

GWEN STEFANI WASN'T kidding when she called her new solo album *This Is What the Truth Feels Like*. It manages to combine upbeat pop with bracingly honest lyrics about her split from ex-husband Gavin Rossdale, the father of her three children. "Even before I knew that my life would be forever changed and all my dreams would be crushed," she says, "I was quite desperate to make new music." She ended up with a flood of inspiration that she compares to No Doubt's 1995 breakthrough, *Tragic Kingdom*, written in a similar breakup haze: "I didn't even know I could write music," she recalls. "And then my heart was ripped out, and, like, served back to me on a platter. And this album, I feel like it just fell out of the sky. It was a miracle."

What will it be like to revisit the heartbreak in these songs when you sing them on your solo tour this summer?

I'm not in a different place yet. I'm still heartbroken. You can't have your family break up and still not be going through it a year later. I was just cleaning out a room in my house before I called you. It's devastating.

You had another solo album almost done before this one, which never came out. What happened to that?

That was a fake record. I had it, but it never felt right. I had this opportunity to be on *The Voice*, so it was like, "You're on TV, let's put a song out." But I gave birth, and I was on TV, like, five weeks later. I was still nursing. There was no way!

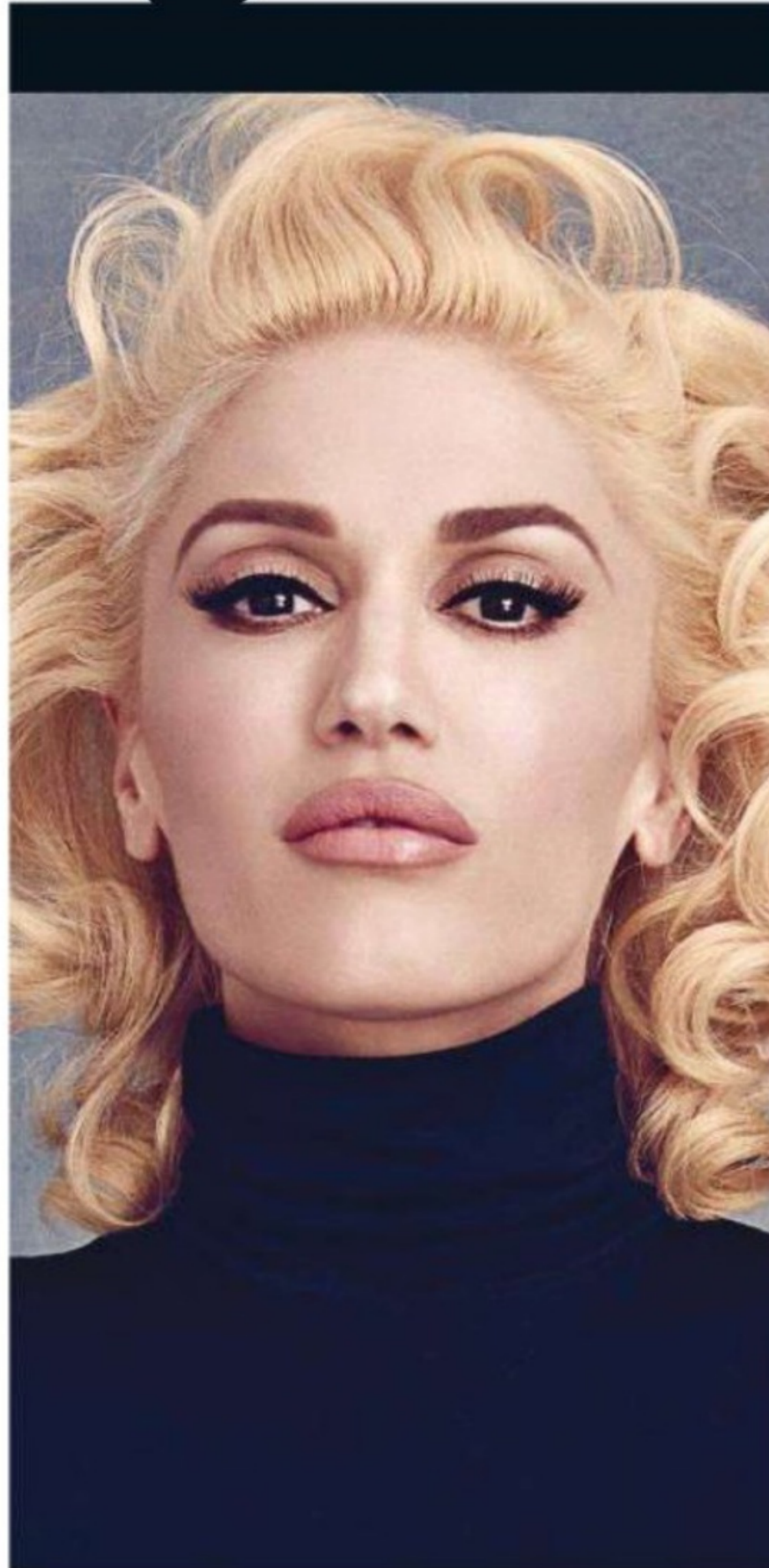
You worked so hard on the last No Doubt record, and it didn't connect. Is that band over?

I don't know what's going to happen with No Doubt. When Tony [Kanal] and I are connected creatively, it's magic. But I think we've grown apart as far as what kind of music we want to make. I was really drained and burned out when we recorded that album [2012's *Push and Shove*]. And I had a lot of guilt: "I have to do it." That's not the right setting to make music. There's some really great writing on that record. But the production felt really conflicted. It was sad how we all waited that long to put something out and it didn't get heard.

Do you have any issue with the other members of No Doubt working with Davey Havok from AFI?

Of course I don't care. Those are my homeys from when I was a little girl! I want them to be happy and do whatever they need to do to fulfill whatever creative place they need to fill.

Q&A



Gwen Stefani

The pop-rock icon on No Doubt's future, the heartache behind her new solo album, working with Prince, and being a little bit country

BY BRIAN HIATT

You've recorded a duet with [new boyfriend] Blake Shelton. What do you make of the country world?

Being on *The Voice* helped open my mind to all kinds of music. My parents loved folk and bluegrass – my first concert was Emmylou Harris. And at the end of the day, a song is a song. You can take a country song and make it into a dance track. It's all about how it's produced.

You collaborated with Prince a couple of times. What was that like?

He was such a genius that you can't believe he existed. I was onstage with No Doubt in Minneapolis in the Nineties, and I saw his silhouette in the audience. I was like, "How is this happening?" Later, I sent him the demo to this song "Waiting Room" – he called and said, "Hey, I had to rewrite the song, but I think you're going to like it." He played on the version you hear on [No Doubt's] *Rock Steady*, and I sang on his album. He sat at the board and sang me every single note. I was in there for, like, eight hours.

"Hollaback Girl" has become such a signature song for you. How did you and Pharrell Williams write that one?

Back then, I felt scared to be around Pharrell. He's supercute, and he's so talented. It hurts you! But I knew that in that song, I needed to get back at somebody for talking shit on me. And I wanted it to sound like a cheer. I explained it to him, and he said, "I have this beat." He also said, "Gwen, you're too good, you don't need to holla." When we finished the song, we were literally doing the Tom Cruise on the couch. And the label was scared to put it out – they waited until the third single! Isn't that crazy?

Is it tough having to live up to songs like that?

When you have a long career, you do get insecure. How do I do something new that doesn't sound like something I did before? How do I compete with how great "Hollaback Girl" was – and aren't we going to sound like the girls that *tried* to sound like that? But this album was supertriumphant for me.

The Nineties were such a dude-heavy time in music. Is it fun to see women dominating pop?

It's such a weird time in music. Everyone is listening to whatever their playlist is. Whereas before, we were kind of told what we were all going to be into. There's some really great stuff out there, and some really horrible stuff. I feel sorry for some people that these are the songs they have to grow up listening to. But doesn't every generation end up feeling that? **G**