

FROCK STEADY

Gwen Stefani on remixing her tunes and reinventing her style

It's actually an honour to be on one of those fashion-police pages in the tabloids. Even the bad ones," says Gwen Stefani, while talking to *FLARE* during her Canadian press visit for her sophomore album, *The Sweet Escape* (she's returning this spring to tour). "I strive to make it onto the worst-dressed page. I mean, who makes these fashion rules up, anyway? And why would you want to be regular and mainstream?" This seems like a fair question coming from someone who first broke onto the music scene in 1995 with an unconventional skater/ska/surf look that definitely did

not coincide with the prom-polished chart toppers of the time (namely, Mariah and Celine). Thankfully, not much has changed and Gwen's Harajuku-loving tastes are still far from typical pop star (her latest video, for "Sweet Escape," has her sporting prison-striped gowns and bodysuits). When it comes to whom she depends on for inspiration—music- and fashion-wise—it's clear she no longer worships at the church of Madonna: "I think Björk is the most stylish chick ever. Anybody who I think is cool thinks she's cool." It's no wonder. *The Sweet Escape* would make Björk proud, as the disc is chock-full with sonic eccentricities—mixing hip-hop beats (courtesy of producer

Pharrell Williams) with bizarre pop samples (from *The Sound of Music's* fräulein Maria) and pairing sweet verses drenched in '80s synthesizers à la New Order in songs such as "Yummy," "Early Winter" and "Wonderful Life." The latter track—co-written by Linda Perry—dives into Stefani's romantic past, and Stefani cites it as a tribute to "a lost love" that ended tragically. "It was written for my first boyfriend, who later committed suicide," she says. "He turned me on to bands like Depeche Mode and The Cure, so it was amazing to write a song for him and to have Martin Gore [Depeche Mode's lead songwriter] play on it. If my ex were alive to hear it, he would be flipping out." We sure are.