

= Early Winter =

" Early Winter " is a song by American singer and songwriter Gwen Stefani from her second solo studio album , The Sweet Escape (2006) . Written by Stefani and English pianist Tim Rice @-@ Oxley , the song was released in Europe as the album 's fifth and final single on January 18 , 2008 by Interscope Records . Musically , " Early Winter " is a soft rock and synthpop ballad with new wave influences . Critics found it similar to songs by English alternative rock band Keane . The lyrics of the song describe the nearing of the end of a relationship , and were speculated to be references to Stefani 's own relationship with husband Gavin Rossdale .

Upon its release , " Early Winter " received generally positive reviews from music critics , many of whom commended Stefani 's vocal delivery and the song 's emotional appeal . The song charted on only a few record charts , but performed well in Germany and Slovakia , where it peaked at number six on the singles and airplay chart , respectively . An accompanying music video for " Early Winter " was directed by Sophie Muller and was filmed in destinations like Budapest , Milan , and Prague . It contains scenes of Stefani in a palace @-@ like hall in various gowns and at railway stations . " Early Winter " was included in the setlist of The Sweet Escape Tour , and the performances featured a special coda section delivered by American musician and bassist Gail Ann Dorsey .

= = Background = =

" Early Winter " was written by Tim Rice @-@ Oxley , pianist of English alternative rock band Keane , and Gwen Stefani for the latter 's second solo studio album The Sweet Escape (2006) . The production of the song was handled by Nellee Hooper . Before working with Oxley in the studio , Stefani called him to discuss some of her ideas behind a potential song , saying " I wanted a ballad . I wanted to write ' Eyes Without a Face ' or ' Killing Me Softly ' or ' Time After Time , ' and he was like , ' OK , Cyndi Lauper , got it , ' like he was taking my order . " In the studio , Oxley played " Early Winter " on a piano , and after hearing the song , Stefani approved of it and commented that " It was so beautiful and addictive . I didn 't really attack it because it was kind of done , lyrics and everything . " After letting the song " sit with her for a bit " , she rewrote some of the lyrics .

Stefani was the first artist Oxley wrote a song for outside of Keane , and the singer remarked that " he 's like Clark Kent @-@ subtle , but Superman @-@ talented . I 'm lucky I was his first , because I 'm sure he 's going to go write with lots of girls after me . " Oxley would later collaborate with artists like Australian singer Kylie Minogue , and in an interview he talked about working with her and Stefani , saying " I 've been very lucky to work with people at the top of the industry . Both were very talented and more creative than I think they ? re given credit for . They ? re both very good writers and singers and they both work so hard , just grafting the whole time . Honing those pop sensibilities through writing with them was good fun " .

= = Composition and release = =

Musically , " Early Winter " is a " sleek , surging " soft rock and synthpop ballad . Similar to Stefani 's work with her band No Doubt , it is highly influenced by new wave music . Clark Collis from Entertainment Weekly termed it a " tortured and not un @-@ Keane @-@ like lament " . The lyrics of " Early Winter " are based on issues related to the end of a relationship , and Jennifer Vineyard from MTV described them to be " poignant lyrics about a couple recognizing the beginning of the end " . In the song , Stefani metaphorically compares the end of her relationship with her partner to falling leaves . It was speculated that the song was a reference to Stefani 's own relationship with English musician and husband Gavin Rossdale . " Early Winter " was chosen as the fifth and final single from The Sweet Escape , and was released in Europe as a CD single on January 25 , 2008 by Interscope Records . It was made available for digital download on the iTunes Store on January 18 .

= = Reception = =

= = = Critical response = = =

The song received generally positive reviews from music critics . Andy Battaglia from The A.V. Club praised Stefani 's vocal delivery , saying her " nasal voice suits the whiny sentiment of the subject matter " and opining that she " sounds most commanding in songs that flirt with blush @-@ making drappiness " . Nick Levine from Digital Spy rated " Early Winter " four out of five stars , and complimented its emotional nature , naming it a " forgotten classic from an eighties movie soundtrack " and deeming it " the most affecting moment of Stefani 's solo career to date " . John Murphy from MusicOMH called the song " rather nice " and appreciated its lyrical content , although he commented that " it does sound like Stefani covering a Keane song " . Alex Miller from NME complimented Oxley 's involvement in " Early Winter " and singled it out as " one of the few potential hits " from The Sweet Escape . Mark Pytlik from Pitchfork Media picked " Early Winter " as one of the highlights from the album and favoured Stefani 's vocal delivery , noting that the song " proves that Stefani still has the ability to elevate an otherwise ordinary rock song to another level " . Sal Cinquemani from Slant Magazine complimented " Early Winter " for being " less forced and much less self @-@ conscious " in comparison to the rest of the songs on The Sweet Escape , and felt that " it 's refreshing to hear Stefani in her more natural habitat " .

= = = Commercial performance = = =

" Early Winter " had limited chart success , and appeared on only a few charts . It narrowly missed charting inside the top twenty of the Austrian Singles Chart by peaking at number twenty @-@ two , although it stayed on the chart for nineteen weeks . " Early Winter " debuted and peaked at number six on the German Singles Chart , becoming Stefani 's second highest @-@ peaking single in the region , alongside " The Sweet Escape " (2006) . It spent fourteen weeks on the German chart . The song failed to chart on the Hungarian Singles Chart , but managed to peak at number seventeen on the airplay chart . " Early Winter " entered the Slovak Airplay Chart at number 95 and peaked at number six , and spent a total of thirty @-@ nine weeks on the chart . After debuting at number fifty @-@ two on the Swiss Singles Chart , it ascended to number twelve and spent a total of twenty weeks on the chart .

= = Promotion = =

An accompanying music video for " Early Winter " was directed by Stefani 's frequent collaborator Sophie Muller , who had previously directed the music videos of " Cool " and " Wind It Up " . Filming of the music video took place at destinations like Budapest , Milan , and Prague , where Stefani had been touring during The Sweet Escape Tour in 2007 . It opens with a black @-@ and @-@ white scene of Stefani lying on the ground in a long white gown . In the next scene , Stefani is shown walking on the street under red street lights and then holds her love interest , played by her tour backup dancer Steelo Vazquez , against the wall and talks to him . The scene then changes to Stefani walking on a street and later walking into the railway station . In the next scene , Stefani is seen singing under falling red @-@ coloured feathers in a huge palace @-@ type hall . Scenes of Stefani staring at herself in the mirror with her hair up and snow falling slowly down , with the lights turning on and off intermittently , are interspersed throughout the video . Stefani is also seen sitting on the ground and singing while crying . She is then shown at a railway station walking besides a moving train . The video ends with Stefani running out of the hall . Tamar Anitai from MTV Buzzworthy praised the video for being " acutely artful , immeasurably stylish " and commented that " Gwen ? s managed to raise the bar on her own superlatively supreme style in her new video . "

" Early Winter " was included on the setlist of The Sweet Escape 's promotional tour of the same name . The performance of the song included a coda section , which was delivered by American musician and bassist Gail Ann Dorsey . Joan Anderman from The Boston Globe regarded " Early

Winter " as a " winsome anthem " and Dorsey 's coda performance " thrilling " .

= = Track listing = =

CD single and digital download

" Early Winter " (Album Version) ? 4 : 44

" Early Winter " (Live) ? 6 : 53

= = Personnel = =

Credits adapted from the liner notes of The Sweet Escape .

= = Charts = =