

**GUITAR  
WOMAN**

"Trying to explain creativity is like talking about love. As soon as you start, you've formed a new opinion."



# Deeper Into the Groove

Madonna 2000:  
On life at home,  
Guy Ritchie,  
and her cutting-  
edge new sound

By **Jancee Dunn**

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HOW ME A PERSON WHO IS UNINTERESTED IN Madonna, and I'll show you a liar. Oh, sure, a few years ago it became fashionable to say that "Madge," as she is known in England, was over. Then she put out 1998's quadruple-platinum *Ray of Light*, which garnered a Grammy and a slew of MTV Video Music Awards (handily beating out barely-legals like Fiona Apple and Brandy). † It is fair to say that Madonna will always be perched on the cusp of pop culture – particularly after the release of *Music*, a potent distillation of Euro dance beats and her own restless energy. This time around, Paris-based electronica wizard Mirwais

was at the boards, and the result is an edgier, funkier affair than William Orbit's lush, ethereal *Ray of Light*. † *Music* is an exuberant whirl of French disco, giddy pop and an intriguing alloy of folk and electronica, best showcased on Mirwais' favorite track, "I Deserve It," a spare love song that features Madonna's unadorned vocals against a backdrop of electronic squiggles. "She try a lot of things with her voice, but never the dry voice," says Mirwais in his

thick French accent. "I never touch reverb. The first time, she was afraid, honestly, of that. I think sometimes a lot of people are afraid of their own voice, you know? But it was amazing."

The 39-year-old producer – who is all but unknown on these shores – got the Call last year, after Madonna heard his demo via her Maverick Records partner, Guy Oseary. "She took a big risk with someone like me," Mirwais says. "When you arrive at that kind of level of celebrity, you can just work in the mainstream and just stay there. Everything she do, for her is like a challenge, and I like this kind of personality." Orbit, who was back at the helm for three of the album's tracks, feels that Madonna doesn't get the proper credit for her musical chops. "At the Grammys, it was a little implicit that there was a guy behind it all, and she's the chick," he says. "The one with all the equipment is assumed to be pressing all the buttons. She presses all the buttons." He is thoughtful for a second. "You know, she hasn't shouted about her musical abilities, but she is the consummate songwriter," he says. "She listens to classic musicals a lot. Not just the obvious ones, like *Singin' in the Rain*, but...things your mums and dads watch – she's into it all. And she writes really solid, melodic stuff like that."

We join Madonna in her office at Maverick Records in Los Angeles, which is scented with Votivo candles. Moby's *Play* can be heard in another room. The walls are hung with an array of photos: Noel Coward, Jimi Hendrix, John Coltrane and the late artist Jean-Michel Basquiat, a friend of Madonna's from her New York days in the early Eighties.

During our chat, Madonna is very pregnant with her second child, little Rocco, whose father is British filmmaker Guy Ritchie, the 31-year-old director of *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* and Madonna's current boyfriend. Her claims of being a "fat whale" are not exactly accurate – even her pregnancy seems compact and well-designed. She wears loose black drawstring trousers, a white tank top underneath a white short-sleeved shirt, diamond Cartier hoop earrings and some hip Nike orange-and-white slides that are not available to the public yet. She has creamy skin, very light-blue eyes and longish hair with blond streaks framing her face. Perhaps unsurprisingly, she also has a firm handshake.

**NOBODY'S PERFECT**

In 2000: "People buying records are teens. I hope people like my music."

"Is she nice?" you ask. Yes, she is. Thank Christ. ("She smells fear, like a dog," warns an acquaintance of hers, "so don't show it, even if you're feeling it.") She's funny as well, and refreshingly honest. She's just like you and me, only she's the most famous person in the world and she's worth \$613 million. Without further ado: Madonna, who is gingerly easing her pregnant self into a blue-and-white-striped chair.

*How's your health? Is everything going well?*

Yeah. I'm in the final stretch, where I can't get out of chairs and beds without lots of effort. And I feel like... I'm a whale.



Oh, please.

I know. Everyone says, "But you're pregnant." But the thing is, it still feels strange. And the more incapacitated you get, the more ridiculous you feel. You hold on to things to get yourself in and out of cars – you know, things that you perceive as weak and vulnerable. I'm not good at being those things [laughs].

I'm seeing more pregnancy photos of you than there were the first go-round.

To tell you the truth, it's because I've spent so much of my pregnancy in London, where every time I walked out my door I got photographed. So I would prefer to not be photographed so much, if you must know. I mean...ugh. I don't want to see pictures of me in my underwear, eight months pregnant, on the front page of the newspapers – but there's nothing I can do about it.

All right – let's talk about your new album. "Ray of Light" was introspective and mystical. This one seems like a burst of pent-up emotion and energy.

Absolutely. The last album was much more introspective.

For the most part, I finished *Ray of Light*, came out here to L.A. and prepared for a film, made the film, and then I pretty much went to England and spent most of my time there just writing for the record. So I haven't really been out there, and I haven't really done much. I do my work privately, and take care of my daughter, and try to be a decent girlfriend. These are all kinds of quiet, introverted things. So I think that the whole waiting-to-be-sprung feeling is sort of bubbling under the surface and reflects in a lot of the music.

How did you find Mirwais?

Guy Oseary, my partner here. But a lot of times I'll get stuff, and I'll go, "Oh, my God – this is amazing. I want to work with this person." That's what happened when I heard Mirwais' demo for his own album. I heard it and was just like, "This is the sound of the future. I must meet this person." So I did, and we hit it off. And that's exactly how it happened with William Orbit, too.

There are so many effects on your album. How do you know when to call it quits?

Because I just put my foot down and go, "It's good enough now. We're done. We're done working on it." He could just sit there in front of his computer screen, changing, honing, editing, cutting, pasting – whatever. And it would never end. But life is too short for that sort of nonsense.

My persona in the studio is, "I'm in a hurry." So I have a tendency to annoy everybody with that. I think at first he was a bit put off by it. I think he was more put off by the fact that I knew what I wanted so clearly, and I wasn't interested in lots of embellishments when it came to the production. Because *Ray of Light* was so multilayered in that way, sort of dense with sound. And I wanted to do the opposite.

In songs like "I Deserve It," in fact, your voice is completely unadorned.

At first I was disturbed by it, because I hadn't done that in a long time. But then I

started to see the purity of it, the juxtaposition of the rawness of my voice with the really overprocessed synthesizer sounds. And I started seeing that it was a nice marriage.

Did William feel like his toes were stepped on a bit because he wasn't completely in charge this time around?

I told him I was probably going to work with other people. The last thing I wanted to do was a repeat. And the funny thing is, I remember when I was mastering the album in London with Mirwais, I was afraid to play him the stuff I had done with William and Guy Sigsworth. I thought, "Oh, he's not going to think it's cool," and I was cringing and waiting until the last moment. And I played it for him. He looked at me and said, "I'm so jealous." And I was like, "Oh, good!" Because I want the producers to be mutually jealous of each other. That's a good sign, don't you think?

Absolutely. Can you take me through the specifics of writing one of the songs? "Nobody's Perfect," for example. [She rolls her eyes.] What's with the eye-rolling?

I'm sorry. Oh, God. Because I hate explaining stuff like that – really.

Why?

I don't know. I think it's good to be mysterious. Creativity is sometimes unconscious, subconscious, conscious – and often it's a mixture of all three. And to try to explain it sometimes – it's like talking about love, you know? As soon as you start talking about it, you've formed a new opinion about it, and it's obsolete....

But I need something here. How about telling me the most out-there source of inspiration for a song?

OK. The song "Music," the hook of the song – "Music makes people come together/And music makes the bourgeoisie and the rebel" – do you know where I got that idea?

I do not.

At a Sting concert. Weird, isn't it? OK. I went to see him in New York at the Beacon Theatre. He has a pretty mixed audience – I always look at audiences when I go to concerts. I'm obsessed with checking out the audience and seeing how they react. And people were pretty well-behaved and enthusiastically polite for stuff that he was doing off his new album.

But then, when he did the old Police songs – and it was just him and a guitar, and the lights came down – somehow the energy in the room changed. It ignited the room, and it brought everybody closer to the stage. And suddenly, people lost their inhibition and their politeness, and everyone was singing the songs and practically holding hands – you know what I mean? It really moved me. And I thought, "That's what music does to people." And so that's how I came to the hook of that song.

"Music" was leaked on Napster. Any thoughts?

They downloaded a portion of "Music" before I'd even mixed it. It was astonishing. I have no idea how they got it....So, basically, my manager made a public statement saying,

“Everyone thought I was a freak [as a teen]: I was confrontational, didn't shave under my arms, no makeup.”

#### Dive Deeper

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#### MATERIAL MOM

(1) Celebrating herself, circa 1980: "I was a football player's nightmare," she said about her high school days.

(2) With her daughter, Lourdes, age two, in New York's Central Park, 1999.

(3) A scene from the video for "Music," 2000 (from left, animated renditions of Debi Mazar, Madonna, Niki Haris). The song hit Number One on the U.K. charts. In the video, they ride in a limo chauffeured by (4) British comedian Sacha Baron Cohen, who portrays his infamous alter ego Ali G. "You can't not have fun with him," said Madonna.



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“Anything that you’re hearing on Napster, or anything on any other website, is unfinished product.” Simple as that. And then suddenly it was in every headline: “Madonna is against Napster.” I mean... I don’t take that sort of a stance. I feel covetous about my work, and I don’t want people to hear it until it’s finished. At the same time, I think, to a certain extent, the trading of information is inevitable. And, on the other hand, Napster could be a great way for people to hear your music who wouldn’t have the chance to hear it on the radio. So that’s what I have to say about that. Really, I want to strangle the person who got hold of it. I don’t know – I can’t control everybody [laughs].

Your video for “Music” looked like a good time, with your old friends Debi Mazar and Niki Haris as your entourage.

The thing is, at first I tried just doing it with some girls that they were gonna cast, and I didn’t feel comfortable. All the pretty model-type girls were too stiff. So I said, “OK, I’m gonna call my girls.” I literally called them on the day of the shoot, and I said, “What are you guys doing? Please save me!”

And you were fairly pregnant at the time? You can’t even tell.

Five and a half. Yeah, you can. As you can see, I’ve got my coat shut half the time. And that was the idea. It’s like, “Where could I be sitting all the time? OK, I’m in a limo” [laughs]. And you can’t not have fun with Ali G around, ‘cause he’s such a troublemaker. And he’s always goofing on everybody, in character. He just had us rolling the entire time we were shooting... Have you seen his show in England? You have to see it. You will die.

I was discussing you with your publicist, Liz Rosenberg. The first thing she said about you was that you are not extravagant.

This is true. I mean, I appreciate it in other people. Like when I go to the Versaces’ homes and see the way wealthy people live, I think, “I know I can live that way, but it wouldn’t come natural to me.” But I do appreciate that people can sort of go full-bore and get into it and live a super, glamorous, decadent life. And have gold faucets and statues everywhere. I do appreciate beautiful things, and I have nice things in my house – nice art, and I like Frette linens and all that stuff. But I just don’t – I don’t have to show off. I like to show off when I’m onstage. I don’t like to show off, like, “Come in and check it out. Look how rich I am.” That’s not my style.

Why?

Because I’m just a middle-class girl from Michigan. It’s just not in me.

Was there serious wealth in your town when you were growing up?

Yeah, and I hated those people. Because they had nice clothes and cool cars and cute boyfriends. I just wore the same brown corduroy bell-bottoms every day and felt terribly unfashionable.

You say you were kind of a weirdo. But I’ve seen cheerleader photos of you where you looked like a football player’s wet dream.

Are you kidding? I was so not – I was a football player’s nightmare. Everyone thought I was a freak. They didn’t go out with me. I only got the weirdos. Because I didn’t shave under my arms, and I didn’t wear makeup, and I was really confrontational. And I just didn’t know how to play the game. My sister Paula and I formed this pact, and we decided we were just not going to do anything conventional. I think we read too many Carson McCullers novels or something. It didn’t go over very well – with the football players, anyway.

What was your worst high school job?

I had to clean houses. It was gross. I had to clean the toilet bowls of boys I went to school with. No, there’s nothing more degrading than being someone’s housekeeper. I mean, God bless my housekeeper and – well, all my housekeepers.

You have said that when you met Guy, at a dinner at Sting and Trudie Styler’s house, you had an immediate reaction to him. How about him? Did he have designs on you?

Well, he later told me that he never would have come to the party if I wasn’t gonna be there. So he had something on his mind. I mean, I don’t think he had spending his life with me, or having a baby with me, on his mind. But I think he was curious to meet me – definitely.

What attracted you? Was he confident?

Very, very confident. In fact, I was very taken by his confidence. He is very sort of... cocky, but in a self-aware way. So it was very funny. Like, “You play your cards right, kid, and maybe I’ll put you in one of my movies” type of thing [laughs]. He was kid-

ding. But I thought he was really sweet.

What were the last three CDs you listened to?

The soundtrack to *Big Night*. I think I listened to that last night, because my boyfriend likes to cook to it. You know that song? [Sings] “Hey, mambo, mambo Italiano.”

Right.

It’s a big favorite in our house. That and a Leftfield CD. And there’s a CD called – well, Jason Bentley is this DJ who works for us at Maverick, and he put a compilation of things together for me from this label called Naked Music, a small label in San Francisco. And I couldn’t even tell you who they all were, but it’s just really cool. There’s a singer called Lisa Shaw, I know that. She sings on a track called “Always,” I think? It’s so cool.

What do you think about the musical landscape right now in America?

[Smirks] Thinking does not really come into the picture.

When is the reign of teen pop going to end? It always goes in cycles, but...



THE GUY IN HER LIFE

“[Ritchie] told me that he never would have come to the party [where we met] if I wasn’t gonna be there.”

But can a reaction hurry up, please? Will someone just start puking? Can we have some version of the punk-music movement again?

In the meantime, the current crop is still hanging on.

What – kiddie bands? I hope not much longer. We always talk about it at our house. Because there are so many great people in the music business who are languishing right now. Especially a lot of the great English bands. You talk to the guys from Massive Attack, or Tricky, or Goldie or any of those people – it’s like there’s no outlet for any of their music. Record companies don’t know what to do with them. I mean, the only people buying records are teenagers. God, it’s depressing. I mean, I hope people like my music.

Please. You know they will.

Listen, I swear to you – I don’t know anything. It’s a slippery slide to get on. And I keep my fingers crossed. I have the best intentions. I worked hard, that’s all I can do, you know?

It’s an interesting visual, your album nestled amid all the dreck in the Top 10.

I know. Well... who knows? I mean, I’ve been told I have inspired Christina Aguilera and Britney Spears [rolls her eyes]. So maybe it’s not so strange that I could be in the mix of them.

Let’s move on to leisure-time activities. What’s the last movie you rented?

We don’t rent that many movies, we just get them.

“I mean, I’ve been told that I have inspired Christina Aguilera and Britney Spears [rolls her eyes].”

You being Madonna and all.

You’re gonna laugh when I tell you what movie we saw last. Out with it!

Next Friday.

The Ice Cube movie?

Well, Guy liked the first *Friday*, so, whatever. You know, we trade off. I don’t mind. I’m not a snob. And now I’m gonna force him to watch one of my dark, depressing, artsy-fartsy movies.

So it’s *Next Friday* one night, *The Exterminating Angel* the next, then *Caddyshack*. And then we’ll watch, you know, *Rocco and His Brothers*. Actually, he enjoyed that – I was shocked. That’s a really good, salty film. It’s got a lot of guys in it. It’s a real male-bonding movie, so he could relate. They fight each other a lot.

Can you ever sneak away to a movie and sit in the back?

I did. We went to see *Me, Myself and Irene* the other night, in Hollywood.

You don’t have any film work coming up that we should know about, right?

No. I can’t find a script that I like. They all suck. I always get sent scripts with femme-fatale parts. And lately I’m just getting all the scripts about mothers with children. With truculent teenage daughters and stuff. Boring! I’m still a truculent teenage daughter.

When was the last time you were completely alone?

When I was in Greece recently. I kayaked out into the middle of the sea and just kept going and going and going. Pretty

soon, I looked around and I couldn’t see anything. I thought, “Oh, my God – I’m alone. I’m really alone.” It was an incredible feeling. Just floating around. Wondering if there were any sharks.

How long had it been? There’s always someone in your sphere, right?

Yeah. I don’t know, 20 years. In the morning, you have coffee, then go on the computer for a few hours, e-mailing people.

Then where will we find you?

Um... in the kitchen, eating [laughs]. Reading more magazines. Just being a slob, really.

You have to be reveling in it just a little bit.

No. I have become... useless [laughs]. I’m moving, so my days are completely filled with, like, choosing fabrics for curtains – which I also sometimes feel really psychically disturbed by. I don’t want to choose lighting fixtures. But I have to, because I want to live in a house that is an expression of me. [Sighs] And I get to the end of my day sometimes, and I think, “OK. I’m pregnant. I’m fat. I can’t exercise, can’t wear cool clothes. I don’t feel like dancing. And there’s absolutely nothing remotely cool or cutting-edge about me right now. I’ve become a domesticated cow. I just choose fabrics!” [Laughs] OK? That’s it. And it’s very disturbing. Sometimes [voice gets wavery] I burst into tears thinking about it. So that’s about it.

That’s a taste of what you might have been.

No, I know – I know it’s temporary. But, still, it’s a funny place to find yourself in, when you think of yourself as having some kind of revolutionary spirit.

I read that you go to Disneyland with your daughter, and to play groups, and the Discovery Center, and so forth.

No, I don’t. Who said that? I went to Disneyland once. I go to places with my daughter, but I don’t go to those places. My nanny goes there. I’m more apt to do things like take-my-daughter-to-work situations. I drag her shopping with me to choose lighting fixtures, or—

Does she have opinions on the lighting fixtures?

She has opinions on everything. We do more sophisticated things together – and I leave the play-group shit to somebody else [laughs]. I mean, eww.

You’ve mentioned that you feel insecure sometimes. When was the last time that you actually felt insecure?

I feel insecure every five minutes. What are you talking about? Every time I look at myself in the mirror, I panic. Every time I see some horrible picture of myself in the newspaper, where I look like a whale. I mean, now I do. I feel really insecure about my body. I think all women do when they’re pregnant.

Let’s get specific here. Say you come across some old photos of a boyfriend’s ex. Do you make mean comments?

No, I never want to give away my power that much.

But you do feel a twinge.

Well, there’s a whole thing that happens. First I go [gasps], “Oh, she’s skinny and pretty.” [She grins wickedly] Then I think, “Oh, but I’m me.”