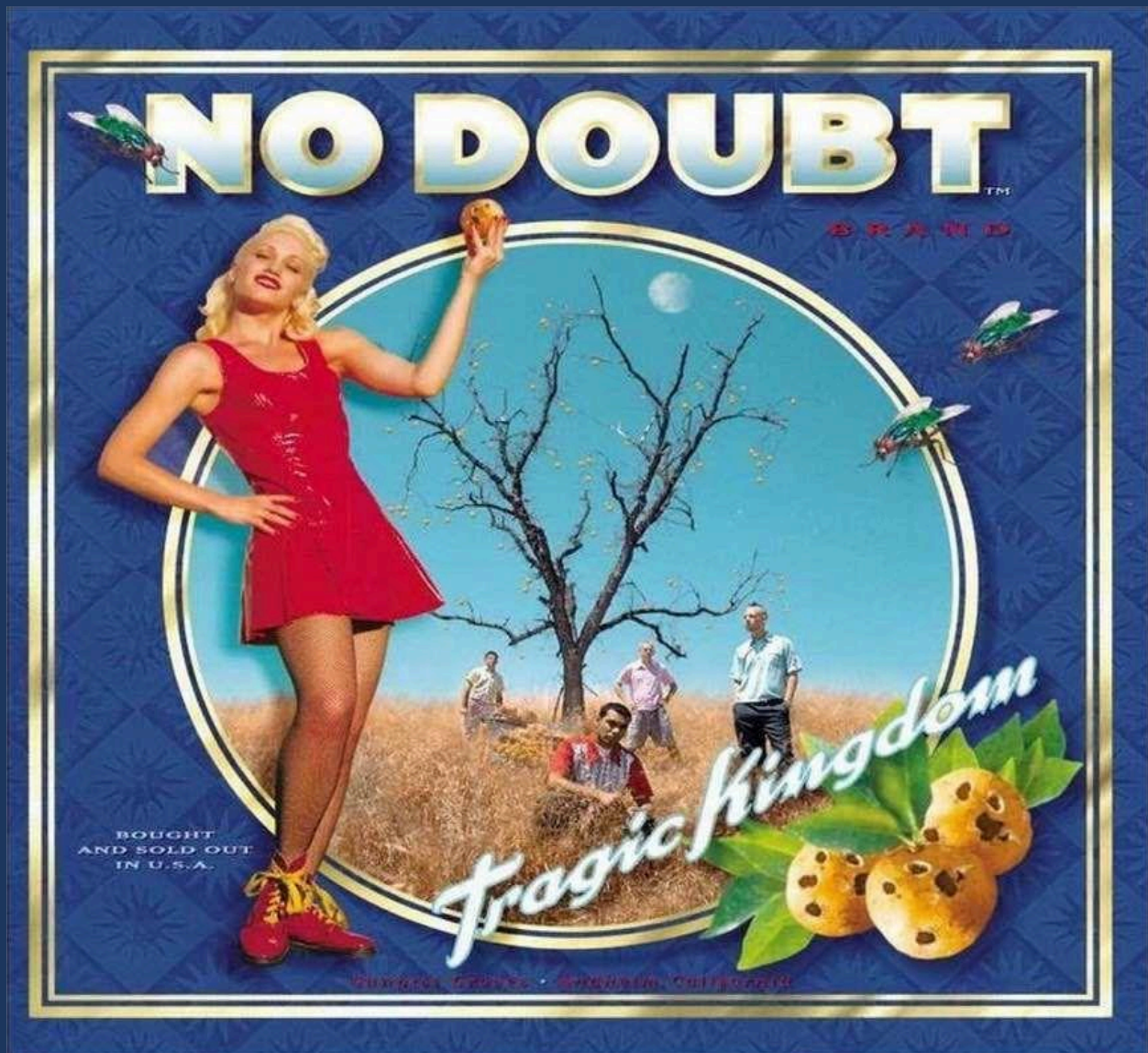


# Tragic Kingdom

By

No Doubt



Album Review by Ava Andrews

# Tracklist

## Side A

1. Spiderwebs ----- 4:28
2. Excuse Me Mr. ----- 3:04
3. Just a Girl ----- 3:28
4. Happy Now? ----- 3:43
5. Different People ----- 4:34
6. Hey You ----- 3:34
7. The Climb ----- 6:37

## Side B

8. Sixteen ----- 3:21
9. Sunday Morning ----- 4:33
10. Don't Speak ----- 4:23
11. You Can Do It ----- 4:13
12. World Go 'Round ----- 4:09
13. End It on This ----- 3:45
14. Tragic Kingdom ----- 5:31





# No Doubt

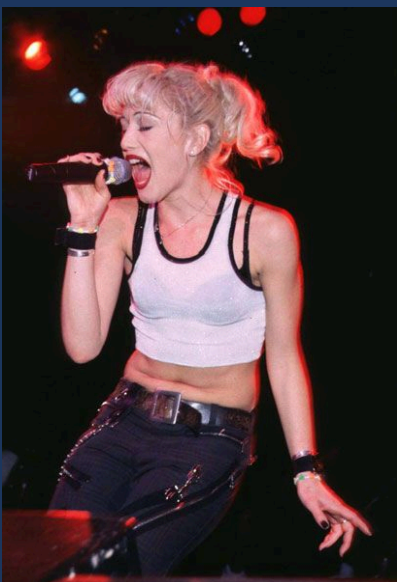
## History:

In 1986 in Anaheim, California 19-year-old Eric Stefani and his coworker, 17-year-old John Spence, came up with an idea for a band. Eric played keyboards and John sang the lead vocals. When the two boys created this plan, they decided to bring in a couple more of their friends with Gwen, Eric's younger sister, singing backing vocals for Spence. They practiced in Eric's garage in true rock band fashion. This group was initially called "Apple Core" and, through many lineup changes (beginning when John Spence committed suicide in 1987), went on to become the band we know and love today as No Doubt.

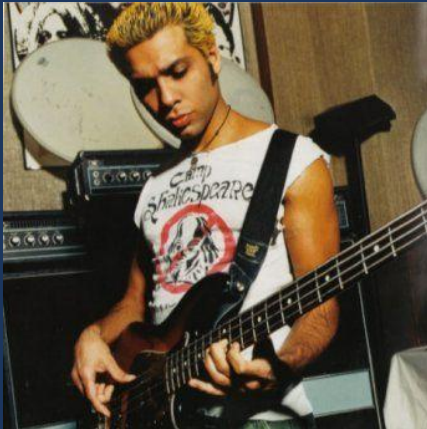
## Members:

### Gwen Stefani

During the making of *Tragic Kingdom*, No Doubt consisted of five members with Gwen Stefani as the lead vocalist. Her punk attitude and vocal style added plenty of angst to a number of No Doubt's iconic songs. She has the incredible ability to sound soft and sweet as well as gravelly and guttural. This range gives depth and interest to No Doubt's music. Her blonde hair and grunge look (outfits, makeup, hair) added considerably to the overall rock aesthetic of the band. Her stage presence was incredible and her live performances never disappointed. She's featured front and center on the album cover for *Tragic Kingdom*, rightfully, as No Doubt's front woman.



## Kony Kanal



Tony Kanal was a crucial part of No Doubt. He played bass guitar for and he, like most of his band mates, wrote music as well. The band considered Kanal to be the leader behind the scenes. He is quite brilliant. Tony explained in a mini documentary that he was five classes away from a psychology degree before No

Doubt went on tour for *Tragic Kingdom*. Kanal's band members believed that he was the reason No Doubt kept running smoothly for over 15 years. Famously, Gwen and Kanal were in a relationship during the making of *Tragic Kingdom*. This gave both of them ample inspiration while shaping many of the songs on the album.



## Tom Durmont

Tom Durmont was No Doubt's guitarist. Being the oldest and one of the more level headed members of the group, Tom was considered the "Dad" of the band. His impeccable riffs added to many tracks on

*Tragic Kingdom* and made for some highly recognizable openings. Durmont joined No Doubt in 1988 and was a loyal member until their separation. Tom was an integral part of the band.

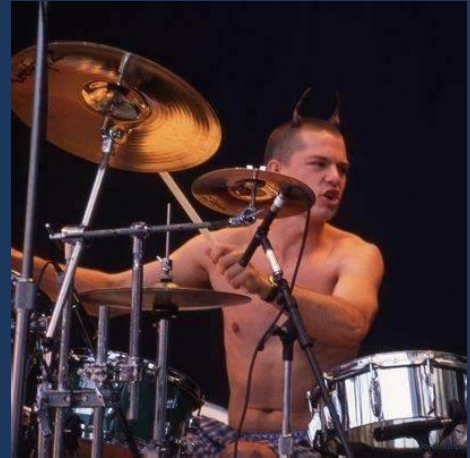




## Adrian Young

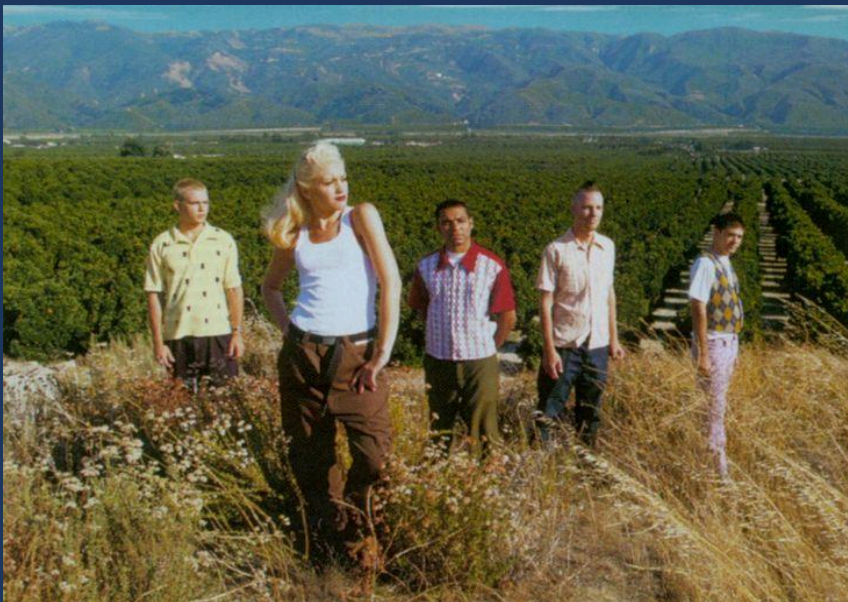


Adrian Young played percussion for No Doubt. Adrian was the wild card of the band. He often did crazy things with his hair like styling and dyeing it to look like horns or putting it up in a mohawk. Young was also infamous for performing in a G-string and mooning the audience while on stage. No Doubt describes Young as the silly younger brother of the band. This is ironic because Adrian was the first member to have a child. Adrian was a great addition to No Doubt and his look furthered the band's image as rockstars.



## Eric Stefani

Eric Stefani is Gwen's older brother and the originator of No Doubt. He played piano and keyboards for the band as well as writing some of their music. During the recording and producing of the album, though, Eric became depressed. Around the end of 1994, he stopped contributing to the band entirely. By the time *Tragic Kingdom* was released, Eric wasn't considered to be a member of No Doubt. However, he is pictured on the cover of the album because Gwen thought his efforts throughout the creation of *Tragic Kingdom* should still be recognized.



Eric Stefani



## The Album:

*Tragic Kingdom* is constantly referred to as No Doubt's best album and that's for good reason. Released on October 10, 1995, *Tragic Kingdom* was No Doubt's third studio album. They put out the album under the labels "Trauma" and "Interscope". In less than four years *Tragic Kingdom* was certified Diamond by the Recording Industry Association of America and 13 years after that, over 8 million copies were sold in the United States alone. This album was unlike any other the band had previously recorded. *Tragic Kingdom* has a distinct ska feel. This



grunge-rock, pop-punk album has the addition of ska sounding keyboards and horn sections. Some songs have a more laid back, slow but steady, pace that suits the reggae vibe. The name *Tragic Kingdom* was inspired by one of Tom Durmont's teachers in junior high. *Tragic Kingdom* was a nickname she had created for Disneyland.

## The Production:

*Tragic Kingdom* was recorded over the span of more than two and a half years and produced by Matt Wilder. This album was also recorded in 11 different studios across Los Angeles. These included: Clear Lake Audio, Total Access, Grandmaster, Rumbo Recorders, The Record Plant, North Vine, Santa Monica Sound, Red Zone, Mars, Studio 4, and NRG. The reason for the excessive amount of different recording spaces was a matter of money. No Doubt would be informed by their record label that there was a deal on studio time at any particular place. Then the five of them would do as they were told and record there. At one of these studios, No Doubt met Paul Palmer, the cofounder of Trauma Records. He helped mix their song Just A Girl and was hooked. Since Trauma records was already associated with Interscope (their record label at the time) the contract was easy to swing.





# Songs

## “Spiderwebs”: 9/10

“Spiderwebs” written by Gwen Stefani and Tony Kanal is about a man making constant, intrusive phone calls to Gwen. The chorus explains that she would rather walk through spiderwebs than answer the phone. Instead of telling the man to go away, she keeps making this excuse about walking through spiderwebs because (as seen in verse two) she doesn’t have the courage to confront him. In the bridge, Gwen tells the audience that these calls have become more frequent, and this man has begun calling her at all hours of the night. This message is shown even more clearly in the music video No Doubt released for this song. During sections of this video, the band members are wrapped up in phone cords and they are flailing trying to escape. This



video also utilizes a fisheye lens quite often which gives it a cool effect. The horns that begin the song and the reggae feel immediately show you that *Tragic Kingdom* is not just a basic punk rock album, but a new twist on the typical genre you know and love. It’s the first taste of ska you get from No Doubt. I think “Spiderwebs” is an amazing song. It tells a clear story that’s easy to decipher on your first or second listen and it’s catchy. The guitar in the chorus is perfect for

getting an audience riled up and Gwen’s voice is immaculate.

<https://youtu.be/6ZktNltwexo?si=CaFVsCX8KiNEscTA> (“Spiderwebs” music video)

## “Excuse Me Mr.” - 8/10

In “Excuse Me Mr.” Gwen Stefani and Tom Durmont depict a woman begging for attention from a man whom she adores. It’s clear, though, that this man wants nothing to do with her. This message is reiterated again and again in the chorus. This enforces the repetitive nature of the woman’s pleas very well. Gwen’s vocal performance in this song is remarkable. If the brief, epic guitar introduction doesn’t entice you, Gwen’s raspy, gravelly tone at the very beginning of this song is sure to pull you in. For a change of pace, the bridge of “Excuse Me Mr.” has ragtime-esque piano and trumpets that match. This horn section adds to the punk rock ska theme of the album. During the bridge, the woman accepts that this man she wants is not interested in her and would not even save her if she tried to tie herself to the train tracks (which is displayed in the music video). The music video for this song perfectly encapsulates the 90’s. Gwen’s outfit, hair, and makeup all scream grunge. I love “Excuse Me Mr.” because it’s a good song to dance to with exceptional vocals and incredible sounding instruments.

[https://youtu.be/it1aZBPuH4w?si=fET\\_oB7gg-rwS1g5](https://youtu.be/it1aZBPuH4w?si=fET_oB7gg-rwS1g5) (“Excuse Me Mr.” music video)

## “Just A Girl” - 10/10

“Just A Girl” is one of No Doubt's most recognizable songs. This track is a masterful criticism to the patriarchy. The first chorus of “Cause I’m just a girl, oh, little old me/ Well, don’t let me out of your sight/ Oh, I’m just a girl, all pretty and petite/ So don’t let me have any rights” is sickeningly satirical and Gwen’s facial expressions in the music video further demonstrate that. Then, in the second chorus, the speaker explains how she’d rather not be a girl. Gwen uses some negative examples of girlhood such as; being unable to drive late at night and gawking men to argue why. Following that is the bridge where she sings, “I’m just a girl/ I’m just a girl in the world/ That’s all that you’ll let me be” Though it’s short, this bridge is awfully powerful. Women in power are often perceived as women before anything else. They are often looked at as a woman before a talented and hardworking human being. The final chorus of “Just A Girl” is





arguably the most forceful. Gwen begins with, "Oh, I'm just a girl, living in captivity" symbolizing a zoo animal being stared at or teased through the bars. She feels trapped in the system of oppression that society has placed on her. Then she goes,



"Your rule of thumb makes me worrisome"

which is a common phrase with a dark meaning. When you say "rule of thumb" you are alluding to the story of men being legally allowed to hit their wives with a stick no thicker than their thumb. This reference was not lost on Stefani and Durmont, the writers of this piece. The next line of the chorus is, "Oh, I'm just a girl, what's my destiny?" This line is brutally real and perfectly placed. Many women

don't have the opportunity to live full lives because of their gender. Working towards a high up corporate position or having the right to go to school is not available to many women around the world. Lots of girls don't get the chance at a bright future. "What I've succumbed to is making me numb" expresses how many girls gradually become numb to the objectification and blatant sexism they face on a daily basis whether that be in the media or in their own lives. My favourite lines in this song are, "Oh, I'm just a girl, my apologies/ What I've become is so burdensome" because they perfectly encapsulate the message of this song. Young girls are taught to be soft and polite. They are told to act like a lady. This passage shows how many women have internalized the sexism they experience.



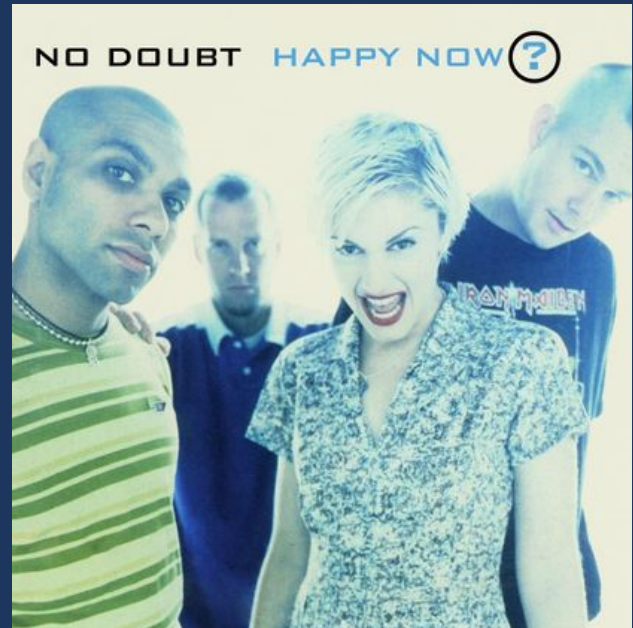
These girls blame themselves for what happens to them because they are told "that's how the world works" They think that they are in the wrong for piercing through the fabric of society. They believe that by addressing the wrongdoings of these men or by calling out the harm in these stereotypes they are difficult or troublesome individuals and this is encouraged by the patriarchy. "Just A Girl" is my favourite song on this album because the message continues to be necessary today. Progress has been made, but many aspects of being a woman are exactly the same as they were in 1995. It's a legendary song with catchy instrumentals and vocals to die for. The music video fits No Doubt exceptionally well and conveys the message even

stronger with girls on half the set doing their makeup while the boys are on the other half rocking out.

<https://youtu.be/PHz00QfhPFg?si=w0XGOdAEq8AuzkOU> ("Just A Girl" music video)

## "Happy Now?" – 8/10

"Happy Now?" Is the first break up song on *Tragic Kingdom*. This song was written mainly by Gwen and (as confirmed by the band) it was about her relationship with Tony Kanal. The meaning behind the song is essentially an angry rant about a noncommittal ex boyfriend. The singer passionately asks if the ex lover is happy with his newfound freedom now that he is single. This message is clear within the first verse of the song, "You had the best, but you gave her up/ 'Cause dependency might interrupt/ Idealistic will, so hard to please/ Put your indecisive mind at ease" During the creation of this song, Kanal encouraged Gwen to pour her heart out and use her rage creatively. The bridge gives an amazing change in energy which sets up the guitar solo that follows splendidly. Gwen's voice on the line "you're free at last" oozes with pain and anger. The song is full of pettiness over the whole situation but that specific line illustrates it very well and Stefani's sweet and soft vocals at the end are the cherry on top to this remarkable song.



<https://youtu.be/C0NBjw-K3K4?si=YfiDf879e2KaI24O> ("Happy Now?" audio)

<https://youtu.be/Jfc-fCpMiZI> (Interview with No Doubt about "Happy Now?")

## "Different People" – 8/10

"Different People" begins with a breathtaking, very ska inspired, instrumental. The message behind "Different People" is pretty self explanatory. The world is made up of many different kinds of people. All unique in their own way. This song was written by Tony Kanal as well as Eric and Gwen Stefani. The horn section in "Different People" helps build suspense and sounds remarkable in combination with



the keyboards and electric guitar especially in the pre-chorus. The ending is perfect and Gwen's improvisational-type lines fit the song perfectly. Gwen's voice gives the song a dynamic touch as ever and it's another great song to dance to. I believe "Different People" is exciting and is well suited for *Tragic Kingdom* with its strong ska influences in the instrumental.

<https://youtu.be/7qxWhkY1Z4Y?si=T26cKeE9k2P4sxY8> ("Different People" audio)

[https://youtu.be/H6xyJogs\\_yo?si=PT6I4jiRvNikR3Sy](https://youtu.be/H6xyJogs_yo?si=PT6I4jiRvNikR3Sy) (No Doubt performing "Different People" live)

## "Hey You" - 8/10

"Hey You" has an amazing range of musical instruments from the beginning chimes to the keyboard solo to the sitar in the outro. "Hey You" (written by Gwen and Kanal) is about women's expectations of the perfect love story. In the first verse Gwen sings about a woman in her wedding dress and goes on to say to her, "Well hey you, with the dreams in your head/ You've been so misled by your heart's pull" Stefani later explains that the woman will grow tired of married life. She warns the bride that even if she "plays the game" and marries somebody, her life won't necessarily be the fairytale she's expecting. The lyrics in the chorus: "You're just like my Ken and Barbie Doll/ In a plastic world of make-believe/ You're just like my Ken and Barbie Doll/ You know he's just gonna leave" are a heartbreaking, pessimistic take on marriage. The disheartening lyrics with the upbeat tune is an interesting juxtaposition. The chorus can feel repetitive but it strongly conveys the theme of the song. I love "Hey You". The message and the diverse array of instruments are breathtaking.

<https://youtu.be/2gycPi5eLXU?si=3BA6KDopCuLKPLNE> ("Hey You" audio)

<https://youtu.be/-uKQicNbppc?si=TORVjDSgU43WQDJv> (No Doubt performing "Hey You" live)

## "Sixteen" - 9/10

"Sixteen", like many of the songs on this album, has an iconic beginning. The passionate voice of Gwen Stefani and the intro riff combine together to create a powerful start to an amazing song. Then reggae-esque keyboards come in and Gwen begins telling the story her and Tony wrote together. "Sixteen" is about being in between adulthood and childhood. It's about the confusion of growing up as well as the rage teenagers feel towards authority figures because of the lack of respect they give. The interlude has a cheerful strings section while a man's voice says "These

children, they're not really bad, most of them/ Just products of rough neighborhoods and bad family situations" Then an awesome guitar solo plays and the outro begins. My opinion may be biased because it resonates so much but, Sixteen is definitely one of the best songs on this album. There isn't a dull moment throughout the entire song. "Sixteen" is a track I could play on repeat and never get bored because there are so many different unique sections. I adore this song.

<https://youtu.be/JeIXr8VeXkQ?si=Xs9jynM72WbfpQVA> ("Sixteen" audio)

<https://youtu.be/IXfcwS2Rv5M?si=tFx9FV9MZgDdSX2> (No Doubt performing "Sixteen" live)

## "Sunday Morning" - 9/10

"Sunday Morning", written by Tony Kanal as well as Eric and Gwen Stefani, is one of No Doubt's best. The beginning of "Sunday Morning" is awesome. The strong bassline and the drums build beautifully for when the guitar and keyboards come in. Then the vocals and reggae-style keyboards and guitar are placed right after the introduction. This song is about Gwen and Tony's relationship. It's written from the perspective of a woman who describes

how she used to act during her relationship. She explains how she acted clingy while he was more reserved. She expresses how she wanted to swap places with him. She wanted the upper hand in the relationship. Then she realizes that he wants her back



and she has this power that she wanted. This is conveyed in the lines, "You're trying my shoes on for a change/ They look so good but fit so strange" While the song is aimed at Tony, ironically, he's said it's his favourite on the album. The chorus of "Sunday Morning" is enticing. The change in instrumentation adds interest to the song. The bridge has a

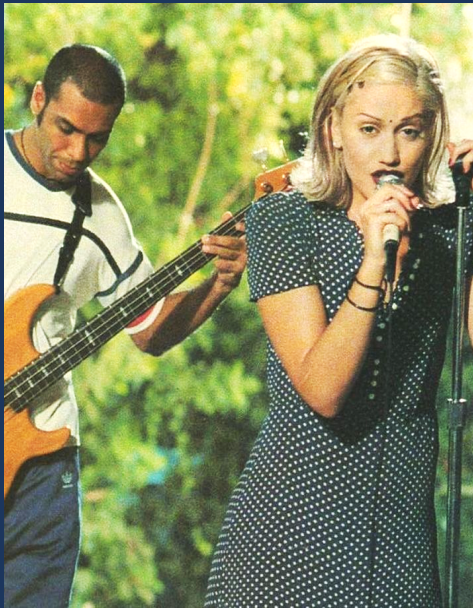
completely unique melody which is completely carried by Gwen's expressive vocalization. The music video is also quite iconic and very well suited for the 90s. I enjoy listening to "Sunday Morning" because the bright sound makes me feel good.



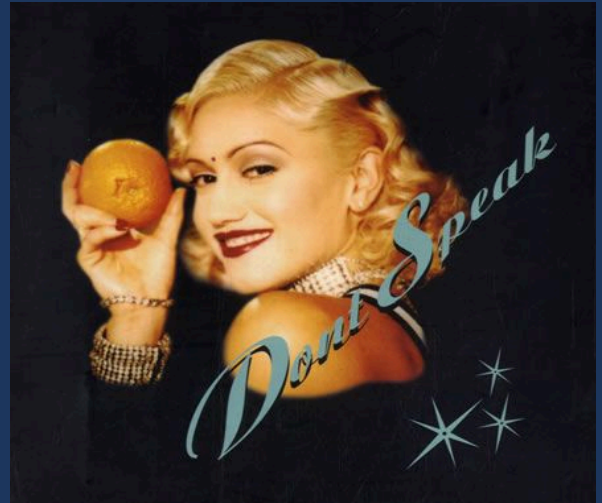
<https://youtu.be/PiBX-ESFDF0?si=qRiklHhAG9YqLD-3> ("Sunday Morning" music video)

## "Don't Speak" - 8/10

"Don't Speak" is arguably No Doubt's most well known song. It is also their most streamed song on Spotify. This song retells the events of a break up. Eric and Gwen Stefani wrote this song based on Gwen's relationship with Tony. In "Don't Speak" Gwen is explaining that she doesn't want Kanal to keep talking. She knows that he's about to break up with her and she doesn't want it to be true. She doesn't want to hear his reasoning because she knows it's only going to hurt her more. This song begins slow and ballad-like and then



builds to a powerful, almost angry tune. Gwen's tone matches these crescendos and decrescendos beautifully. The use of guitar and drums to build up the intensity is brilliant. The instrumentals and the difference between the verses and choruses make for an incredibly well-balanced song. The music video is also perfectly suited for the song. Artsy, yet straightforward. My favourite part of Don't Speak is when Gwen repeats, "I know you're good/ I know you're good/ I know you're real good, oh" Her voice is intoxicating. I also love the fade out to her saying "hush hush darling" I believe "Don't Speak" is popular for a reason. It isn't my favourite No Doubt song, but I still think it's amazing.



<https://youtu.be/TR3Vdo5etCQ?si=puI3glCqm0pEoBWB> ("Don't Speak" music video)

<https://youtu.be/KI1qN12nGng> (No Doubt performing "Don't Speak" on MuchMusic)

## “Tragic Kingdom” - 7/10

“Tragic Kingdom” is the title track of this album. Written by Eric Stefani, “Tragic Kingdom” is a song about the “dark side” of Disneyland. The beginning of the bridge, “Have they lost their heads/ Or are they just all blind mice?” alludes to famous Disney stories as well as conveying the song's central theme. Eric writes about a magical place that has lost its spark. He describes the high prices and even makes references to the conspiracy theories about Walt Disney himself. In the pre-chorus Gwen sings, “They pay homage to a king/ Whose dreams are buried in their minds/ His tears are frozen stiff/ Icicles drip from his eyes” which is clearly referring to the idea that Walt Disney had his body frozen when he died. In the beginning of this song, you can hear theme park background noise in the background and an announcer who tells everybody to “remain seated.” The dark and mystic instrumentals mixed with Gwen’s soft backing vocals as well as her strong lead vocals are epic. The horns in “Tragic Kingdom” are also very well utilized. The entire song feels wicked and moody. The frantic fast paced ending adds to the eerie feel of the song. I like “Tragic Kingdom” because it feels like a piece of art. It’s clever without being too vague. The message is carefully curated and the tone of the music helps convey the message.



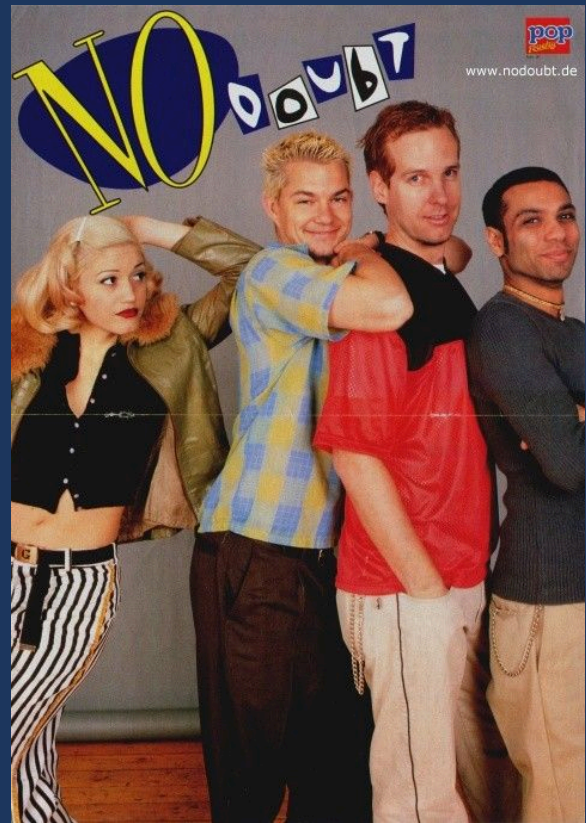
<https://youtu.be/esyqRcEFDVI?si=6ZQSiYPbd3l5NSy> (“Tragic Kingdom” audio)

<https://youtu.be/xwTkMkiI3iI?si=Mr5KUN4z7oOsEea1> (No Doubt performing “Tragic Kingdom” for MuchMusic)

## Significance:

*Tragic Kingdom* was an incredibly popular album upon its release. Less than a year after it was put out, MuchMusic the Universal Music Group and HMV worked together with No Doubt to do a promotional event for the album. The band performed in Toronto in the MuchMusic studios and afterwards they answered questions about *Tragic Kingdom*. The entire live segment was shown in HMV stores all over the world which encouraged fans to ask questions to the video jockeys at MuchMusic. The whole promotion attempt was highly successful. *Tragic Kingdom's* record sales doubled within the week. It was so successful that the organizers were campaigning for the Guinness Book of World Records to produce a new bracket for the largest virtual in-store promotion. This event combined with No Doubt performing at the Warped Tour in 1995 are both amazing examples of how it grew to popularity. Having a foundation of their other two albums was helpful, and their label knew how to market the band.

With this grand-scale audience, *Tragic Kingdom* helped contribute to the revival of ska punk music. While No Doubt may not have been as respected as Rancid or Less Than Jake in the ska punk rock community, there's no question that *Tragic Kingdom* didn't further the ska punk fad of the 90s. While new wave and grunge was taking over and stealing the spotlight from these reggae punk type bands, No Doubt helped keep the genre alive. No Doubt was popular for a reason and while many music nerds tend to look down on bands that acquire mainstream success, that doesn't discredit their brilliance or their impact on musicians everywhere.



(No Doubt performing on MuchMusic)

<https://youtu.be/xwTkMkiI3iI?si=Mr5KUN4z7oOsEea1>

<https://youtu.be/KI1qN12nGng>



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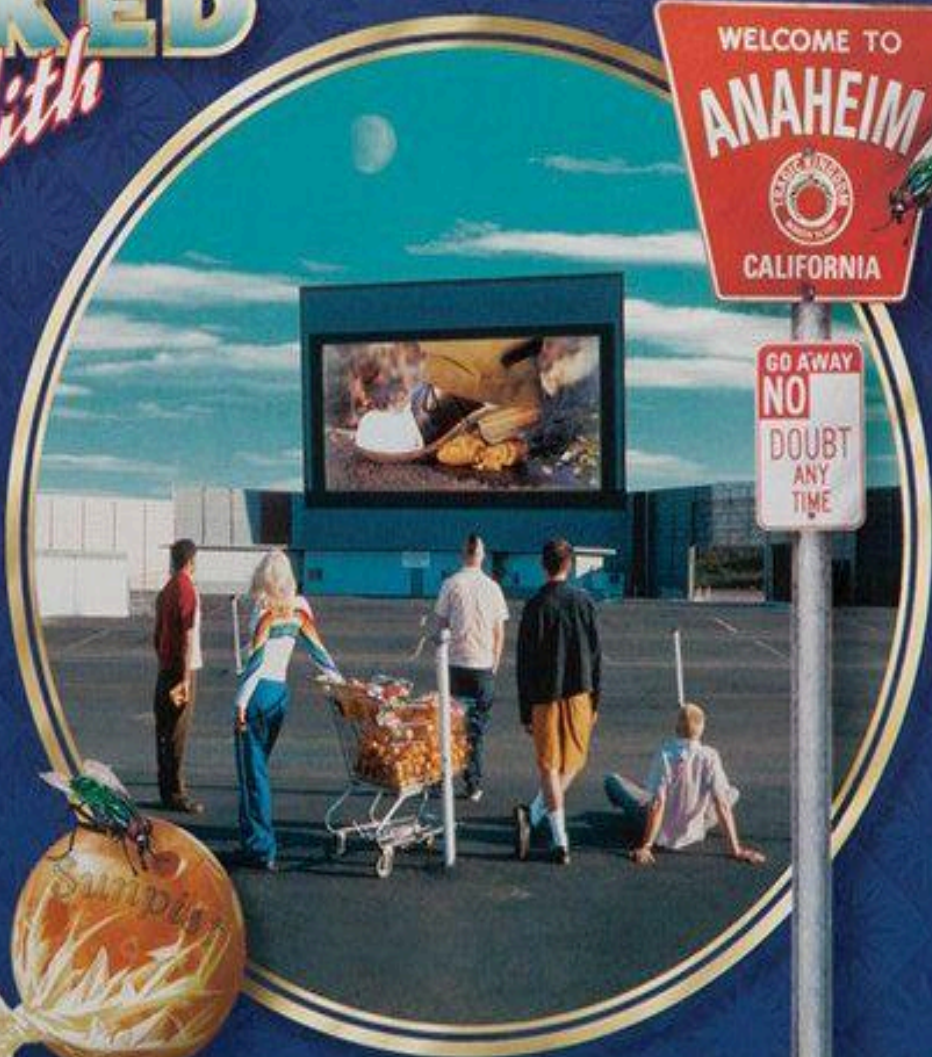
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