in Bangalore, and this was the general response that the Californian band evoked when they performed live at St. Joseph's Centenary grounds in Bangalore on the 13th of October, 1997. With Gwen Stefani's rich, versatile vocals, Tony Kanal's bass, Tom Dumont's 'engine guitar' and

Adrian Young's booming drums, the atmosphere was absolutely electric!

"Everyone's welcome to our kind of music," says Gwen Stefani, and with its versatile combination of rock, funk, punk and Jamaican ska, the music of No Doubt does have universal appeal. Yet it took the band over a decade to achieve the kind of success it has seen with the release of their

album *Tragic Kingdom*, and its highly popular #1 hit single, 'Don't Speak'. Their previous releases – *No Doubt* in '92 and *The Beacon Street Collection* in '93 – failed to create ripples in the music world. Perhaps it is because success has come to them after a long, hard struggle that the No Doubt quartet comes across as a sincere, down-to-earth group, which can express itself

articulately.

RSJ spoke to the group at the Windsor Manor Hotel in Bangalore during their visit to India. Excerpts :

RSJ : It's been a long road to success for your band. What kept you going through all those hard years of struggle?

Gwen : (*Immediately*) I'll get this! I think, in the early days what inspired us was the music that we loved. Most of that came from England ... what kept us going was that we were having a really good time. We just kind of got addicted to it. The audiences who would come to our shows and see us, they'd be a source of real energy to us. This is crazy for us!

RSJ : How has success changed your lives?

Gwen : You can see it right here!

Tony : We just spent the last twenty-six months of our lives travelling around the world, so I think the biggest change is that we're not home anymore, we're always travelling. The last twenty-six months have been so amazing because now we're in India and we went to Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Indonesia. So that's been the biggest change, the fact that we've been able to travel around the world.

Gwen : Another thing is that we want to continue being in the band. Earlier, we would all be looking at our watches thinking, 'Oh, we gotta all get real jobs and carry on with our lives.' This December's gonna be eleven years of being in the band. At a point in time we wanted to be successful and we started to get a little nervous.

RSJ : So, during those years of struggle, what kind of jobs did you have?

Adrian : I was a waiter!

Tony : A very good waiter too! I worked in a department store selling men's clothing for a long time, actually the same department store as Gwen. She worked in cosmetics right across the room, so we'd look at each other and wave and talk about dinner. Tom had an amazing job in a mortgage company for a while.

Tom : Yeah, I'd sell everything from cell 'phones and yogurt to drugs and linen!

RSJ : Tell us something about the major influences in your music. We have heard that Prince, Jimi Hendrix influenced you?

Tony : Well, for me Prince was a huge influence. I grew up listening to him and that was how I wanted to be. And we were fortunate enough to meet him. A few months ago, we actually flew to Minneapolis to watch his show. We went to his studio and he invited us to play with him ... we spent maybe an hour, which was a dream come true!

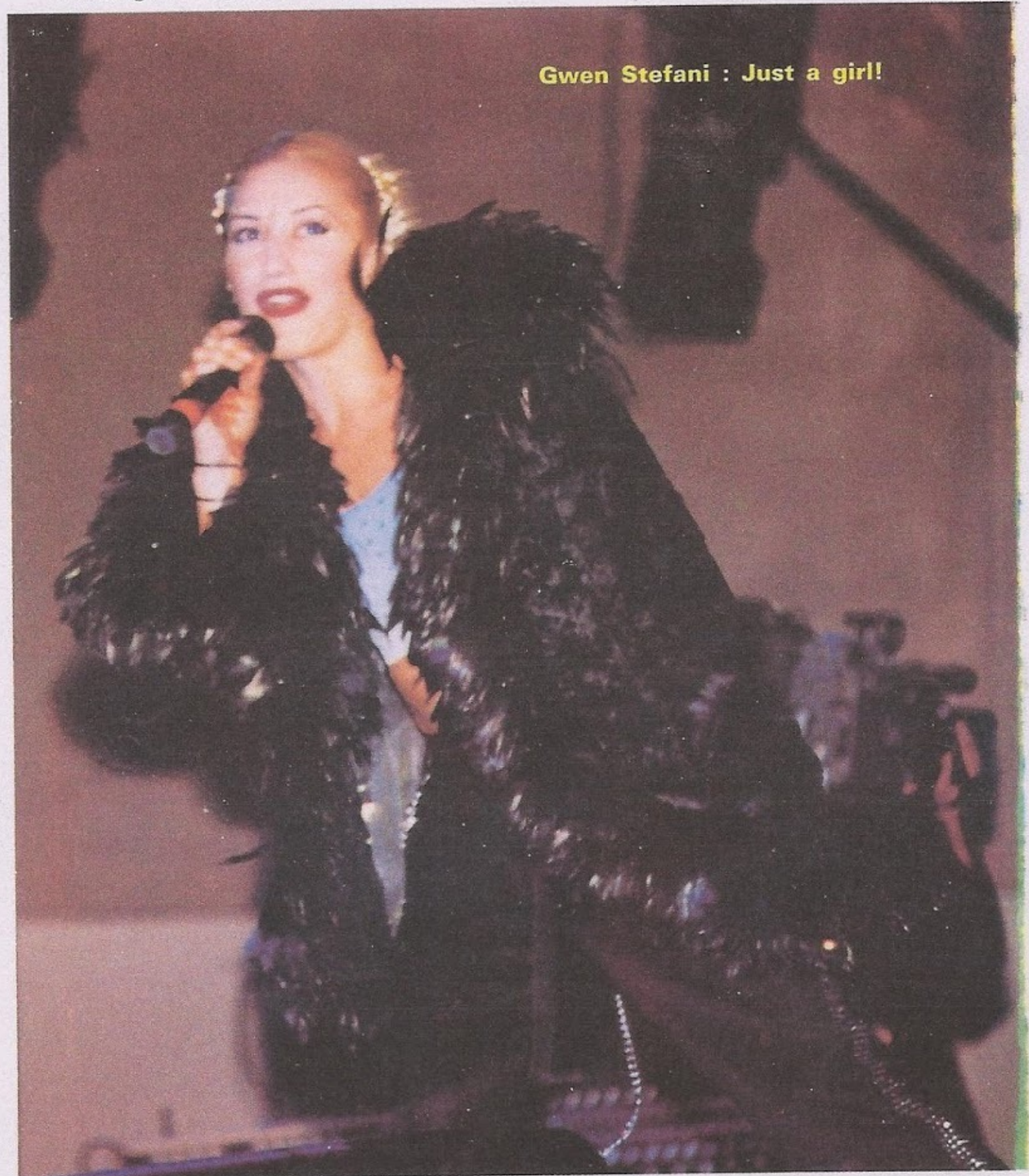
Adrian : I would say that the ska bands were the hugest influence. Also, the Police.

Tom : I grew up listening to a lot of hard rock stuff, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Kiss ...

Inevitably, then, Gwen was asked what the secret was behind her *bindi*? She explained that it originated from her relationship with Tony Kanal, who is Indian by birth, though settled in the USA now. "Tony and I are really good friends, we used to go out together, dating each other

for almost eight years," she said. "So, since I was seventeen, I kind of grew up in his family and I was invited to all the *pujas* and Indian parties. And, you know, being in California we don't get to wear real sparkling outfits. For me it was a good opportunity to be a part of that while growing up. The *bindi* wasn't such a signature thing until we made a video and I wore it ... it kind of exposed a little bit of culture to the American people. For me, it was just fashion."

Tragic Kingdom was pulled right out of my life! ... but now I make up imaginary stories." - Gwen



Gwen Stefani : Just a girl!

Photograph : Sohail Akbar

Having admitted to going around and then splitting, Gwen and Tony were asked how they managed to stay together in the band despite splitting personally? Tony replied: "The band is so important to us that the personal changes, whatever they be, we want to keep the band going. I think there's a good chemistry between all four of us."

"We are each other's friends," Gwen added. "It's not like we're just a band ... we pretty much love each other a lot. We're like married to each other."

RSJ : Your album, *Tragic Kingdom*, was it inspired by some personal experience?

Gwen : Yeah, it was pulled right out of my life! If you listen to the lyrics, they're about broken relationships ... but now I make up imaginary stories.

RSJ : Does your record company control your image at times? Do you have to consciously work at projecting yourselves in a particular way?

Gwen : Everything that we do, this is really us. Our record company has nothing to do with it ... we had to fight to stay like this and be true to ourselves. You know, we make the kind of music we want to do ... we just held out. Eventually times changed and our music was played on the radio. But earlier No Doubt was illegal – it just wasn't mainstream at all.

Tony : We've always been a very hands-on band, involved in every aspect of what we do, you know, making sure that small things like T-shirts are sold for the right price ... just getting involved in every single aspect of being in the band because there's a lot of business stuff that goes on as well.

RSJ : How do you see yourself as a band? You've been called alternative, rock, funk – but how would you describe yourselves?

Gwen : All we say is we're No Doubt because we've always struggled with a label. In the early days we were a ska band. To be honest, that was almost a bad label to have! But nowadays the whole ska thing is really big in North America.

Tom : We have the basic format of a rock band with those things you mentioned – ska, rock, funk. We like to have a lot of variety in our music.

RSJ : In the rock scene, you hear of drug abuse a lot. How did you manage to stay clean?

Adrian : We've all had really good upbringings!

RSJ : What do you all do to relax when you have such a busy schedule? Do you have other hobbies?

people don't talk about our relationship!
Tom : I am twenty-nine years old and have a girlfriend. I talk to her every day. Actually, that's my favourite pastime on tour as well.

Finally, as a message to their fans in India, Gwen said: "We've never been a political band ... we're just a rock band and we write songs. We followed our dreams and stuck with it but we also had a backup plan, we always went to school. I think it's important to be realistic. Also, put everything into what you believe in. Don't be lazy about it."

Tony said: "I think if any kids have the opportunity to express themselves through art – you know, music painting, anything – don't miss that opportunity. Even if you're doing something else in life, it's great to have that balance."

The dogged determination and hard work put in by No Doubt was evident in their high-powered performance at the show in the evening. Gwen Stefani's alluring and seductive yet child-like charisma in particular, sent the crowd wild as it danced, clapped and jumped along with her. 'Sunday Morning' and 'Don't Speak' were expectedly the most popular, with the Bangalore crowd singing along with Gwen.

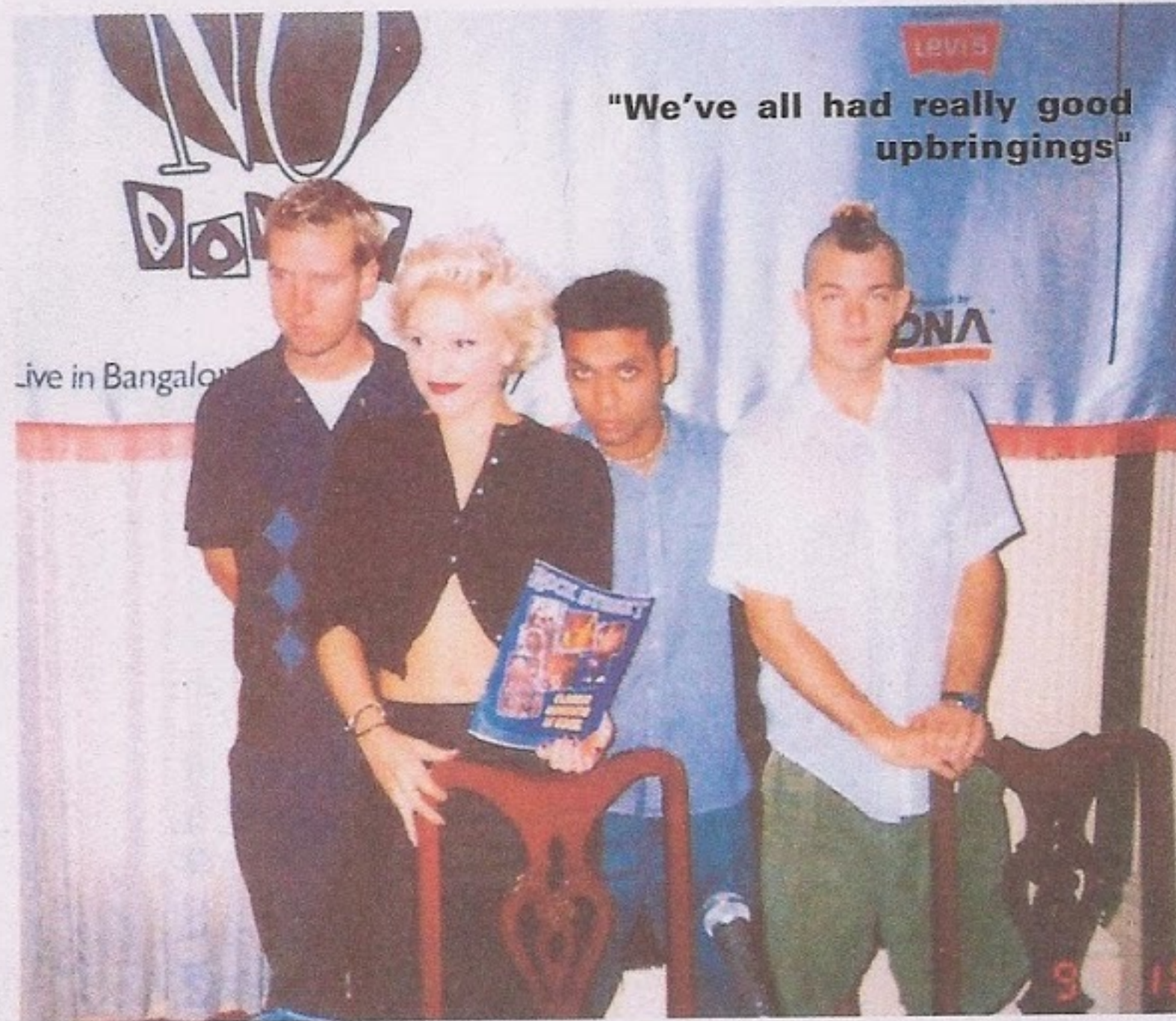
There was much laughter when Gwen got the guys in the audience to sing "I'm just a girl" with her. "Gotcha!" she cried after the song.

"We went through some really hard times in the past couple of years," she had said earlier, "and our way of dealing with that is humour."

Such easy humour was evident all through the show. 'Different People' and 'Excuse Me Mr.' also went down well with the crowd, as did 'Spider Webs', which had been saved for the encore. While explaining why they are called 'No Doubt', Gwen had said at a press conference in the afternoon, "I think it's always been a real positive thing and we are really positive people. It's about having fun."

And this positive energy is exactly what is so completely in evidence at a No Doubt show.

Sharon Shefali Sen



"We had to fight to stay like this and be true to ourselves ... we make the kind of music we want to do ... we just held out."

Gwen : I like to go sari shopping when I'm in India!

Adrian : I like to play a lot of sports. ("He's a good golfer," Tony added).

Tom : I'm on the road so much, I just like to sleep. ("Tom spends hours at the computer," said Tony. "Yeah," added Gwen. "He's our Internet guy.").

RSJ : We know a bit about your lives, Gwen and Tony, but what about Adrian and Tom? Do you have girlfriends?

Adrian : (*Teasingly*) The funny thing is,