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# REINVENTING NO DOUBT

(SKA? WHAT SKA?)

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In bed with Gwen Stefani! Bliss! Rapture! Total listener-contest dream come true! That is, if you've haven't already spent two years in a tour bus with Gwen Stefani. Or a thousand hours at soundchecks with Gwen Stefani. Or 18 months in recording studios with Gwen Stefani. Or untold nights in cramped, urine-smelling, graffiti-mottled backstage dressing rooms with Gwen Stefani.

"Feel free to remove your shoes, dude," Stefani chides one bedmate. "'Cause I do, like, sleep here."

Arrayed upon their singer's huge, *Sleeping Beauty-meets-Kama Sutra* four-poster, the males of No Doubt nonetheless seem quite content with their current arrangement, staged for a visiting video crew. Surrounded by scented candles, their backs against the mirrored headboard, drummer Adrian Young (in spotted cheetah coif), bassist Tony Kanal (newly bleached blond), and guitarist Tom Dumont (proudly untinted) lounge like the three stinky brothers of a pink-haired fairy princess, here in her Hollywood castle.

The cameraman asks which member will greet the viewers at home.

"Tom, you should do it," says Kanal.

"What should I say?" asks Dumont.

"Just take your cock out and throw it down."

Dumont, who is wearing a brown argyle sweater, looks unlikely to perform this feat. ("The rest of the group, they have this entertainment ethic," he says later, in the drawl of a philosophizing patrolman on *Cops*. "I love music, and I love playing guitar, but showmanship isn't my strength.")

Kanal is undeterred: "Cock'n'roll, yo!"

The bandmates are here to tape an intro for the premiere of their new single and video, "Ex-Girlfriend," and their homey little bedroom tableau is the first pre-album publicity they've had to do in five years. That is, since the days when Stefani was blonde, Anaheim was home, and "ska" was considered a hot growth stock.

Much has changed since then. Homes have been bought, SUVs have been registered, and the group has labored for two years on a follow-up to their 15 million-selling '95 smash, *Tragic Kingdom*. The result, titled *Return of Saturn*, is a rambunctious and assured burst of new wave revivalism by people who clearly grew up within broadcast range of '80s-era KROQ—and who are quite aware they aren't kids anymore.

Fittingly, the video recasts the band as a fresh but familiar-looking rock entity: kind of like the '96 Smashing Pumpkins, with a pinch of Garbage, a bit of Puffy, and a lot of fluorescent clothing. Like most No Doubt videos, the Hype Williams-directed, *anime*-inspired vignette also contains a wry autobiographical wink. It stars Stefani as a pink-cornrowed, kung-fu-fighting

**TIRED OF SKA, BORED WITH BINDIS, AND SUFFERING FROM NASTY WRITER'S BLOCK, NO DOUBT LOOKED BACK TO THE '80S FOR INSPIRATION, CONJURING A NEW-WAVE FEST THAT WOULD DO MISSING PERSONS PROUD.**

**NOW IF ONLY A CERTAIN SOMEONE WOULD PROPOSE...**

# MISSION TO 1982

BY CHRIS NORRIS | PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHAEL LEWIS

Ex-offenders: No Doubt singer Gwen Stefani (far right) with former boyfriend Tony Kanal (left), Tom Dumont, and Adrian Young.









DUMONT: T-SHIRT BY DOLCE & GABBANA, FINGER-PRINT T-SHIRT BY MOSCHINO JEANS UOMO; KANAL: VINTAGE LEATHER JACKET FROM DECADES, INC., PANT BY COSTUME NATIONAL HOMME; STEFANI: ONE-SLEEVE DRESS BY VIVIENNE WESTWOOD GOLD LABEL, NECKLACE BY DELPHINE CHARLOTTE PARMENTIER, BRACELET BY JADE JAGGER

● Beauty and the beat: Stefani likens the band's 13-year relationship to being in their "own little land."

"I JUST COULDN'T WRITE WORDS—I HAD NOTHING TO SAY," GWEN STEFANI SAYS. "IT WAS ONE OF THE DARKEST PHASES OF MY LIFE."



assassin whose assigned hit turns out to be her ex-boyfriend. "I play the ex-boyfriend," says Kanal. "Surprise."

Kanal has already endured the worst revenge a jilted girlfriend can exact: being made to perform her he-done-me-wrong songs before thousands. But Kanal has long aged out of the role of mute romantic villain—both in and outside No Doubt's circle. Despite the fact that he caused their heroine enough heartache to power a platinum-selling weeper like "Don't Speak," today's younger No Doubt fans, who dish in chat rooms like soap addicts, hardly consider Kanal the devil.

"Gavin is the devil," jokes Nina Young, Adrian's new wife and No Doubt's former production coordinator. She is, of course, referencing Bush singer and Stefani boyfriend Gavin Rossdale. "The kids online, they want Gwen and Tony back together. To them, Gavin's like the Yoko Ono of No Doubt." (To which Rossdale replies, "Jesus Christ!")

Concerned fans would probably be gratified to see the vibe here today. Under the gaze of numerous Gavin snapshots, here cuddles a group it would take one hell of a "Yoko" to shake. "Tony! I wanna be with Tony!" cries Stefani's little niece Madeline, who clambers onto the bed.

"C'mere, little lamb," Stefani calls from the middle, beckoning not her four-year-old roommate but her older, smaller one: Maggen, a shaggy, 16-year-old Lhasa apso with a ribboned topknot. The cast assembled, the ersatz but inseparable family called No Doubt is ready to greet the world. The cameraman asks them to move closer together.

"Come on, nerds," Stefani coos brightly, pulling them tighter. "Come on! Come on, nerds!"

NO DOUBT'S MEMBERS ARE ALL AROUND 30; THEY'VE BEEN together since high school—two facts that make them a special brand of modern-rock act. While most bands today resemble hockey teams or rapping Navy SEALs, this quartet recalls a not-so-distant era when men and women toiled together in the making of rock'n'roll songs—a time of bouncy, Anglophilic high jinks known as new wave. "We love music from the '80s," Kanal says. "Even the cheesiness of it. That was what we grew up with." And like well-adjusted children of Simon LeBon, No Doubt wear the '80s exceptionally well.

Produced by studio svengali Glen Ballard (Alanis, Aerosmith), *Saturn* has many of the sugar-high thrills we expect from the folks who brought us "Spiderwebs" and "Just a Girl." But they're colored by an audible wistfulness, the kind you might evoke by sticking an Adam Ant pin on your Fubu sweatshirt. "The songs' DNA contained a profound knowledge of '80s pop," Ballard says. "And I think there was an unconscious decision to key in on the sounds and textures that evoked what Gwen was writing about, in terms of a reflective look back."

Named for the astrologically designated moment of adulthood (a 30-year mark at which the planet Saturn realigns with its position at your birth), *Return of Saturn* is about pondering the past, taking stock, and freaking out. "Assessing my life / Second-guessing," sings Stefani in "Artificial Sweetener." Two songs later she's getting Oingo-existential ("Six Feet Under"). And in both songs, the fretting about romance and destiny comes with so many Split Enz guitars, Cure bass lines, and Missing Persons keyboards that few survivors of the John Hughes administration will brave it with a dry eye.

But the members of No Doubt are actually quite far from the futuristic androgynes of the classic new wave era. For proof of this, look no further than the album's real surprise, "Simple Kind of Life." In this beautifully crafted ballad, Stefani weighs dreams of motherhood against career. "All I needed was a simple man," goes one verse, "so I could be a wife." Five tracks later she's pining for nuptials in "Marry Me," pouting "I can't help that I like to be kissed / And I wouldn't mind if my name changed to Mrs." ("Kind of a sledgehammer of a hint," quips Rossdale.)

Girl Power? *Jewel* wouldn't sing lines like these. But this is exactly the kind of unfashionable, unpunk sentiment No Doubt shouted out in the middle of grunge season, giving voice to legions of kids who knew that,

deep down, they weren't nearly as "alternative" as they dressed. "You can't argue with Gwen's passion for honesty and openness," enthuses Rossdale. "It takes a lot to be that vulnerable and lay yourself open like that." And this is something even the most jaded No Doubt detractor would have to admit: Makeup or not, these guys aren't faking a thing.

ORANGE COUNTY, CIRCA 1985: A SUNNY REAGAN STRONGHOLD with a variety of disgruntled musical youth. Of these, the ska fan was probably the least imposing. Neither as icy as the goths nor as tough as the hardcores, ska kids were generally fun-loving and integrationist hipsters with good organizational skills and bad dance moves. While No Doubt has long outgrown this scene, its members are still imprinted with some of these traits.

Take Tony Kanal. A dreamy-eyed 29-year-old of Indian descent, he's No Doubt's second-prettiest member. ("You are a beautiful man," reads a letter from a gay grad student, closing with a hopeful "P.S.: I have lots of muscles.") Onstage, he's a sweaty, head-bobbing dynamo. Offstage, he's pretty far from a wild-livin' rock dude. In his bedroom closet: ten pairs of carefully stacked, different-hued Dickies ("that's what I always go for first"), a pile of neatly folded Beefy-T's ("pick any out, you can't go wrong"), some warm-up pants for sportier occasions, and several flavors of Puma. In his office bookshelf: *The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success* by Deepak Chopra and *Power to Burn: Michael Ovitz and the New Business of Show Business*.

Kanal has been the band's business manager and archivist for over a decade. "This is where I spend most of my time," he says, leading the way into the first-floor office of his still partially furnished Hollywood Hills home. By the desk is a framed poster from the movie *Scarface*. "I usually watch that or *The Godfather: Part II* before most business meetings," he says, then laughs. "It really does work."

Pointing to another wall, he shows me a framed ticket stub from his first concert: Prince, "Purple Rain" tour, February 23, 1985. "Wear something purple," it reads. "And I did," Kanal confirms. Below it is another stub: the Untouchables, March 14, 1987, Kanal's first ska show. Deprived of wardrobe suggestions, he showed up dressed a bit study-hall, fretted at the punkish crowd, and hit a thrift store to re-gear-up.

Within months of joining No Doubt in 1987, Kanal was managing the band and dating leader/songwriter Eric Stefani's sister, who took over as singer when John Spence committed suicide. Then Dumont joined up, defecting from a heavy-metal band led by his sister. ("Yeah, I had a mullet," he confesses. "But it was a more forward-thinking mullet.")

Last came Young, who soon established a rep as the band's hardest partier and most frequently naked member. Such was the high-energy live act signed to Interscope for a self-titled, profoundly ignored debut in 1992—the year No Doubt's story got truly interesting.

Just as the band was beginning work on their second album, two things happened. Eric decided to quit the band, and Tony decided to quit Gwen. These are precisely the events supposed to end bands' histories, not begin them. But what follows is a classically '90s tale of female empowerment: Girl grows up happy in the shadow of guys. Guys fail her. Girl finds hidden strengths. Girl rescues guys, goes platinum.

"Suddenly, all the lyric-writing responsibility was kinda dropped into my lap," Stefani says. "And I had all this stuff on my mind. Broken-heart stuff." Which led to *Tragic Kingdom*'s "Just a Girl," "Don't Speak," and "Happy Now?"—hits that blew these four friends into the stratosphere. And that is how Gwen Stefani, her bandmates, and her bindi helped pull America out of the grunge age.

Which was a breeze, they say, compared to making their latest album.

"IF YOU HIT THE HOLE IN FOUR YOU GET A PAR," SAYS ADRIAN YOUNG, holding forth on a Long Beach, California, golf course. "If you hit it in three it's a birdy. Two, it's an eagle. Five is a bogey." According to this scale, I am currently hitting about a booty. Taking aim, I slice a ball deep into a bucolic wooded region. "It's so strange that you don't know anything about golf,"





Look back in leg warmers: *Return of Saturn* is all about reassessing the past and, occasionally, freaking out.

"I TAKE GOLF WAY MORE SERIOUSLY THAN I TAKE ANYTHING IN LIFE," ADRIAN YOUNG SAYS. "IT MAKES ME MORE MAD THAN ANYTHING—ANY GIRL, ANY BAND FIGHT."

says Young. "Where did you grow up?"

In many ways, Young is the living embodiment of No Doubt's '50s-flavored So-Cal dream, his lifestyle more like an ring-a-ding anesthesiologist's than a rock drummer's. He plays golf, drives a black Mercedes, and lives

with his wife in a huge house with orange trees and a well-stocked wooden bar. Only his cheetah 'do and slightly maniacal eagerness conveys that Young is, as Stefani puts it, No Doubt's "cool-meter," he who kicks most ass.

We jump into the golf cart and tear off, two Big Gulp-sized cocktails jostling in convenient beverage holders. "I take this game way more seriously than I take anything in life," Young says, cornering so sharply my margarita nearly upends. "It's an obsessive thing. It makes me more mad than anything—any girl, any band fight. It's just full of anguish." He stops, grabs a club, and hits an impressive drive onto the green. "Go in...go in...motherfucker!"

The making of *Return of Saturn* held lots of its own brand of anguish for No Doubt. The process began in early '97, two months after the *Tragic Kingdom* tour ended. It continued, three producers and four false starts later, through January 2000. DMX would have put out five albums in that time.

"Here's the thing about our band," says Kanal. "We have really strong opinions individually. And you get 13 years into a band, and you learn not to step on other people's sensitive areas." While conducive to band harmony, this diplomacy makes efficient songwriting next to impossible. After months of wheel-spinning, they decided to sack their longtime producer Matthew Wilder—too much a buddy now to effectively whipcrack. They met with Rick Rubin (Chili Peppers). They worked with ex-Talking Head Jerry Harrison, recording the *Go* soundtrack hit "New." They recruited Michael Beinhorn (Marilyn Manson, Hole), who bowed out over scheduling conflicts. And all the while, their singer and lyricist was slowly, gracefully sinking into despair.

"I just couldn't write words—I had nothing to say," Stefani says. "It was one of the darkest phases of my life. And there was so much pressure, because everybody was waiting on me."

Finally they met producer Ballard—a calming, Zen-like presence and, significantly, someone who'd already ushered another '90s rock woman into mega-platinum sales. Ballard reviewed songs, picked winners, and suggested arrangements. He also helped Stefani determine what she really wanted to say. "Gwen kept repeating, 'The person who wrote "Just a Girl" isn't me anymore.'" he says. "She had to figure out where she was emotionally *then*, not six years earlier. And that's always a hard thing to do."

Indeed, it must be hard to hear "Just a Girl" at 30 without noticing the lyrics' extra layer of irony—especially when you're out of the spotlight, back in your parents' house, and feeling, as Stefani says, "like an old, fat tennis shoe." "I think I lost bits of myself when I was on tour," she says. "I spent the last couple of years trying to find what was the real me, the real Gwen." She got into Sylvia Plath. She studied the songwriting of Joni Mitchell. She went through rocky times with Rosedale. ("Ex-Girlfriend" is about him, not Kanal.) Finally, she rediscovered the person who could make all this sadness and confusion tuneful.

But Stefani didn't exactly emerge from the experience full of heady sound-bites on, say, the writer's craft or journeys of self-discovery. This is how she describes the genesis of "Simple Kind of Life": "I had just gotten my period so I was, like, real emotional? And then I just started playing these chords, and I was like, 'Hey, I just wrote a song.' And I went to play it for the guys and I was on the verge of tears, 'cause it was so emotional. And Glen just looked at me and was like, 'That's an amazing song.' And I was like, 'Oh, you think so?'"

Phrases like this got our sweet, open, slightly spacey California girl dissed six years ago, chided as a Valley Girl among the moody rock chicks. But set against neo-navel-barers like Christina Aguilera and Jessica Simpson, Stefani's particular brand of frankness seems complicated, even mysterious. In person, she can come off girly, glamorous, or surprisingly tough—





Droppin' mad hints: On "Marry Me," Stefani sings, "I wouldn't mind if my name changed to Mrs."

calling her friends "Poop" one minute and "Dude" the next. She's shared rock stages with punks like the Vandals and *Vogue* spreads with movie stars like Heather Graham. In a way, today's emphatically "strong women" like Lauryn Hill and Courtney Love make this bipolarity seem even more unusual.

"With us, it didn't *matter* that I was a girl," Stefani recalls of No Doubt's early club years. "That was the whole point. I could still get up there amongst all the other punk-rock fuckin' bands in Orange County and make the crowd go off just as hard."

STANDING IN THE DOORWAY OF HER HOLLYWOOD HILLS HOUSE, Gwen Stefani takes time out for some acting—a little sense-memory exercise. Having just posed for the cover of *Young's* golf-mag-with-attitude, *Schwing!*, she's wearing a gray zip-up hoodie, oversized khaki slacks, and a classically Gwen-ish found-fashion accessory: a white hairnet. "Okay," she says, "you stand right there."

She's about to re-create her immediate reaction to her current home. "I'll show what I did when I first walked in." She goes outside and shuts the door.

While Stefani has taken some tentative forays into Hollywood, auditioning for roles in *Fight Club* and *Girl, Interrupted*, she is an inexperienced actor. Still, she brings great verve to the enterprise. She opens the door, walks in, stops, and gazes at the interior. "Oh my *GAAAAAAAHAHD!*"

The crazy, hysterical scream of delight echoes against the stone walls. "It was just like that," she says. "Well, almost that loud."

Stefani's dramatic Spanish-style chateau has a wrought-copper gate and Rapunzel-ready balconies. In the entryway stands a three-foot, blue-robed Virgin Mary, directly across the rotunda from a multi-armed Hindu goddess—a fitting icon combo for the nice Catholic girl who brought Indian forehead fashion to the mall. "I thought it would be good, 'cause it's all girls living here, to have Mary right there to kinda greet us," she says. "A little reminder to be good girls."

The girls in question are Stefani, her sister Jill (a quiet 27-year-old Berkeley grad in art history), and Jill's daughter Madeline. Her niece was born when Stefani was on tour and, like many little girls across the country, got to know her primarily from videos. Clearly a Gwen favorite, Madeline receives another shriek of delight as she comes running into the entryway. "Sissy!" the four-year-old calls, using the standard appellation for all household members. She is holding a pink, bear-shaped lollipop. "Look! I painted my sucker the same color as your hair!"

Stefani leads us through the living room, passing a curious array of pharmaceutical apparatus: a distillation tube, beaker, and Erlenmeyer flask. "That's a birthday present I got for Gavin," Stefani explains. "Because his record's called *The Science of Things?* And he has a song called 'The Chemicals Between Us'? So I thought that would be a cute present."

Off in the kitchen, the phone rings. It's for Gwen—whose reaction makes it pretty clear who it must be.

"AAAGGGHH!"

She clomps over on her high heels, head thrown back dramatically. "Hi!" she exclaims, grabbing the phone. "What're you doing?"

Silence.

"Oh, that's so cute!"

It is, of course, "Gav," calling from Vienna. Rosedale has become an extended family member in No-Doubtland. He is, Stefani says, both a better cook and a better dresser than she is. ("He doesn't let me wear bright yellow pants anymore.") He often introduces her to new authors. He helps Tom Dumont's schoolteacher girlfriend grade papers. ("Imagine if her students knew who was grading them!" Stefani says.) He even helps field phone calls from the Artist Formerly Known as Prince, mouthing "Do it! Do it!" as the reclusive pop genius called Stefani for a collaboration.

The Artist had first terrified No Doubt by attending one of their Minneapolis concerts, after which he invited these lifelong Prince obsessives back to his paisley pad to jam. "First of all, I do not *jam*," Stefani says. "And I mean, he's not like somebody you meet and walk away going, 'Oh, he's a normal person just like you and me—da-da-da.' You walk away going, 'That is the Artist Formerly Known as Prince!'"

Later, he modified and recorded the No Doubt-penned song "Waiting Room," as yet unreleased. "It was so weird," says Stefani. "Because it was Prince singing lyrics I had written about Gavin with music I had written with Tony."

The mind does indeed boggle.

But No Doubt may be the only rock group in history that could make a surreal, vaguely incestuous entanglement between a British neo-grunge singer, a pink-haired rock diva, her ex-boyfriend bassist, and a five-foot, purple-hued, ambisexual pop genius seem normal—even...wholesome.

"EXCUSE ME," SAYS THE FABULOUS MAN WITH THE ROBIN LEACH accent. "We're having an argument. 'Do you...sing?'"

Our two unbidden guests are hovering over No Doubt's table at Pastis, the newest Manhattan hotspot, the kind of super-chic place where Air is the Muzak, the busboys are flossin', and everyone seems quite desperate to be perceived as Somebody. With her sparkly makeup and tightly woven pink braids, Gwen Stefani is clearly Somebody. Our friends just aren't sure exactly who. "I sing," Stefani says meekly. "I sing in the shower."

"You're in a baaaahnd, aren't you?" insists the visitor. "What's the name of your baaaahnd?"

These questions evince a particularly poignant cluelessness, since Stefani's band is, in fact, surrounding her. In a room filled with Prada, the boys' attire includes a black jersey, an Abercrombie-looking buttondown, and a Black Flag T-shirt. To the star-spotting fabulouise, they are invisible. To Stefani, though, they are, quite literally, an entire world.

After the inquiring minds wander back to the bar, the rest of No Doubt explodes with laughter. "Is that you, daaaahling," says Kanal, almost head-butting Stefani.

"Are you the one...the one with the baaaahnd?" Young asks. The four friends from Orange County recommence the fart noises and cartoon voices.

"From the beginning, no matter who we played with, or who we hung out with, our band was always just its own little group," Stefani says. "Like, its own little *land* or something. If I started something new today and looked for three other guys, and said, 'Hey, we're gonna do this for the next 13 years....'" Stefani trails off. "I can't imagine it." A blur of Gucci and pashmina whirling behind her, she still seems a bit incredulous. "But somehow, you know, it happened." ■

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