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PHOTOGRAPHY SHAWN MORTENSEN

WORKING GIRL

She works hard for the money, and she ain't no hollaback girl, but now that the world has embraced Gwen Stefani as the platinum bomb, will she ever find a simple kind of life?

text **CLAUDE GRUNITZKY** photography **SHAWN MORTENSEN**
fashion **ANDREA LIEBERMAN**





GWEN: bananas sweatshirt, Harajuku Lovers; jeans, "Disquared"; shoes, Christian Louboutin
LOVE (LEFT): sweatshirt, Harajuku Lovers; shorts, D&B; socks, Adidas; shoes, L.A.M.B.
BABY (RIGHT): all clothes, Harajuku Lovers; sneakers, L.A.M.B.

“I WANTED TO MAKE AN ’80s-INSPIRED DANCE ALBUM AND I COULD SEE HOW DR DRE WAS JUST ROLLING HIS EYES.”

THE POPULAR TELEVISION SERIES *THE OC*

and *Laguna Beach* have made Southern California's Orange County accent and attitude like, totally rad. They portray the laidback lifestyle of perfectly aligned palm trees, lazy afternoons, and never-ending spring breaks. Meanwhile, the most famous OC girl of them all, Gwen Stefani, is quietly building her empire as the hardest working girl in show business. Last year, we saw her playing Jean Harlow in Martin Scorsese's *The Aviator*, and this year she is high off the phenomenal success of her first solo album—having already achieved worldwide domination as front-woman of No Doubt—and the summer anthems “Hollaback Girl” and “Cool.” She is also busy spearheading not one, but two clothing lines: L.A.M.B. (which shares a name with her *Love, Angel, Music, Baby* album) and the newly launched Harajuku Lovers.

Her much anticipated runway show for L.A.M.B. took place at The Roseland Ballroom during New York fashion week last September and on October 16th she will embark on a major North American tour, also named “Harajuku Lovers,” starting with a sold-out performance at the America West Arena in Phoenix. In the midst of all this activity on the music, fashion and film fronts, she also finds time to promote other products and services, including the HP Photosmart R607 Harajuku Lovers digital camera and the “Hollaback Girl” ringtone, which is available exclusively through Cingular Wireless.

On this particular August afternoon at Quixote Studios in West Hollywood, Gwen Stefani is sitting in a dressing room chair, facing a large mirror while hair stylist Danilo starts crafting a new look for the TRACE cover. Gwen is chatting away, all platinum blondness and sassy sophistication, as stylist Andrea Lieberman and makeup artist Kathy Jeung try to figure out the implications of this new Afro-braided-platinum-punk look. All three are close collaborators of Gwen's, but now that they have experimented with a folded blue scarf holding in the top of her hair, in a subtle nod to the *I Love Lucy* housewife hysteria from the '50s, the Afro madness just seems more directional. Although Gwen wasn't feeling it at first, she quickly changes her mind and we all agree to go for the Afro look.

Two of her Harajuku girl dancers are also in attendance. Maya (aka Love), hails from Tokyo, and Mayuko (aka Baby), is a native of Osaka, but both became Harajuku girls after they auditioned in Los Angeles. I ask where Angel and Music

are. No one knows. As she makes her way to the cover set-up where lighting is being tested with Polaroids, Gwen starts rubbing her stomach. “It's coming,” she says, speaking of her period. This time, her hands aren't pressed against her bare midriff, as they often are, because her belly is covered by a green Harajuku Lovers t-shirt, but she still tells anyone who cares to listen that she is menstrual, and that her mood isn't the best it could be.

However, Gwen is open and approachable as ever. We shoot the cover and venture out of the studio to nearby Poinsettia Park for additional pictures. That is where the real Gwen Stefani pop experience is brought to life in a series of casual encounters with Angelenos from all walks of life. Of course we should have suspected that a mid-afternoon outing with a pop star in a public park would cause a bit of a commotion, especially in her home state, and the broad scope of her fan base is a reality that cannot be argued with.

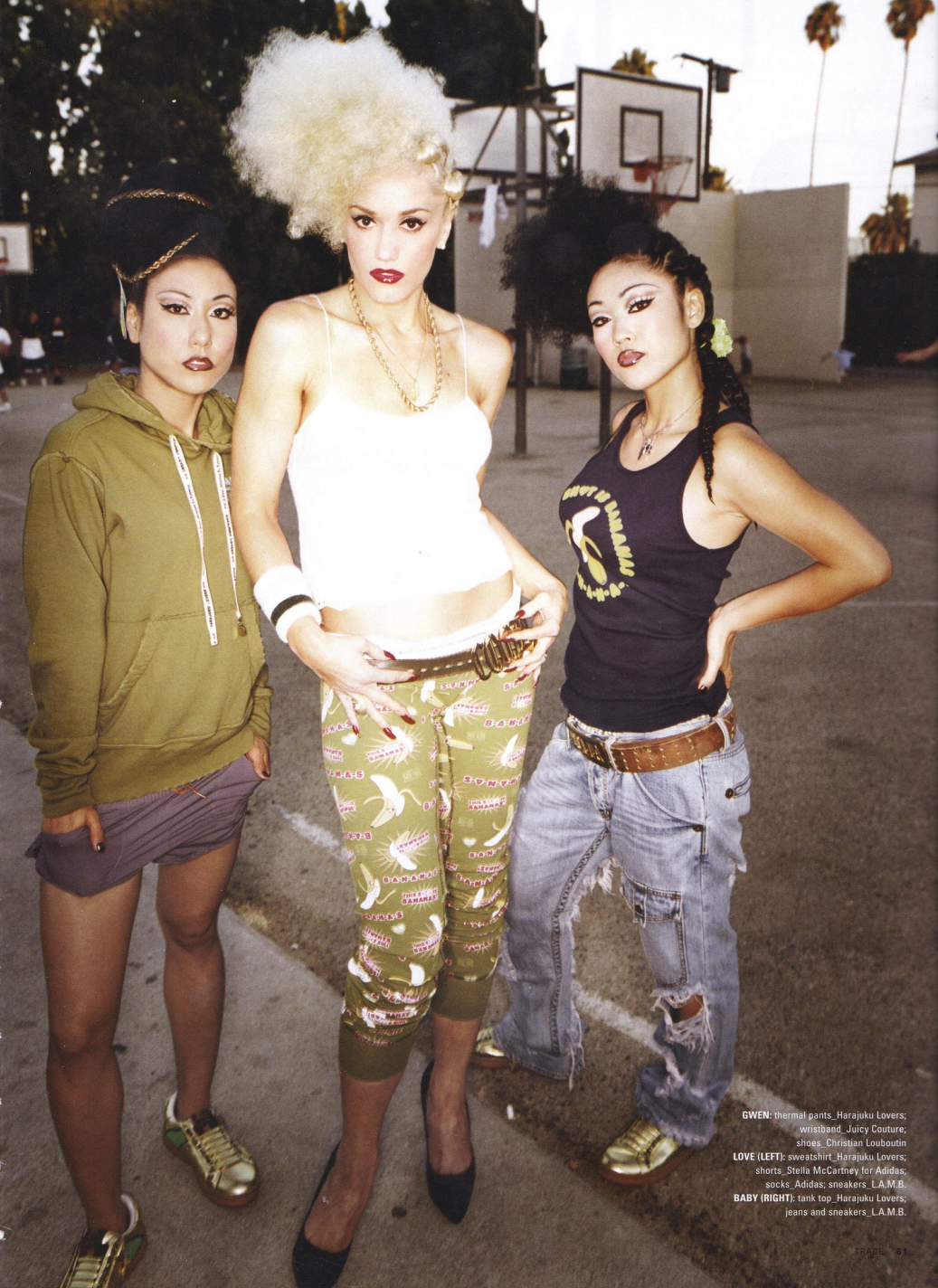
Situation One: A Mexican family in a huge Freightliner delivery truck suddenly stops and idles in the middle of a street, interrupting their work schedule as well as the normal flow of traffic. The wife climbs out of the truck while her eight-year-old daughter stares at the pop star from the front seat, with her father looking on. When the mother returns to the truck with an autograph that reads “To Jackie, Love Gwen,” the daughter starts weeping.

Situation Two: A black man in his early 40s steals a glance at the pop star from the corner of his eye. “Damn!” he says, to no one in particular.

Situation Three: Two LAPD policemen catch wind of our photo shoot, which is talking place without a city permit, but instead of sending us back to the studio across the street, they see Gwen and decide to turn a blind eye to our impromptu production.

Situation Four: A 15-year-old white boy playing basketball in his brand new Air Jordans: “Where's Gwen? That's my wife. Hey shweeetie!”

Situation Five: A tipsy white man in his mid-50s holds his bicycle while he decides to speak to Danilo, who is touching up the pop star's Afro. “Is that Gwen Stefani right there?”



GWEN: thermal pants, Harajuku Lovers; wristband, Juicy Couture; shoes, Christian Louboutin
LOVE (LEFT): sweatshirt, Harajuku Lovers; shorts, Stella McCartney for Adidas; socks, Adidas; sneakers, L.A.M.B.
BABY (RIGHT): tank top, Harajuku Lovers; jeans and sneakers, L.A.M.B.



red cape, vintage;
white tank, Harajuku Lovers;
silver and gold halter top, Norma Kamali;
jeans, Dequared²; belt, her own;
shoes, Christian Louboutin

You can tell her Madonna can't touch her. You can tell her I love her." To which Gwen replies, "You can tell me, I'm standing right here, aren't I?" "Well, sure! Isn't the Hollywood Bowl show coming up in a couple of weeks?" "Yes, in a couple of months." "Well, God bless ya. You've got it, and most people can't find it. I love ya."

ANDY WARHOL FIRST COINED THE TERM

"superstar" to promote his coterie of New York personalities. The word is now used to describe a widely acclaimed celebrity who has great popular appeal and is considered a major attraction. When we finally sat down for the interview after the enlightening Poinsetia Park episodes, I realized that although Gwen has become accustomed to the adulation, especially in a year that can, by any measure, be described as stellar, she is still relatively unfazed by the everyday situations, privileges and annoyances that come with being a superstar.

"2005 has been a mind-blowing year," she admits. "It all happened so quick, and wild and different from everything I've ever done before, but some of the years in No Doubt before we ever got on the radio were great as well. To me, it really doesn't feel all that different from being at Tower Records in Orange County, one year into the band, like 17 years ago, and hearing people whispering about me as the girl from that band. But still, finishing this album and having it be accepted the way it was, that was great. There was a lot of mish-mashing and unlikely pairings, like getting into the studio with Dr Dre and Andre 3000. I wanted to make an '80s-inspired dance album, in the style of Debbie Deb and Lisa Lisa and the Cult Jam and Club Nouveau, but also with Prince and The Time in mind, and I could see how Dr Dre was just rolling his eyes."

Debbie Deb, as some of you older electro-heads may recall, was a two-hit wonder, but one could easily call her a one-hit wonder, because her two songs "Lookout Weekend" ("Lookout weekend 'cause here I come, because weekends were made for fun") and "When I Hear Music" sound almost the same. "Those are the songs that I would listen to when I used to go dancing at Disneyland or places like Videopolis and Studio K," Gwen remembers. "For this album, that Debbie Deb style worked for me, because I wanted a record that was more of a chant than a melody. I wanted to do a record that would be in the clubs. With No Doubt, that would have been impossible, because that style of dance music excludes the drummer."

Those years growing up in Orange County remain the foundation of her musical expression, and many of her biggest hits—starting with the breakthrough No Doubt songs "Just a Girl" and "Don't Speak" from the 1995 album *Tragic Kingdom*—are derived from Gwen's own experiences in mid-to-late '80s Anaheim, home to Disneyland and the Magic Kingdom. In those years, Orange County was the residence of middle class white Californians who chose that particular suburban landscape over the metropolitan sprawl of Los

Angeles, but it was also the chosen destination of many immigrant families, and young families, who were able to find nice and safe homes that they could actually afford.

Orange County was known as Reagan country at the time. The years of the gas crisis and forced busing created an extreme Republican climate. There were planned communities like Costa Mesa, where corporations would build an entire city from scratch, with a city center, a mall, and recreation centers. Bands like No Doubt proliferated and thrived in a scene that was essentially a reaction to Reaganomics. The post-punk scene had become so vibrant and the music coming out was daring in its fusion of mod with ska and reggae and hip hop. The early No Doubt records display that unique fusion, and it was obvious that they were listening to The Clash just as much as they appreciated Grandmaster Flash.

Shawn Mortensen, the longtime TRACE magazine photographer who shot the images in this portfolio, has been a friend of Gwen and the other members of No Doubt since 1994, when the band was just about to switch from their indie label to Interscope Records. "There was an immediate connection," he says, "because we had all hung out in the same area in Orange County and we used to go to the same places, the same clubs. Although I was born in Long Beach, I grew up in Los Angeles and Orange County. When the label asked me to direct a video for them, I knew that it would work. They weren't famous yet, but when I first heard *Tragic Kingdom*, it felt to me like the *Sergeant Pepper's* of Orange County life." Shawn, who has photographed Gwen and No Doubt many times, ended up being best man at Gwen's 2002 wedding to Gavin Rossdale. Hearing him talk about the '80s parties in the OC, one senses a deep nostalgia in his voice and a longing for a mythical era that epitomized the uninhibited, creative spirit and do-it-yourself mentality of rebellious Southern Californians.

With her song dedicated to the over-the-top style of the girls who populate Tokyo's fashionable Harajuku district, Gwen Stefani single-handedly made them recognizable to millions of Americans who would be hard-pressed to locate Japan on a world map. She is building a franchise around the Harajuku iconography so that it can exist beyond her lyrics and videos in her fans' imaginations. Yet, her most popular song from the *Love. Angel. Music. Baby.* album, so far, is not the Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis-produced "Harajuku Girls," but rather the Neptunes-produced "Hollaback Girl." Although Gwen is now known for her penchant for Vivienne Westwood and Christian Dior couture dresses—she wore a special John Galiano creation at her wedding—few of her hardcore fans are actually familiar with the high fashion Japanese brands (Yohji Yamamoto, Comme des Garçons, Hysteric Glamour) that she sings about in the song "Harajuku Girls."

They can, however, relate to the Carson High School cheerleaders she recruited from outer Los Angeles for the perfectly choreographed video that Paul Hunter directed in

“L.A.M.B. IS JUST TOO EXPENSIVE FOR MOST OF THE FANS. HARAJUKU LOVERS IS HOW I EXPRESS ANOTHER KIND OF CREATIVITY, BECAUSE I AM SO INSPIRED BY JAPANESE CULTURE.”

full Technicolor, with emphasis on Gwen's pink bra, red majorette's outfit and bright yellow lowrider. The vivid imagery and The Neptunes' simple one-two beat complemented the girl power words: "Uh huh, that's my shit. All the girls stomp your feet like this. A few times I've been around that track. So it's just not gonna happen like that. 'Cause I ain't no hollaback girl."

"The simplicity of the way Pharrell produces is so different," she says. "It's just one take and four instruments. It's raw, and so different to the way we produce with No Doubt." Looking back, it seems ironic that "Hollaback Girl" actually almost never made it to the album, because it was recorded after the album was completed. "We were done with the album and we really didn't have any space left," she says, "but I felt I didn't have my attitude song. I called Pharrell and told him he'd be mad, because he wasn't on the record. Then, I flew to New York City for seven days. After two days, we had two really good songs, 'Candy Land' and 'You Started It,' but neither would make it onto the album. Then, we did 'Hollaback Girl.'"

After all, the first Neptunes collaboration outside of hip hop was with No Doubt on "Hella Good" from the 2001 *Rock Steady* album. They have both come a long way since then. More than just an attitude song, "Hollaback Girl" somehow represented the mood of the summer of 2005, really striking a chord with young fans around the world. Shortly after 'Hollaback Girl' emerged as one of the most significant songs of the year, Gwen flew to Miami to work with Pharrell in his studio and record more songs. "I have another record, and I have to say the stuff me and Pharrell did is so rad. I'm afraid if I wait too long before releasing it, it will be old. DJ Clue came down to the studio with eight beautiful girls, and he listened to the whole thing."

Now that they have an entire album's worth of material, Gwen is toying with the idea of releasing those songs as an entirely new album for Christmas or Valentine's Day. She even has the artwork and creative direction all ready to go. But then again, the schedules may change, because her record company already has a DVD lined up for a Christmas release. This is what happens when superstars get prolific.

In the midst of all this hyperactivity, one has to question the future of No Doubt and the viability of a band, however successful, whose lead singer has found so many niches of her own, away from the legacy of a sound that was first for-

mulated in 1986. Gwen refutes any suggestion that the band might break up, and she even mentions that they have pledged to reunite in January of 2006. She says all this while making sure she provides the context for her solo career.

"The Rock Steady Tour was one of the best experiences for us as a band. At the end of it, Adrian [Young, the drummer] had a baby. I had just got married, like, two days before the tour started. After the tour ended, that's when I heard that Club Nouveau song again, and the idea of my solo record turned out to be a huge personal challenge. We all decided to concentrate on our own projects. Tom [Dumont, the guitarist] is on tour with Matt Costa and Tony [Kanal, the bassist] is playing with Perry Farrell. When we get into the studio again, it will be great for everyone, because they will all be charged up, with the time that I was away."

The No Doubt greatest hits album with a wonderful new cover of Talk Talk's "It's My Life" came out early last year, at the same time when Gwen was beginning to work on her own album. Having been with the same three guys for 18 years, including a now well-documented eight years as Tony Kanal's girlfriend, she feels that they are a family for life. "It doesn't feel like we've been apart," she says, "because Tony has been my bouncing board. I still lean on him for advice." Tony produced three tracks for *L.A.M.B.* and although he has been working on his own side projects in Jamaica and elsewhere, he has remained a big presence in her life. (She points out that he is the one who turned her on to Club Nouveau and Debbie Deb in the first place.)

The song "Don't Speak," which spent a record-breaking 16 weeks at the top of the charts in 1996 and pretty much put No Doubt on the map, is well known as Gwen's heartfelt response to her difficult breakup with Tony. A decade later, the gorgeous video (set in Italy) that Sophie Muller directed for Gwen's latest single "Cool" is a testament—albeit a very confusing one—to the unbreakable bond between Gwen and Tony. In it, Tony's current girlfriend plays the girlfriend of Gwen's fictional ex, acted by a model who looks suspiciously like Gwen's real life husband Gavin, in a song that was inspired by Gwen's current relationship with Tony.

"Cool" is a prime example of Gwen's proven songwriting





CWEN: white puff vest, Stella McCartney for Adidas; thermal pants, Harajuku Lovers; shoes, Christian Louboutin
LOVE (LEFT): sweatshirt and pants, Harajuku Lovers; sneakers, L.A.M.B.
BABY (RIGHT): tank top and sweatshirt, Harajuku Lovers; jeans and sneakers, L.A.M.B.

skills—"After all the obstacles/ It's good to see you now with someone else/ And it's such a miracle that you and me are still good friends/ After all that we've been through/ I know we're cool." Some of the inspiration came from the song's producer, Dallas Austin. "Cool" is an amazing song," she says, "because I wanted to work with Dallas Austin. He'd signed Fishbone, and I felt we'd have a connection, especially knowing that he's such a solid songwriter. He had a similar story with an ex-girlfriend of eight years, and he'd written a song about it that he'd never finished. As soon as he started playing the chords, I helped him finish the song. He had this idea of a cool, which he said he couldn't make cool, so I wrote the lyrics in ten minutes. I wanted a Cindy Lauper or Madonna 'Crazy For You' feel to the song, and it came out beautifully."

Walking across the street to Poinsetta Park, Gwen receives a call on her cell phone from someone who could very well be a booking agent, and from the conversation that we overhear, it sounds like she is being offered the opportunity to tour right up until Christmas day. "That's something I'll have to speak to Gavin about," she says. "I just can't make that decision right now. We're supposed to spend Christmas in England." Gwen admits that she is nervous about the upcoming Harajuku Lovers Tour, because up until now, touring has always been about going on the road with her No Doubt family. "This tour is going to be different, because it will involve a lot of costume changes. It will be a lot more theatrical, and I will get to do some things that I could never do with No Doubt, things that would be considered cheesy in the rock world. I mean, I love theater, I love *The Sound of Music*, so the Harajuku Lovers Tour will be an opportunity."

It all seems so convenient, and I have to admit that several of my friends find Gwen Stefani's constant references to the Harajuku subculture annoying. The tour that references the clothing line that references the camera that references the lyrics from the single may all be a bit much, but beyond a simple celebrity marketing ploy, it appears that Gwen Stefani is serious about the cross-promotion. When pressed for an answer, she seems to genuinely see her Harajuku-influenced mantra as a way to give more Gwen back to her fans. If she can make a little extra money on the side while doing that, well why not?

"The concept behind the Harajuku Lovers line was to create clothes that would be better conceived than just another merchandising line. I've been working on it for over a year, and it was so hard to get it right. Whereas L.A.M.B. is my creative project that I have a total free ride on, it remains limited by the price points. It's just too expensive for most of the fans. Harajuku Lovers is how I express another kind of creativity, because I am so inspired by the whole Japanese culture. The song lyrics are all over the t-shirts, and the clothes are available for all ages and sizes, from babies all the way to XXL. We have erasers and school stuff and we even teamed up with Nakajima for some Hello Kitty items."

Although Gwen has full creative control over the L.A.M.B.

line, she has recruited a new designer to guide her through the creative process. New York-based Zaldy, who has designed costumes for Mary J Blige and Christina Aguilera in addition to Gwen, says that he has known Gwen for a while because his ex-boyfriend, Matthew Anderson, used to be Gwen's makeup artist.

"Even before meeting her in person, the first day that I saw her on TV, I could tell that she was for real," he says. "She just seemed like the kind of girl I would have hung out with in high school." One night, when he was returning to Los Angeles from the Coachella music festival with Gwen's hair stylist Danilo, he was invited to a party at Gwen's house. That's when she approached him with the idea of helping her to design her new collection. "I was so flattered, and when we started working together, I had to process all this information. When I design the L.A.M.B. line, I always have her in mind, because she is the muse, the only muse, whereas when I design my own line, I have other muses. It is really a great experience for me, because [stylist] Andrea Lieberman is also a consultant, and I get to work in a team. It's almost like doing a group project."

In 1997, I was invited to a Chinese restaurant called Chi Dynasty, in the Hollywood Hills near Gwen's house in the Los Feliz neighborhood of Los Angeles. That night, I had dinner with photographer Shawn Mortensen, Gavin and Gwen. I remember asking her about being a star, and she told me about the constant online interactions she had with her fans. She said that she had a habit of checking the Internet on a regular basis. She admitted that, somehow, she always managed to find the time to maintain ongoing dialogues with a lot of her devoted fans. Eight years later, at the Quixote Studios, I reminded her of our conversation and asked her whether she still had time to engage in regular dialogue with her fans, having recently spotted dozens of websites dedicated to the cult of Stefani. She thought about it for a second and said, "I like to go online and look here and there, but it's not that healthy, because you get bummed out a lot. Actually, all the fan forums on our sites are down at the moment, because they got hacked."

When the interview was drawing to a close, I asked her about the history behind my all-time favorite No Doubt song, "Sunday Morning," from the *Tragic Kingdom* album. She smiled and said it was such a long time ago. She told me that the video, which was directed in the spring of 1997 by Sophie Muller, in her third of eight collaborations with No Doubt, was filmed in her grandparents' house. "The guy that's in the store when I buy the tomatoes, that's my grandpa." Those somewhat innocent statements are really charming coming from a 35-year-old superstar in her prime. They also go a long way towards explaining the enduring popularity of Gwen Stefani, the hardworking girl from the OC who once sang about wanting a simple kind of life. "I was with Tony when we wrote 'Sunday Morning', and we were just kids, just learning how to write songs. I never in a million years would have thought that..."



GWEN: white tank top, Harajuku Lovers; jeans (required); belt, Calvin's mom; wristband, Adidas; shoes, Christian Louboutin
LOVE AND BABY: all clothing, Harajuku Lovers; sneakers, L.A.M.B.

MAKEUP: KATHY JEUNG FOR MARGARET MALDONADO COS
HAIR: DANILLO @ THE WALL GROUP
FASHION: ANDREA LIEBERMAN FOR MARGARET MALDONADO COS