

“I will  
definitely be  
your guilty  
pleasure.”



# dancing

# queen

With Madonna lost in Kabbalah-land, **Gwen Stefani**, who is releasing her dance-pop solo debut, *Love Angel Music Baby*, looks set to take over as Top Blonde. Here, the No Doubt frontwoman and fashion icon talks marriage, movies, motherhood, and the future of her band.

**She** used to be just a girl. Now she's just "Gwen." Thanks to megahits with Eve and Moby, a hot clothing line (L.A.M.B.), a fantasy wedding to longtime boyfriend Gavin Rossdale, and her film debut (as '30s movie star Jean Harlow, opposite Leo DiCaprio, in Martin Scorsese's Howard Hughes biopic *The Aviator*), the No Doubt singer has transformed into a one-name pop icon and multimedia brand—the kind you read about in supermarket tabloids, fashion bibles, and rock magazines

alike. With every door in the music industry open to her as she plotted her solo debut, *Love Angel Music Baby*, Stefani went shopping for producers (Dr. Dre, Andre 3000, and Linda Perry among them) and emerged with a truly eclectic homage to the '80s pop disco of her adolescence. With potential motherhood and a film career ahead, this may be the last time the 35-year-old will be able to stay in the groove for very long, and she's determined to dance—for inspiration. ▶▶

By Marc Spitz Photograph by Lorenzo Agius



In the company of Gwen (clockwise from far left): with No Doubt's Adrian Young, Tom Dumont, and Tony Kanal in 2002; sharing a quiet moment with Gavin Rossdale in London; playing Jean Harlow opposite Leo DiCaprio's Howard Hughes in *The Aviator*

**How are you, Gwen?** I'm fucking great. I'm really, really, really great. I finished my album yesterday. Like, *literally* finished it. Like, it's a wrap, you know? It's so exciting. I feel like I've been running this marathon and I'm still breathing really hard, but I know I won.

**Why did you decide to release a solo album? No Doubt are as big, if not bigger, than they were back in 1996.** People don't do the same thing their whole life, do they? I mean, I've been doing this since I was 17. You get to a certain point in your life when you're like, "Oh my gosh, I wanna do something else, 'cause I'm gonna die." Your life starts to go really quick.

**Did you always want to make a dance record?** Yeah. I first got the idea while on tour in 2002. I'd heard that old Debbie Deb song [1983's club classic "When I Hear Music"] on the radio: [*sings*] "When I hear music / It makes me dance." And then Lisa Lisa & Cult Jam. Those songs were the backdrop of my life. They were what [No Doubt bassist] Tony [Kanal] was super into when we met; he was 16 and I was 17. [Drummer] Adrian [Young] was, like, 'punk-rock bad boy, and [guitarist] Tom [Dumont] was heavy-metal guy, so they didn't really like that music. But I said to Tony, "I want to do a record like this. A dance record."

**Recently, a pattern has emerged of artists making emotional, singer/songwriter statements in their 20s. Then, in their 30s, they're like, "Let's dance!"** Right. For me, this was coming from my heart. I don't know if people are gonna like my record, but it's exactly what I wanted to make. It has such a theme to it—a concept that was never intended, but just kind of happened.

**Can you explain the concept?** I can't, really. But it definitely has more substance to it than I wanted. I wanted it to be like Madonna's "Into the Groove." I didn't think it was gonna be so hard. I thought I'd work with a couple of talented people, and it would be a side project. But it snowballed and took over my life. It was this whole year of hell.

**You collaborated with loads of people on the album. Was it hard not to have your bandmates around to weigh in on what worked and what didn't?** Yeah, the comfort zone was completely taken away. It was more like the torture zone. [*Laughs*] But I knew it was gonna be like that, because when we worked with the Neptunes on *Rock Steady*, the actual experience was not that fun. But we wrote "Hella Good," which became such a signature song for us.

**So if you let someone in on the process, it complicates things, but the results are worth it?** Yeah. It was a really big deal for No Doubt. It was always, "We write the songs. That's the point of the band." But after all those years, it's fun to go in with super-talented people and do something fresh. All you have to lose is time, and if you write a shitty song, who cares? Going into this record, I had a very specific sound I wanted to make, so I made a wish list of people I thought could get me there.

**Anyone you wanted but couldn't get?** I didn't get Robert Smith, who said he wanted to, but he was making his own record. Same with Prince, because he was on tour. Missy Elliott and I didn't hook up either. We did at the very beginning, and she was like, "Gwen, you gotta write some songs first and then I'll know what you wanna do!" I was like, "Okay," and then it just never happened. [*Pause*] And one of the people who was not on the list—she's gonna kill me, but...Linda Perry.

**How did you end up with her?** When I got off tour, the record company said, "Linda Perry wants to work with you!" They were all excited. I was skeptical because I didn't think I was gonna get my dance record out of Linda Perry. [*Laughs*] But I didn't want to miss an opportunity, either. So I went to her studio and we wrote this song together the first day. It was a sweet little song that was not my dance hit. The next day I came back, kind of dreading it, and she had been up all night [*finishing the song*]. I was like, "You did not just do this!" It was really inspiring. But by the last day of our session, I was really

# gwen stefani

dried out. I had no ideas, and every time I'd leave the room, she'd be writing shit and I'd be like, "You gotta slow down. You're writing *my* record!" I was getting pissed off. She's writing these lyrics, and that's when it really crossed the line. It was my insecurities, but I couldn't take it. I was like, "Call the manager! I need to go home! I need to write on my own." I told Linda, "It's nothing against you." And she was like, "You are fuckin' crazy."

**Isn't it a risk working with strong, creative artists like that because they can't help but influence you? The song you did with Andre 3000, "Bubble Pop Electric," is unmistakably OutKast-like.** Well, I always felt like if I were a boy, I'd definitely be Andre. He really did bring a lot to the table, and I was trying to keep above water with how talented that guy is. But by the end, it felt like a collaboration. The good part about working with all these people is that I'm not fully responsible. And I can brag about them and be like, "It's fuckin' good. I don't care if you hate me and think it's gonna be shit. I will definitely be your guilty pleasure."

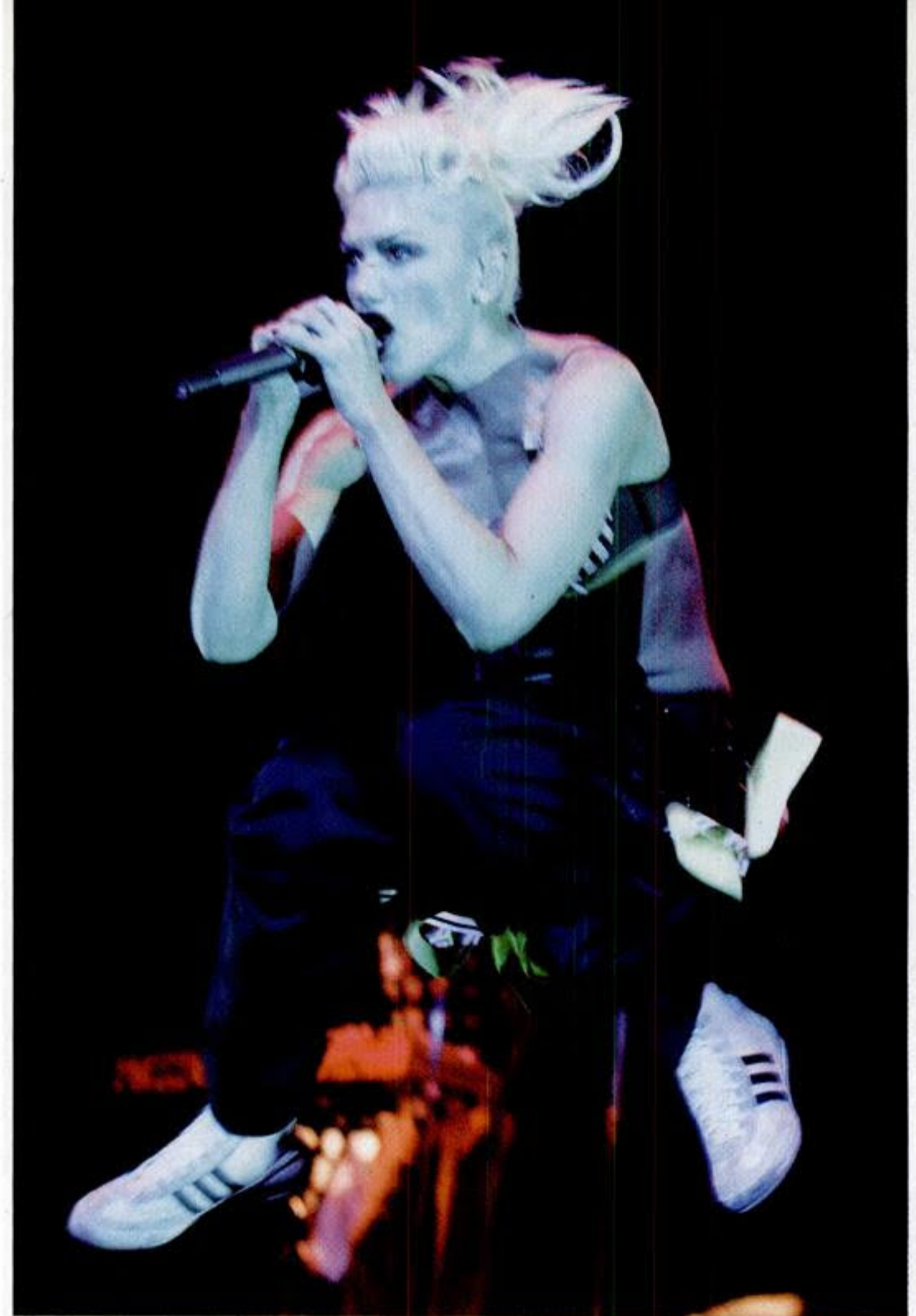
**Tony plays on the record, too. How did it feel to work with him on material outside of the band?** It was really cool. After the Linda thing, Tony called me and I was like, "Dude, I suck." And he was like, "Dude, come over." So I went to his house and a bunch of our friends were there playing these tracks that Tony was doing that were, like, *stupid*. I was like, "You did *not* do these." And he's like, "Yep, you wanna hear your tracks?" And I was like, "Nuh uh, you did not." So he pulls out this one and I'm like, "Oh my God, that's my song." In the next couple of days, we wrote "Crash." I basically went from "I hate myself" to "I just wrote a song!" And the songs were exactly what we wanted to do in the first place: Lisa Lisa meets Salt-N-Pepa meets Bell Biv DeVoe!

**Will you return to the band if you sell 50 million records?** [Laughs] That would be fantastic, and I hope I do. I think the guys probably hope I do too. You know, when I called Tony and Adrian and Tom to say I was doing this record, we'd already decided we were gonna take time off. You gotta understand that these are our lives and, like, lives are short. We put everything into each other for years. Now Adrian has a baby and I got married and Tom got engaged. Our priorities have changed. We've had our cake for a long time now. We're fulfilled like we never thought we'd be.

**You've reached a whole new level of fame in your own right. You're not just the girl in the band anymore.** But everything that I've done has been a really natural progression. Like, high fashion was always something that I'd been passionate about, but was shy to talk about because I thought it was cheesy. The music comes first, but fashion was my guilty pleasure.

**You've always had a lot of style, but it's definitely gotten more elaborate.** That's 'cause I got richer.

**But what about the 16-year-old girl who works at the ice cream parlor who can't afford to look like you anymore? Do you worry about losing that fan base?** Well, no, because I'm not gonna go backward. I wore Doc Martens for 12 years and my feet are ruined from those shoes! [Laughs] I can wear high heels now. I'm a woman. So, no, I don't wanna go backward, but I don't really wanna go forward, either. I mean, I'm really vain and don't wanna get old. But at the same time, I don't want to be that stupid person who tries to hang on. It's hard. It definitely sucks getting older, but you always feel like the best version of yourself because you're more experienced and confident. I hope maybe my children will save me from my vanity.



Stefani takes flight on stage in June 2004

**Are you and Gavin planning a family?** We've talked about it, and I've wanted to have a baby since I was a baby. [Laughs] It's weird, though. I go in and out of wanting to and then being scared. My life is so spectacular, I don't want it to change. I don't want to miss any opportunities. But I think after doing this album, I kind of got it out of my system. So it's gonna happen when it's supposed to happen. I mean, my life is nothing like I thought it was gonna be. It's so much better! Woo!

**And your film career is finally beginning. What was it like to make your first movie with Martin Scorsese?** I only have a couple lines, but, like, there's really no small part in a Scorsese movie. To be able to play someone like Jean Harlow is just...come on, dude. I don't care if I'm just walking around looking like her—it's still a pretty big deal. Scorsese is so warm and welcoming and smart and passionate, and Leo was so helpful. He's incredible. It was a really good experience. I got my feet wet [in movies] and I want to go swimming. I'd *love* to do the breaststroke for a while on that one, but I don't know. It's also very tedious.

**How so?** It's nothing that's ever gonna compare to being onstage and playing for 20,000 people. You don't get that immediate response to a performance. It's more like, "Okay, now do it again 14 more times." And it's very competitive. I've tried out for loads of movies that I didn't get, like *Fight Club* and *Girl, Interrupted*, but I never thought any of the parts were really my part. You get caught up in it because it's like a race. And it's really humiliating because people know who you are. Like, even trying out for the Scorsese movie, I had to go to the Hotel Bel-Air and there were all these other girls there. It's a casting call! Which, for me, was weird because I'm, like—

**An icon.** Yeah! [Laughs] I'm an icon! ■