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Gwen Stefani

She's Not "Just A Girl" Anymore

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Gwen Stefani

**She was just 17 when she joined No Doubt. And 17 years later, she decided it was time to go solo. Coincidence? We think not! By Terry O'Connell
Photographs by Michael Wirth
Styling by Andrea Lieberman**

Gwen Stefani, 35, knows that people are going to be “weirded out”—her words!—that she’s done a solo album. But she can’t let that stop her. This is what she needs to do to grow—personally and as an artist. “Life moves by so quickly, and you start to realize that you want to try some other things,” she explains. “I think this whole album [*Love. Angel. Music. Baby.*] was inspired by the ticktock in my head, like I gotta do this *now*.”

But No Doubt fans have nothing to fear; This album doesn’t mean Gwen’s leaving the band behind. “We definitely have plans to get back together” she says of No Doubt, which she has fronted for 17 years. “But the one great thing about being in a band for this many years and having the success that we’ve had is that we don’t really need to plan for the future.”

That freedom has allowed Gwen to continuously push herself into unknown territory for years. In 2002, she married Bush frontman Gavin Rossdale. The next year she launched a clothing and accessories line (L.A.M.B.). And now she’s making her acting debut opposite Leonardo DiCaprio in *The Aviator* (in 



CLOTHES CALL:
"I've made clothes my entire life. My mom made all *my* clothes, her mom made all *her* clothes—it's in our blood."



“
I feel
powerful,
which I've
never
personally
felt
before.
”

theaters December 17). But of all these projects, her solo album is probably Gwen's riskiest—she's putting herself out there all alone, and it'll inevitably be compared to the amazing work she's always done with her band. Making this album "was not fun and easy," Gwen admits. "It turned into this really hard, ego-busting experience." So when we spoke, I asked the Orange County, California, native what making music on her own was actually like and where she thinks she will go from here.

17: What was it like for you to go into the studio for the first time without No Doubt?

Gwen Stefani: When I went into the studio originally, I was totally burnt out. I'd just gotten married, and I'd just gotten off tour. But I felt like there was this little time clock ticking. I really wanted to do it, but I really wanted to sleep—and I was really torn about actually getting in the room with new people—I'd never done that. It was always the band for 17 years, and when I write songs, I feel like it's a very intimate thing, you know, because you really have to drop it all off and kind of open yourself up. You never know if it's gonna come out or not. So I went into the studio with Linda Perry [a songwriter/producer], who wasn't even somebody I'd wanted to work with. She came up to me at the Grammys and put me in kind of a headlock and looked at me with the eye of the tiger and was like, "We're gonna write some songs together." And I was like, "Uh, you're not Prince, are you?" [Laughs.] You know, I was really looking for a certain sound. But I ended up going into the studio with her, and we'd written a bunch of songs. I had a really successful time with Linda—she was so talented and amazing and spectacular, and she ignited my inspiration because I really didn't have any. When I wrote "What You Waiting For?" it was like the gates had opened and I was like, Oh, my God, I *can* do this! I'd never even worked with a woman! But then I went to work with this other producer, Dallas Austin, who was working across the street. Both of these people have worked on the same records before together—not in the same room, but they've worked with the same artists, and they have this connection—but they both were kind of, like, *negative* about each other, and I felt like all of a sudden I walked into this kind of high school-like pop world. I was like, What am I *doing* here? This is so *weird*. And I kept telling each of them, individually, that they needed to know each other because they're both very cool, and it's so weird that you have this kind of success and connection, but you don't know each other, and you're talking s*** about each other! [Laughs.] So it ended up that I was in [the studio] with Dallas, and Linda called up—she works across the street—and said, "I have this tape for you." And I was like, "Why don't you come over here?" And she was like, "Really?" So she ends up

coming over and crashing our session and these two can't stop talking! They get to know each other, and it's really amazing, right? And suddenly Linda's kind of like daring Dallas to make a song. So we jammed—all three of us—and we wrote this song called "Danger Zone." It just seemed like such a bizarre thing because what is the likelihood of that happening where you have these two separate producers and then you're all together in one room and you write something? I think it's an incredible song.

17: How did you first realize that you had a talent for writing music?

GS: I've learned over the years. Like when I wrote "Tragic Kingdom," I was very naive, you know? I didn't even know I *could* write songs. And when I had something to write about, when me and my boyfriend broke up, suddenly I, like . . . I found my gift, my talent. I mean, I was suddenly a human. Before that all I was was in *love*. I didn't even know what I wanted to *be* when I grew up. I was all about, like, getting married and having babies. That was just my passion. When I learned how to write songs, *that* became my passion. It opened up my whole life. But I never intended for the world to hear any of those songs—or even to still be talking about them at age 35. It's just so bizarre. Because I write songs from my heart, especially on that record—we wrote that record for three years, and we never thought it would come out. And when you write about your life and you share it with the world, it's amazing how comforting it can be because there are so many people out there going through the same thing you might be going through.

17: How do you think your fans will feel about you going out on your own?

GS: I know some of the fans are gonna be bummed, like scared that I'm gonna ruin everything doing this record. My whole point in writing the song "Hollaback Girl" is that I've been around the track, and that no matter what people say, I feel powerful, which I've never personally felt before. With my band, I always felt like we were huge: We'd been together for nine years when "Just a Girl" came out, but we always sold out whatever club we were playing even before that. We were always lucky in that way, just having a history. And that history, that strength is something that nobody can take back. So I've been around the track. You can't take away my history, and I'm not gonna make any excuses. I'm not gonna holla back. I'm like, This is who I am—and it's pretty powerful. **17**

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