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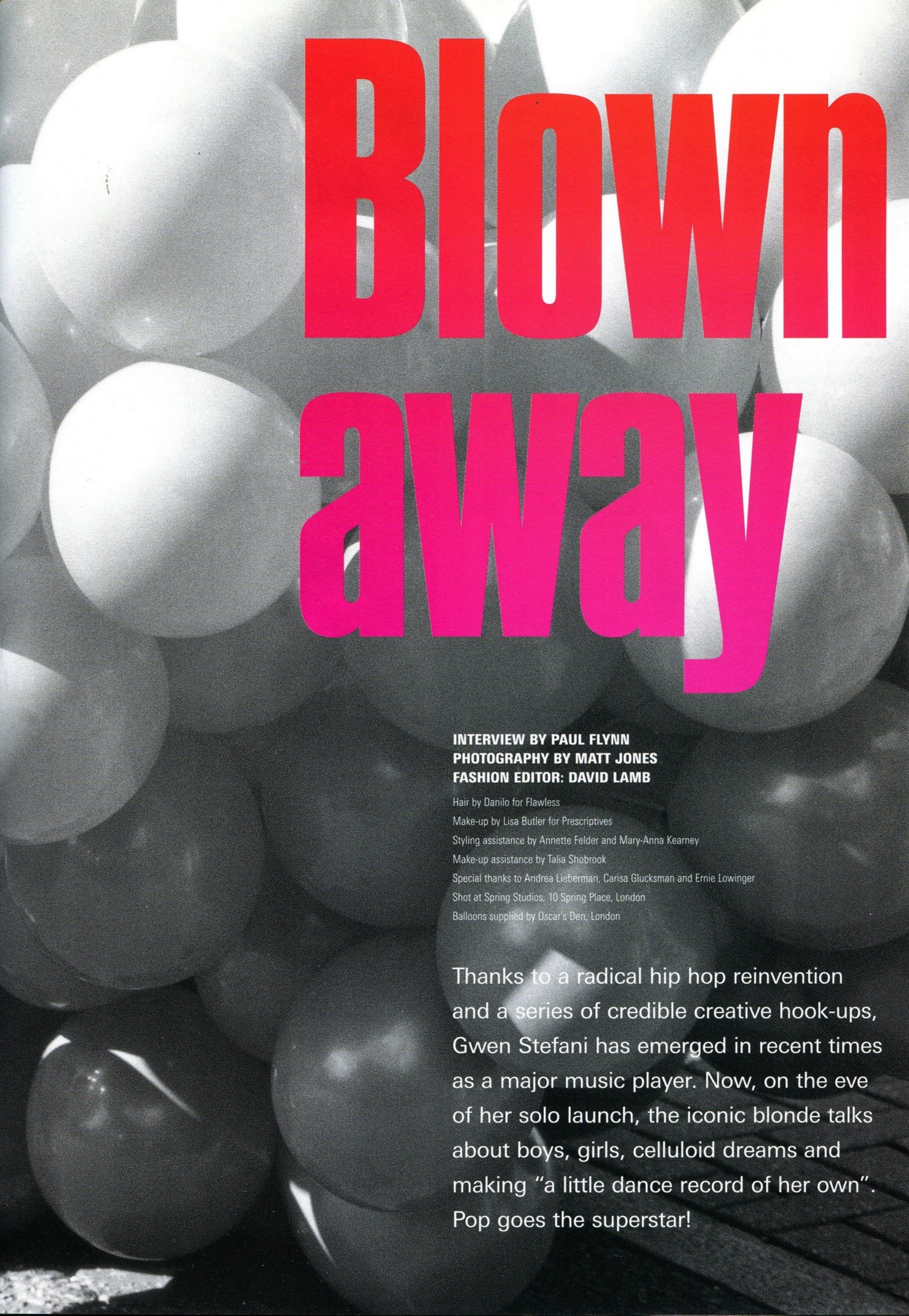


**PARTY  
HARD!  
250  
SPECIAL**



Jacket, trousers and shirt by Yohji Yamamoto; vest, model's own; shoes by Giuseppe Zanotti Design; tights by Fogal.





# Blown away

**INTERVIEW BY PAUL FLYNN**  
**PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATT JONES**  
**FASHION EDITOR: DAVID LAMB**

Hair by Danilo for Flawless

Make-up by Lisa Butler for Prescriptives

Styling assistance by Annette Felder and Mary-Anna Kearney

Make-up assistance by Talia Shobrook

Special thanks to Andrea Lieberman, Carisa Glucksman and Ernie Lowinger

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Thanks to a radical hip hop reinvention and a series of credible creative hook-ups, Gwen Stefani has emerged in recent times as a major music player. Now, on the eve of her solo launch, the iconic blonde talks about boys, girls, celluloid dreams and making "a little dance record of her own". Pop goes the superstar!

**Hotwired for superstardom, Gwen breezes into the photographer's studio at midday. By five in the afternoon, the whole room has fallen in love with her. Not bad, given that half of them are women, gay or variants of both. "I want to be at the centre of something incredible," she says**

Somewhere within Gwen Stefani there must be an element of sadness, dourly gestating, imprisoned, waiting to break free. Not that you'd know it from the woman herself. You won't get so much as a breath of negativity from eight straight hours in her company. Spending time with Gwen is like mainlining a curious, buoyant cocktail of Sunny D and liquid serotonin; it's as if helium has magically found its way into the air-conditioning. She oozes essence of zesty, goofball, feelgood California. She's got a succession of quickfire, cheerful punchlines beamed straight in from *The OC* script office on some delirious repeat edit and raises an ironic eyebrow by way of saucy punctuation for each one. If I had a dollar bill for every time I heard the word 'dude' coming from her big, smiley, slasher Hollywood mouth, I'd most probably have a couple of hundred bucks by the day's end.

Everyone's jaw drops when Gwen enters the room, but she magnanimously deflects this awed reception, partly by running around on vertiginous, clip-clop Westwood heels, showering 'hello' kisses all round by way of introducing herself - as if she needs to - and partly by 'yo, duding' anyone that will listen. Which is mostly everyone. She breezes into the photographers studio at 12.30pm. By 5 o'clock in the afternoon I figure that the whole room has fallen in love with her. Not bad, given that half of them are women, gay or variants of both.

When God was dishing out the good looks, it is fair to say that Gwen Stefani was somewhere near the front of the queue (she skipped the semester when he was allotting angst). She bagged the bright, starry eyes, the Jessica Rabbit waistline, the stretch-to-infinity legs, the neat, cherubic and suddenly explosive pout and added her own bleach later to blend into a perfectly fitting state of white blonde.

Thus, the camera loves her. And, boy, can she work it. Whether peddling down the backstreets of Kentish Town, stopping traffic by flashing her Dior Couture hooped underskirt, handing out balloons to local kids with whom she is causing an evident stir - at any given point she draws an audience of somewhere between ten and thirty gobsmacked onlookers from nowhere - or reclining on her back in the middle of a busy road, she seems preternaturally hotwired to stardom. "Loving your work, Gwen," shouts some itinerant laddo from an open window. Is he referring to her records? Or the fact that she has just strutted starrily down his street, mostly in her underwear. It's never quite established. But Gwen's an expert at this game. She plays it right back to him. "Loving yours, too," she says, blowing the lucky chap a kiss.

Later she will say that this is her work, that "I want to be at the centre of something incredible." She can play the loveable ditz better than anyone you'd care to imagine. But underneath it all, one suspects, is a steely determination to turn her brand into something approaching legend. The eve of her solo launch for world domination - or as she, somewhat disingenuously, puts it "just making a fun little dance record of my own" - is a fascinating moment to watch Stefani. Gwen, you see, is that oddest of breeds. She is a joyful celebrity. She appears to have been born to it. If only they cut all of them from this mould.





Jacket, trousers and shirt by Yohji Yamamoto; vest, model's own; shoes by Giuseppe Zanotti Design; tights by Fogal.

Jacket and trousers by Balenciaga by  
Nicolas Ghesquiere; waistcoat by  
Emma Cook; vintage diamante choker  
from Angels, London.



**"Let Me Blow Your Mind" turned me around. Being able to rock into Eve's world and get lost in all that coolness. I mean, I dreamt of Dre. It was like walking into another, completely different place. It was awesome"**

#### What was little Gwen like?

I was always, um, a little...[dithers a while, stirring soya milk and honey into her tea]

#### Was she going to be a superstar?

No! Dude! The only fantasy I ever had about that was after I was already in the band. When I was in High School I thought that a really cool job would be to sing jingles. I do physically like singing. I thought I could do it. So that was where my ambition was at. I thought 'dude, you can sing. Hey, you could do Kentucky Fried Chicken commercials.' That sounded like fun.

Before she acquired the illusive status of being famous for simply being Gwen Stefani, Gwen was famous for fronting No Doubt, an unusual, ska-inflected poprock operation. I had always, wrongly, assumed No Doubt to be named with a knowing wink to the obviousness of their English musical heritage, a nod to the whole ska thing. In fact, the explanation seems far more literal. It is because they, and their startling frontwoman, appear to have no doubt. Even in their fallow periods, No Doubt have exuded a unique and singular, can-do confidence. I'll be honest, the first time I heard tell of the group I winced. Then I saw them and gasped. They looked like they'd been assembled by an angry marketing meeting of chunky, godless businessmen clutching phallic cigars and mopping sweat from their thickset brows with fancy Hermes hankies in a Bel Air production office. The foxychick and the almost Benetton-ad racial assortment of backup dudes. Mohawks, skaters, punks, babes. Ragga, pop, rock, ska, even a short, sharp brace of metal and the odd hip hop inflection. This cacophony was surely dreamt up to appeal on every level, at every single junction of the record-buying demographic. It was as if '80s MTV had imagined the group into life, willed them into being.

Yet for two partially flunking albums - their self-titled debut in 1992 and *Beacon Street Collection* in '95 - they managed to keep only their heads above water. LA college kids with piercings and Acupuncture booties kept them just about in business. There were tours with The Red Hot Chili Peppers and Ziggy Marley, but still Gwen would only get stopped while shopping at Tower Records on Sunset Strip and asked about the band. She was approaching huge in her native LA, a bona fide sensation in Anaheim - unbelievably appropriately, CA's feeder town for Disneyworld that was her childhood home. But in most of the speaking world she couldn't get arrested. Then along came *Don't Speak*, the first of two monumental, turnaround, upward swings in the imperial curve of being Gwen Stefani.

Gwen was 26 when *Don't Speak* gave her her first international smash nine years ago. She toured its parent album *Tragic Kingdom* in support to the then-huge Bush, where she met her husband, their handsome, English rake of a singer, Gavin Rossdale. If for a while they appeared to be the wipe-clean, parent friendly Kurt and Courtney, her inflating success bubble put Gwen in the bridesmaid's role of a direct run of iconic pop blondes from the previous two decades. Exactly where Courtney always threatened yet never quite managed to be. Debbie Harry was approaching 30 and three albums old when she first cut through to circuit-dominating pop supremacy. Madonna - that other

Catholic, Italian-American bleached pop goddess that Stefani is so often compared with - was 27 by the time of *Holiday*. It is suggested to Gwen that the '70s gave us Harry, the '80s Madonna, and the '90s Gwen. She looks aghast.

"You're crazy, dude. That's crazy. Don't even say that shit. Listen, I'm having a freeking fun time and I love what I do but to even talk about me in the same breath, you know?" Three days before we meet, Gwen had been to see Madonna on the London leg of her career-defining Re-invention tour. "It was amazing. It was actually quite embarrassing how close I was to her. It was so fun. People were so happy. I was so elated. I haven't been to a concert like that in years."

Beneath the wonder, there is a serious consideration here, as to how far Gwen can go. If Gwen is gently cautious about voicing it, Madonna herself, ever a champion of the young bucks biting at her ankles, spotted it. They have socialised together. "She's been really nice to me. It's something not a lot of people know about Madonna - how supportive she is to other female artists." Gwen has a theory on their connection: "My mom's Irish/Scottish and my dad's pure Italian, but his dad came over from Rome to Detroit, so I tease Madonna that me and her are related. Because my grandma's sister's husband is Ciccone. But I don't think so. Maybe." The thought is clearly a thrill, however far-fetched.

Twelve million copies of *Tragic Kingdom*, and its follow-up *Return Of Saturn* later, a brace of Grammys collected, and the second pivotal moment in the making of a modern icon occurred. Gwen had been experimenting with solo vocal work, already, and had bagged an American smash with Moby on the single *Southside*. But it was her duet with crop-headed Dr Dre prodigy, rapper and impercunious scion of all things street Eve on *Let Me Blow Your Mind* that upped Stefani's ante into being something other than the pretty frontwoman of the American record industry's favourite globe-trotters.

Did she feel the shift? "Aha! Sure I did. Just like everybody else did. I am under no illusions that that record turned me around. Being able to rock into Eve's world and get lost in all that coolness. I mean, I dreamt of Dre. He's always been on my label and I always dropped things to people that knew him, like 'dude, if you ever want me to do any vocal thing, anything, I'll do it'. So I got the call about the Eve track, but I didn't have much to do with that track. I went in. He beat up my vocal, I left and I remember it was really liking walking into another, completely different world. But it turned out so incredible and it was such an incredible thing to be a part of. It really opened our world up to all these other people. We had a whole opportunity out there of people that would work with us. It was awesome. That's how I met Andrea, too."

Andrea is a crucial figure in the Gwen operation. They share a closeness amongst singers and their stylists probably only rivaled in the celebrity cannon by Kylie and her creative directing shoulder, William Baker. Andrea, a Bronx girl by both nature and nurture also looks after Jennifer Lopez - it was she that selected the olive green, heavy print, Versace/tat Tape Oscar ensemble that was to redefine red carpet attire forever - but Gwen is more than her client.

"She's my girlfriend first," says Andrea. "I love working with her and hanging out with her." Gwen puts it even more succinctly "She's the

**By her own admission, coolness is not Gwen's forte. She blanches when asked how cool she is on a sliding scale of one to ten. "No way. That is so mean. I could never do that. I just don't think like that"**

East Coast me," she declares. Their bond was instant and thus their working synchronicity was nailed instantly, too. A fashion plate was beginning to weld itself onto the public conscious. Stefani became eternally prefaced in print by the seldom scientifically or precisely used words 'style icon'. And she earned the plaudit with glowing ribbons.

By her own admission, coolness is not Gwen's forte. She blanches when I ask her to rate how cool she is on a sliding scale of one to ten. "No way. That is so mean. I could never do that. I just don't think like that." Nevertheless, she has become a benchmark for the scintillating ambitions of the coolerati since her seismic shift. No Doubt's first and, thus far only post-Eve album, the almost perfect pop/rock configuration *Rock Steady*, attracted a new elite into the fold. Nellee Hooper, William Orbit and Sly & Robbie joined in the production credits. Just to prove the band itself was one step ahead of the fashion curve, they invited Ric Ocasek, frontman of The Cars and new wave renaissance man par excellence, out of retirement to harness a couple of the moodier rock moments. The result was astounding. If *Don't Speak* had been both blight and blessing for No Doubt - who really wants to be a one-hit wonder, however wondrous the one hit? - *Rock Steady* established them as one of the late-blooming giants of the world stage, both commercially and creatively. It was their belated tipping point moment. They achieved heat.

By the time it's come to a full blown solo foray, everyone wants a piece of Gwen. The cast list of collaborators on her debut is dizzying. Andre 3000, Wendy & Lisa, Pharell, New Order, Linda Perry, Dr Dre, Dallas Austin and long-time No Doubt co-writer and one-time boyfriend Tony Kanal are all along for the ride.

Outside of her currently enviable musical predicament - Stefani's solo album is the most hotly anticipated of the season, and not without reason: it's dynamite - she has been directed by Martin Scorsese in the Howard Hughes biopic *The Aviator*, opposite Leonardo DiCaprio. Her and Andrea's fashion line, L.A.M.B, is finally reaching its full potential ("Look at my cardigan," says Gwen, showing off a piece of her own work "it looks like camouflage, but look closer. It's lambouflage"). Multi-tasking is in Gwen's DNA. She is rocking so hard now, a free-wheeling boulder couldn't interrupt her progress. Thus her opening gambit as we sit down to talk properly comes as something of a surprise...

Do I smell? I'm so sorry. I mean, I have all this crap on me and I've not showered and I've been running around and, um, I'd stay away from me if I was you.

**You smell fine.**

Just stay over there, dude.

**Honestly, there's nothing! Why do the solo thing now? Is this it for No Doubt? Has it run its course?**

People for years have always been saying 'oh she'll go solo.' Listen, I am not going anywhere. My fears are the same as any No Doubt fan's fears. I really do not want to fuck that up. I've been doing No Doubt for 17 years now. I talked to Tony about it and said I didn't want to threaten anybody or anyone's situation here, but I wanted to try something else. He was really into it. They were all supercool about it.



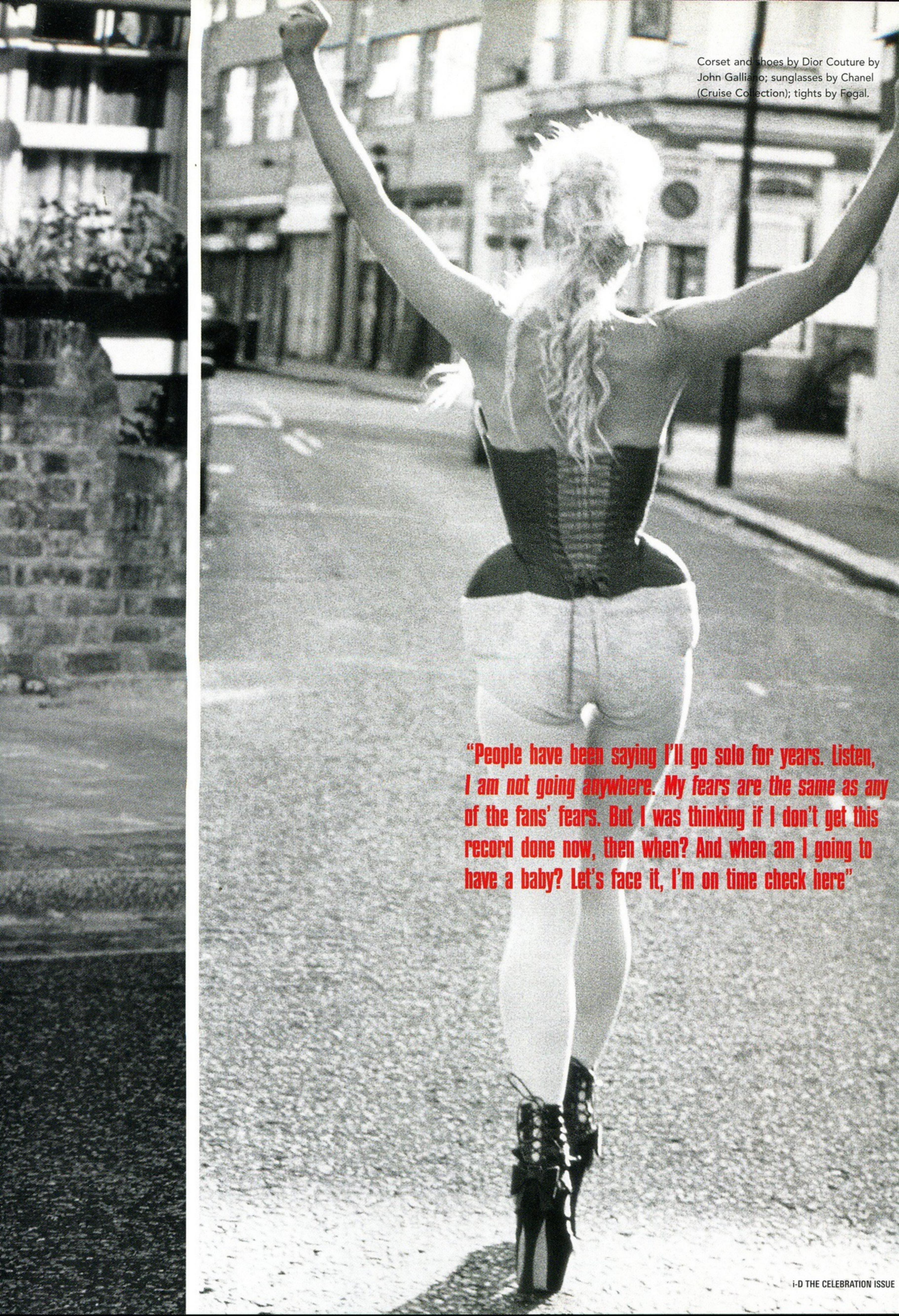


Jacket, trousers and shoes by Balenciaga  
by Nicolas Ghesquiere; waistcoat by  
Emma Cook; vintage diamante choker  
from Angels, London.

Jacket, sweater, skirt and brooch by  
Viktor & Rolf; shoes by Louis Vuitton;  
tights by Fogal.

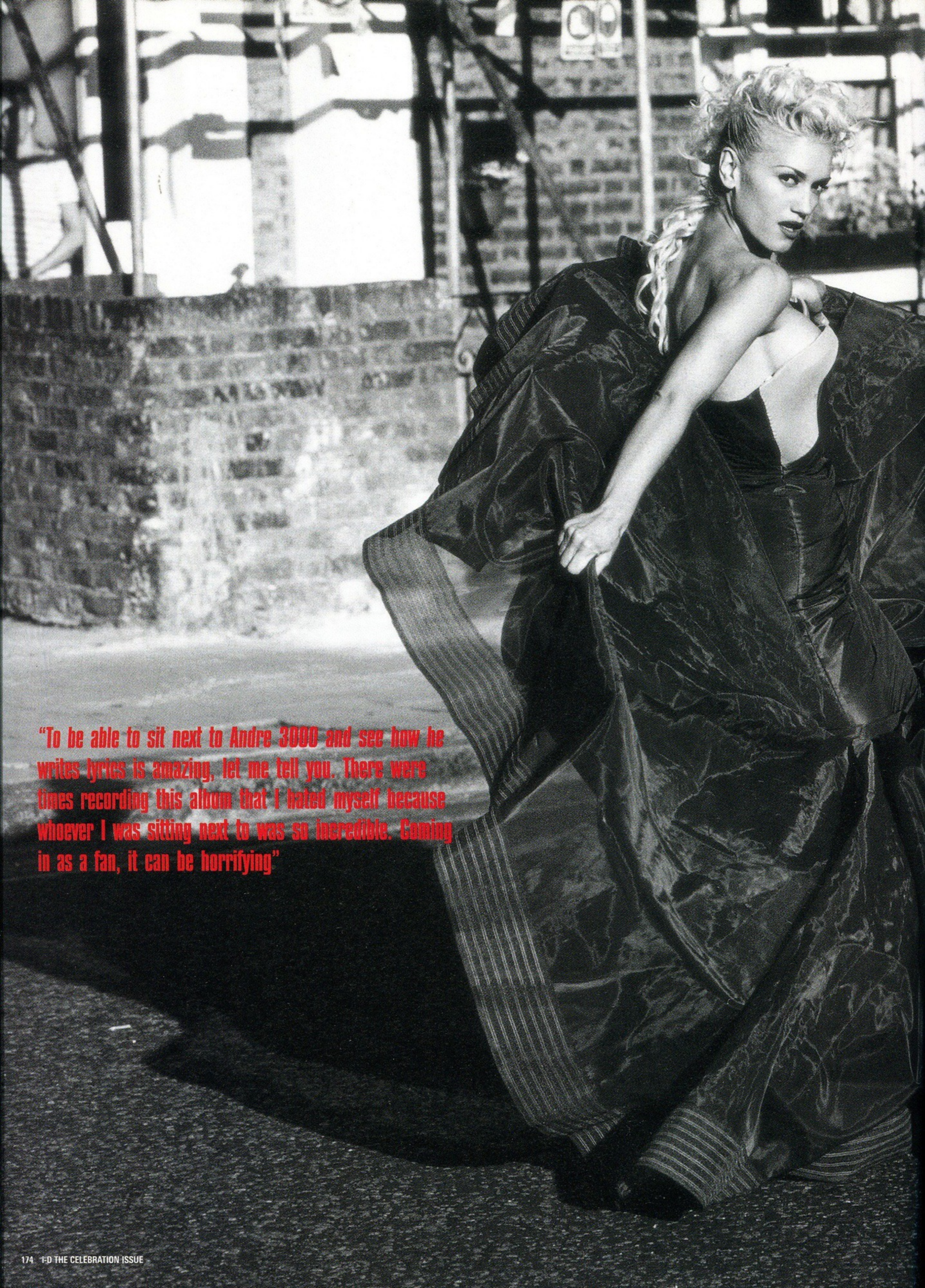






Corset and shoes by Dior Couture by John Galliano; sunglasses by Chanel (Cruise Collection); tights by Fogal.

**“People have been saying I’ll go solo for years. Listen, I am not going anywhere. My fears are the same as any of the fans’ fears. But I was thinking if I don’t get this record done now, then when? And when am I going to have a baby? Let’s face it, I’m on time check here”**



**"To be able to sit next to Andre 3000 and see how he writes lyrics is amazing, let me tell you. There were times recording this album that I hated myself because whoever I was sitting next to was so incredible. Coming in as a fan, it can be horrifying"**

Corset, underdress and shoes by Dior  
Couture by John Galiano; tights by Fogal.



**“What is my first film appearance like? It’s a small part but I’m not really calling it that. I’m playing Jean Harlow, appearing with Leonardo DiCaprio and directed by Martin Scorsese. That is huge, dude”**

I already said that I wanted to make a family...oops, I wanted to make a movie, and I did want to make a family, too, by the way. All these things that I want to do and, let's face it, I'm on time check here. They understand that. It's different for them because they're guys so they're all cool. I was thinking if I don't get this thing done now then when's the No Doubt record going to get done? When am I going to have a baby? Fricking hell, this clock is going quickies?

**It's a pop record, right? A proper pop record?**

Sure. Me and Tony come from totally different backgrounds, musically, to Adrian and Tom. They're really into punk and heavy metal and ska and Tony and I didn't really listen to that stuff when we were growing up. We listened to all the '80s stuff. When I met Tony I was 17. He turned me on to Prince, The Family, Time, Club Nouveau, Debbie Deb, Lisa Lisa, all that stuff that was totally a huge part of our childhood. Early Madonna really figures here. *White Lines*. I had all that shit, and even though you didn't necessarily admit it, it was a totally huge part of our musical upbringing. It felt right to go there again. Cyndi Lauper, Duran Duran. I graduated Sixth Grade in '87, you know?

**Have you only ever had two boyfriends in your life?**

Yes. I had one boyfriend in high school who was my kissing boyfriend who I was completely in love with. We went out for six months. The thing about him that's weird to talk about is that he actually died. Recently, you know. Just two years ago. I didn't know him for years, though I actually wrote a song for him on this record called *Wonderful Life*. He was one of those guys that was the naughty, naughty boy who had total character but was always getting in trouble. He was in and out of high school all the time.

**So the boy that all the girls wanted to date?**

Yeah. One time he was back in high school and he just turned into Robert Smith overnight, which obviously I found very attractive. I was obsessed with him for years, then he broke up with me. It wasn't like... It was Ninth Grade, he was the second boy I kissed. But Tony was my real boyfriend for eight years. We broke up then I met my husband and we've known each other for almost nine years.

**What attracted you to Gavin?**

Probably physical stuff, you know. It was very physical to start with.

**What were your initial impressions?**

We got to meet the guys and we went into the room and all I'd ever heard was 'Gavin this' and 'Gavin that' and I saw the guy and it just hit me like something out of the blue. I was like 'whoof!' He is shockingly handsome. We went out for dinner last night and I was thinking 'gee, you are hot' and then I thought 'and I'm married to you! Whoa!' It's really good. Then he was on tour with us and it was kinda weird. All my band are my friends and none of them wanted me to go out with him. He had a little reputation for being the typical rock star guy.

**But he's a nice boy?**

He's an amazing person. He's such a nice guy. Obviously, I wouldn't have gone out with him if he wasn't.

**There was a little rock'n'roll mythologising around him though?**

Sure. I mean, probably some of that shit was true but he was a guy like anyone is. It's not like you're born a rock star.

**Why do all these people want to work with you now?**

Linda Perry had come up to me. She approached me, which is wild. She came up to me at the Grammys and put me in a headlock. We were the first girls to sign to Interscope, so I've kinda known her for years and we were always drawn to each other.

**Is she not a little scary?**

She is, dude! She was right up in my face telling me 'we're gonna write songs together'. She totally confronted me about working together and she's the hottest hit maker. You have to remember that I've never worked with a woman before and this girl can play any instrument she picks up, she can run the board, she produces, she writes, this is the coolest, most awesome person to be around. She's on fricking fire from the moment we walk into the studio. My ego was already curled up and in the corner by the time she's pounding out these tunes but it just clicked. There were times during the process of doing this that I hated myself because whoever I was sitting next to was so incredible.

**Are you aware when you're in the presence of genius?**

To be able to sit next to Andre 3000 and see how he writes lyrics and comes up with shit is amazing, let me tell you. For me coming in as a fan, it can be horrifying.

**Aren't you aware that those people are fans of yours too? That's why they're there?**

Everybody that I've worked with seems to be really into it, which is very flattering. I can't believe it. I didn't want to put something out unless it was incredible. I said that from the beginning and at any point I could have just pulled it.

**Jean Harlow, let's talk...**

I just saw it in New York. I saw my clips. It's sick.

**What was Scorsese like?**

Magical.

**Not frightening?**

The exact opposite. I was obviously scared out of my mind, but he's the most welcoming, comforting kind of guy. Almost to the point where you think 'have you got to make me feel this nice - haven't you got a film to direct here?' He basically saw my picture from a *Teen Vogue* shoot on the side of a bus stop by Herb Ritts. It's all Herb's fault! I'd done the whole Marilyn on the beach kinda thing and Martin saw it and asked me to try out for the Jean Harlow part and I tried out and got it. The thing that's crazy about this... I mean, it's a small part but I'm not calling it a small part. I'm with Leonardo DiCaprio, directed by Martin Scorsese, playing Jean Harlow. I can be on screen for, like, one second and that is not a small part. That is huge, dude.

**Are you pleased with it?**

Oh boy, am I?

**Is this the first time you've acted?**

Yep. You know what's crazy about it is I'm playing Jean Harlow just after Howard Hughes has given her her first major movie role, right? And I thank Howard for giving me this amazing part. So I sent Marty some flowers when he cast me with the exact same words on it. It's kinda symbiotic, you know?

**How many people will you be thanking in your first Oscar speech?**

Dude, the list will be endless...

**One last thing. How happy are you right now?**

Ecstatic, basically. 🎉