

JUST A GIRL TAKING OVER LAS VEGAS

“Being on stage in Las Vegas... I forget how much it’s a part of who I am. I’ve done it my whole life, pretty much. I think I don’t want to do it again, then I get on stage, even when I’m sound checking, I’m like, “Oh My God, I love this!” I love my music, I love being up there, I love the attention and I love being able to share that love with people. It’s my gift. It’s what I’m here for.”

Gwen Stefani spent her youth in Anaheim, California, a suburban girl living a stone’s throw from Disneyland. It was her older brother, Eric, who founded No Doubt, the hybrid punk/rock band that would help Stefani make her way into the musical limelight with their 1995 breakout album, *Tragic Kingdom*. The band’s unique sound coupled with Stefani’s platinum blonde hair, red lips and punk rock fashion sensibility, brought the singer to Rockstar status in the 1990s. With lyrics torn from the pages of Gwen’s personal diary about falling in love, makeups and mending a broken heart... her music draws listeners with its vulnerability. Her down-to-earth nature and self-deprecating sense of humor seals the deal with fans, making her one of the most successful female recording artists of the past twenty-three years. Her first solo album, 2004’s *Love. Angel. Music. Baby.* plus her L.A.M.B. fashion label, catapulted her into the music and style icon stratosphere, and follow up albums, *The Sweet Escape* and No Doubt’s 2012 reunion album, *Push and Shove* capped off two decades of recording and touring for the Grammy-winning artist, as she focused on raising her three sons with then husband, Bush lead singer, Gavin Rossdale.

In 2015, the California girl experienced a seismic 8.5 earthquake in her personal life when her marriage to Rossdale imploded amidst a cheating scandal. Then an unexpected romance with country crooner and Gwen’s, *The Voice* costar, Blake Shelton, whom the Hollaback girl began dating later that same year. Gwen did what she does best; poured her emotions into her most personal music to date, with 2016’s, *This Is What the Truth Feels Like* album and a subsequent tour. The mom of Kingston, eleven, Zuma, nine, and Apollo, four, embarked on a Las Vegas Residency at Zappos Theatre at the Planet Hollywood Resort & Casino, called, Gwen Stefani: *Just A Girl* —an homage to her first single to make the Billboard Hot 100 Chart, and a personal anthem she says holds true today. Gwen and I sat down to discuss this new chapter in her life and career.

Allison: Did you sit with your sons and say, “Mom’s going to perform in Las Vegas... what do you think?”

Gwen: Honestly, my kids don’t really have too much of a say on what the schedule’s going to be. But as a mom, if you look at my touring for the last ten years, I haven’t



really toured. It’s hard with the kids, because they’re in school and you can’t pull them out. It’s not fair to them. I did my last tour because I had an unexpected life crisis and the music poured out of me. I didn’t plan on making any music. It was a life-saver; a beautiful moment for me to write again. I put the “This Is What The Truth Feels Like” tour on at the last minute in the summer and went with the kids. I thought about doing a Vegas show for a while. The Las Vegas Residency works for me as a mom, because it’s these little chunks of time where you can fly in and out, and it’s workable, and with three kids it’s a big deal and it takes a lot of balancing. This is perfect for where I’m at right now and works creatively. It’s a new challenge; a way to express myself and do my whole catalog of music that defines every single period in my life; all the crisis and all the joys. Creatively, I couldn’t have done it any sooner. I had to have all these songs. It just feels like the perfect next chapter for me.

Allison: You take audiences on your life journey.

Gwen: Exactly! People come for a weekend in Las Vegas, it’s different from when I’m performing in Philly and it’s about Philly culture, and the audience is coming out for one night. A Vegas show is a bigger commitment for people because they’re making a memory. People are coming from all over the world. It’s a smaller audience than a stadium which I’m used to performing in. When you’ve toured for as many years I have, it’s awesome, but let’s do something new! Doing *The Voice* was so inspiring for me. Everybody wants something challenging and new to look forward to.

Allison: You saw Jennifer Lopez’s Las Vegas show.

Gwen: I’ve always looked up to her in the sense that we’re the same age. When No Doubt was coming out she hadn’t done *Jenny from The Block* yet, but she had that song, *Waiting for Tonight*. At the time I was working with Prince and he was comparing me and Jennifer. I didn’t see how I was in the same category with her. She was Jennifer Lopez and I was in a band called No Doubt

Interview by Allison Kugel

(laughs). But years later we are doing these residencies. She is a crazy worker, I look at her and I’m like... Wow! I went backstage to talk to her after a show, she comes out of the dressing room looking like a Barbie Doll. She was breathtaking on stage, but when you see her up close, it’s like... It’s not possible you are so gorgeous!

Allison: Did you choose Planet Hollywood?

Gwen: I feel like they chose me. What’s cool is Planet Hollywood is the Zappos Theatre; the team is incredible. They take over with their creativity; it has a futuristic feel. They give \$1 of every ticket sold to the children’s charity, Cure 4 The Kids Foundation. You get motivated making a difference. To get on stage, share my story, and make money to give to children is amazing. I feel proud of that.

Allison: Did Blake offer you any creative input?

Gwen: He’s my best friend, so I bounce stuff off him all the time. He’s super supportive and he gets me motivated. There’s a whole bunch of songs about him and that’s fun. Like anyone with their best friend, we share everything.

Allison: Your show, *Just A Girl*, is the title of one of your biggest hits and you’re always saying, “I’m just a girl from Orange County.”

Gwen: If you knew me or saw my family and how I grew up, I’m 100% the same person I’ve always been. When I wrote, *Just A Girl*, I was twenty-five years old, going to college, still living at my parent’s house, and I was very naive. I had a boyfriend at the time that lived at his parent’s house. I was driving one day and thinking... Wow! I have a different position in this world, being that I’m a female! It was a realization we have as females. I’m walking down the street and some guy whistles at me? What does that mean? Suddenly, you’re aware of your sexuality, and that you’re ascribed a certain value because of it. When I wrote, *Just A Girl*, nobody was paying attention. I didn’t know how to write a song, but I wanted a way to say, “This is my DNA.” And my DNA is... I’m just a girl from Anaheim [California]. I’m just me. At the same time, using my gift, respecting it and being confident in it, I’ve gotten this far. Music is powerful, and for a song like that to still be relevant twenty years later? We have so much going on with female empowerment and what’s our place? When I read the lyrics of that song I think it was a Godsend, and I know I didn’t think it up on my own. I thought it would go out of style, that I’d be too old to say “just a girl” but it still works.

Allison: What’s your routine before you go on stage to perform?

Gwen: I pray, but first do my makeup (laughs). Make-up is huge for me. I have this song, *War Paint*. There is a meditation in putting on my makeup. Makeup is art. I’ve always done my makeup. We do a group prayer circle. The last few years I’ve toured, the prayer is not just before, but during the show. When I think how ordinary I’ve been, and that I’ve created all these songs, I don’t know where they come from. I think that it’s got to be a channeling that comes through me. It’s a spiritual thing that’s been given to me to share. The music takes me back... it’s not just a show, it’s my life. It’s real and that’s why I am honored to do it. I’m going to look back on this and say... I can’t believe I did that! ■

Gwen headshot: Courtesy of Yu Tsai

For more on Gwen Stefani visit AllisonKugel.com Planet Hollywood October show dates and ticket purchases for Gwen’s performance available online.