

B O N N I E R A I T T

Conversation between a couple overheard at a recent Bonnie Raitt concert: She: "Right now, I can't think of anyone else I'd rather be than Bonnie Raitt."

He: "Right now, I can't think of anyone else I'd want you to—"

She: "Finish that sentence and you're a dead man!"

That exchange pretty much says it all about Bonnie Raitt's appeal—she is the undisputed queen of cool. The daughter of actor/singer John Raitt, Bonnie was brought up a Quaker and drawn to folk music and political activism during the Sixties. Since forgoing her senior year at Radcliffe to "hang out with old blues guys," she has been charming her way into the hearts of men and women alike for almost 20 years, singing soulful ballads, playing kick-ass slide guitar and staying politically active. After being dropped by Warner Bros. and after waging a successful battle with the bottle a few years back, Bonnie, at 39, re-emerged this year with a new release on Capitol, "Nick of Time," which critics are hailing as her breakthrough album. Paul Engleman and Articles Editor John Rezek caught up with Bonnie in Chicago. They report that she is as smart and sweet and salty in person as she seems on stage. And, if possible, even cooler.

1.

PLAYBOY: You grew up in Los Angeles and attended Radcliffe. So how did you acquire your down-home charm?

**we consult
the redheaded
blues singer on
dimples, the
appeal of tall
men and the
sensuous allure
of a woman
with a
microphone in
her hand**

RAITT: I'm basically a child of the era I grew up in. I listened to popular music that was out at the time, which included early rock and roll and, when I was ten or eleven, the folk-music craze that was sweeping colleges across the East. I went to camp in the Adirondacks every summer and most of my cultural imprinting was done there. I didn't like beach-party music and that scene or the Republicanism that was in L.A. My dad being in the business but

not of it, my family had values different from those of the typical showbiz family, and that worked for me. I was also a redhead in a town of people who got tan.

In terms of my personality, geez, I've been like this since I was a little kid. My dad's naturally very down to earth and very funky and my mom is, too, so we kind of felt like the Beverly Hillbillies. We were pretty down-home folks living in Coldwater Canyon.

2.

PLAYBOY: You're noted for your political activism. Why is it that you don't write or record political songs?

RAITT: The songs I sing are real political. They're just political about men and women. How we treat one another is where politics starts—how we treat one another as nations and vis-à-vis those less fortunate than we are.

3.

PLAYBOY: How good a guitarist is Lee Atwater?

RAITT: I have no idea and I couldn't care less. It's really sad that the best offer those rhythm-and-blues people got this year was from the Republicans. I'm on the board of the Rhythm & Blues Foundation, and we're working really hard to get the pioneers of rhythm and blues more work and some health insurance. The best thing that's come out of that so far is the show for Lee Atwater. So any rhythm-and-blues fan is better than no rhythm-and-blues fan, but the irony was not lost on me.

4.

PLAYBOY: With all the critical acclaim you get for your singing, do you feel as though your guitar playing goes unappreciated?

RAITT: I'm not that famous one way or the other. It just happens that not many women play slide guitar. It's been treated as a gimmick, and that part of it I find amusing. I'm grateful it got me in the door, if that's what sets me apart. Playing slide guitar is the thing that gets attached to my name, so I'm proud of it.

5.

PLAYBOY: How do you react when you realize that every guy in the audience wants you to be his girlfriend?

RAITT: It's great that people like me on whatever level they like me. I present a pretty healthy role model for having a

good time. I'm comfortable being as sensuous and as sexual as I am, and I'm both of those things when I'm playing my music. I don't think it comes off in a silly or frivolous or exploitative way.

Men get titillated by the sexuality that women singers, especially jazz and blues singers, sing about, but they're not sitting in the audience wishing they were on top of me—I don't think. I'm not threatening. I'm not one of those gorgeous women other women get jealous of when they bring their boyfriends to see me. I could be like a really good friend to them and they know it.

6.

PLAYBOY: What do women know about men that men don't know about themselves?

RAITT: Oh, boy, something I can sink my teeth into here! Well, the great men do know this about themselves and they pick women who know they know about it: Men like to be nurtured and cared for, and that doesn't necessarily sacrifice their strengths. That doesn't mean they don't have a healthy relationship with their own mothers or that they want to lay their head on your chest all the time. One of the most charming sides of men, even wonderfully complex men, is the one that lets us be almost motherly. There are things men like to have done to them that would probably surprise other men if those other men didn't also like the same things. That's something they don't communicate to one another.

7.

PLAYBOY: What behavior of women should be automatically forgiven?

RAITT: I tend to think in terms of people, not men and women. To me, the business about "Oh, I better stay out of your way because it's that time of month" is almost the worst thing you could send up.

And men don't know that they have the same cycles. They have similar periods when they're irrationally cranky and the smallest problem seems huge. There are times when I wish I could just look at a calendar and tell when this time was going to be. A certain amount of that irritability and hormonal ruckus should be forgiven with regularity.

8.

PLAYBOY: On the subject of men, who need not apply?

RAITT: Men who don't like women, overly

macho—read insecure—insensitive and self-important bores. How's that? People who aren't culturally and politically well rounded.

In terms of me personally, a similarity of taste in music and politics would be pretty important, as would a sense of humor. Looks would be way down there, though I like tall men. [Laughs] That's not a priority. I mean, a brain and two legs will do. I just get moony over really tall men, for some reason.

9.

PLAYBOY: Considering that your father is an actor, did you ever have aspirations to become an actress or perform in the theater?

RAITT: Yeah. I wanted to be a serious actress when I was eleven or twelve and I used to be in plays. I would have loved to do more theater in college if I hadn't started hanging out with all these blues guys and got distracted in a great way. I'd love to act if I would be good at it. I'm very comfortable in front of an audience, but I don't feel real comfortable in front of a camera, because I'm kind of funky-looking. That's why I asked Dennis Quaid to play my boyfriend in my video, to have somebody to play off of and somebody there who could help me get through it.

10.

PLAYBOY: How tall is Dennis Quaid?

RAITT: How *young* is more like it. He's very young. He has a girlfriend. And Dennis Quaid is just tall enough, thank you.

11.

PLAYBOY: Men in their anger have called women many things. Which of those angry descriptions sometimes apply?

RAITT: And you're not going to tell me what they are, are you? Well, it depends on how deep the accusation is. If somebody has acted inconsiderately or is being bitchy for no reason, then we all know that both

men and women get like that. When a man gets angry, it depends on whether his anger comes from a deep-seated resentment toward women in general—his mother, his sister, his previous wife—or whether he's just upset because he really, honestly thinks she knows where his socks are. I mean, "You never want to make love when I want to make love" is different from "You said I could go fishing and now you don't want me to."

12.

PLAYBOY: How good are you on the phone?

RAITT: Very good. I have to be, because I'm separated a lot. I can't wait for picture phones to come in, though. Then I can keep the members of the band out longer, because they won't have to go home as much. It will be great. You can pay a little extra to have a room with a picture phone. You get out your bottle of Oil of No Lay. "What should I wear tonight, dear?"

13.

PLAYBOY: You took up guitar when you were nine years old and soon turned to playing blues. How old were you when you learned what a *mojo* was?

RAITT: I was probably about seventeen. I don't know what the actual gadget is, but I believe it's some sort of little kit that you put together to cast spells. I haven't really been a big student of that stuff, nor do I put my head in those little shops. I kind of look around and go, "Yikes!" and get out of there. We didn't have a whole lot of that stuff in L.A., where I was brought up. I like to keep it kind of mysterious, because it's much more powerful to imagine it. I mean, do I really want to meet Mel Gibson? I don't know. I kind of like him where he is, right in my head.

14.

PLAYBOY: Some people get over the blues by listening to your songs. What do you listen

to when you want to chase the blues away? RAITT: Well, there's the wallowing music. I listen to *Somebody's Leavin'*, by Bill Payne. I listen to Ray Charles. When I really want to give in to being sad, I listen to Lowell George. *Song for Adam*, by Jackson Browne, is the saddest song I've ever heard. *River*, by Joni Mitchell. There are some Bruce Hornsby songs.

In terms of feeling better, Howlin' Wolf, Muddy Waters, the stuff by Little Feat that kicks your butt. *Start Me Up*, by the Rolling Stones. Good R&B. Marvin Gaye, Junior Walker. You'll notice I haven't said much from *this* decade. I'm real current.

I do like to wallow in sad songs when I'm feeling sad. I sing them for that reason, too. But I never do more than three in a row. Otherwise, people would be killing themselves in the audience.

15.

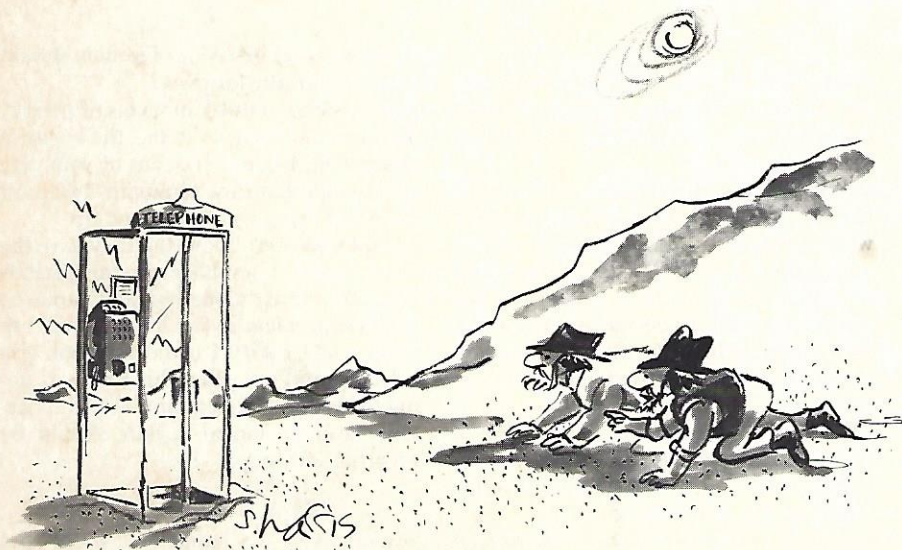
PLAYBOY: When you decided to take better care of yourself, was there a particular moment when you realized you *had* to stop drinking?

RAITT: Well, I knew it was coming. I knew that I was going to have to stop drinking too much, because I was putting on a lot of weight and I didn't like the way I looked. And, as people who have had an episode in their lives will tell you, the more your self-esteem drops when you don't like the way you look, the more you try to deny the problem. In my case, it doubled up at a time when Warner Bros., unrelatedly, chose to relieve me of my duties for them.

I went out on the road very upset, feeling betrayed and pissed off and defiant. It wasn't a healthy, recreational kind of drinking. It was a vengeance kind of drinking. It never got in the way of my singing, because I didn't do it before the show. I wouldn't jeopardize that. So at the end of a couple of years, when I would see pictures of myself, I knew I didn't look good. The fact that I might be killing myself didn't even enter into it. The part that made me stop was that I was maybe going to do a video with Prince, and I didn't want to look like a tank next to him. I remember being so proud thinking I was the last girl singer still drinking. Then I looked in the mirror. I looked terrible and I felt terrible, and I said, "Who's winning in this contest?" I had a skiing accident, which I think was really some sort of divine intervention, because I needed some reason to get off the road. I knew I could go to A.A., because I had friends who were going and they looked and felt great and were singing great. You know, blues singers can be any weight, but let's face it: Some people look better heavier than others. I wasn't one of them, so it basically came down to pride. Vanity is a cheap way to put it. I think it was self-esteem, business sense.

16.

PLAYBOY: When people have to give up drinking or some other addiction, does it help if they focus on what they don't have



"It's probably for me. I have call forwarding."

to give up?

RAITT: Oh, man, yeah! I thought I was going to be really boring and I'd have to be a born-again Christian or lose my sense of humor and go right to bed after the show and nobody would hang out with me. I'd never get to have a boyfriend, because I wouldn't get to go to the south of France and drink wine. All these silly things came to mind.

You don't have to give up. What you get in return is yourself. It sounds so trite, unless you're going through it. It's just that what better challenge is there in life than to be free of all the demons of what you should be and what you could have been? If you think you have a problem at all, you should check those programs out. You don't have to sign up. It doesn't cost anything. Just be around it for a little while and see if it applies. You'll know.

17.

PLAYBOY: What's more sensuous than slide guitar?

RAITT: Singing is the most sensuous, and playing guitar is the second most sensuous instrument I can think of playing. Harmonica is the third most. I'm telling you: A tall guy who plays harmonica. Now, *there's* a thought.

18.

PLAYBOY: How do you react when fans approach you in rest rooms?

RAITT: I don't like to be bugged in bathrooms. I mean, people hand me cassettes

under the stall. It's brutal. Or they start talking to me when they know I'm in there and there's a whole line of women waiting: "So, what's Jackson Browne really like?" "Can I come out of here first before I have this conversation?"

19.

PLAYBOY: You and Madonna find yourselves looking in the same washroom mirror in a Los Angeles restaurant. What do you talk about?

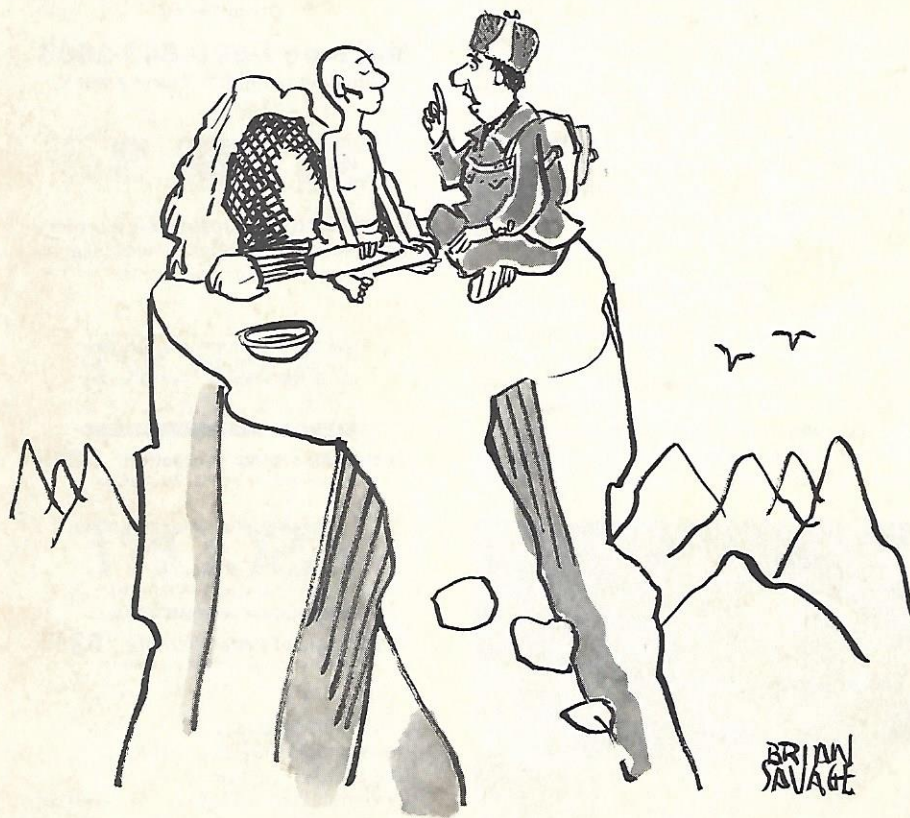
RAITT: Obviously, she would know I knew who she was, but I don't know whether she would know who I was. If she said something like, "I've always liked your music," then I would say, "Thank you. You're not doing a bad job with your career, either."

But if we were, in fact, discussing stuff, I would tell her that she had a lot of gump-tion and direction in her career, that she definitely represents this generation of women, the newer one that's coming up. There's a respect that goes from artist to artist by just how somebody is handling himself, regardless of whether you like what he's doing. I wouldn't say *Who's That Girl?* was one of my favorite movies, but you've got to admire her for knowing what she's doing.

20.

PLAYBOY: Dimples: boon or bane?

RAITT: Great, especially when you don't have a whole lot else going for you. As long as I'm smiling, people like me.



"One final question on reincarnation—it's about residuals."

DR. SPINTHER

(continued from page 90)

the micro-momnie's orb blinked and became rosy inside. Three gold nines appeared in it, floated to the surface and shimmied there.

"Only nine ninety-nine per period," cooed the Analyzer, "with just nine hundred down."

Nine hundred thou? My heart cantered, but I was relieved. "Way too much," I said and gave a forlorn shrug. "I guess ultra-enhancement's out of the question for me."

The Analyzer's face became a grid of green lines, and blue began to flood the squares, one by one. "We can extend the amortization. We can establish an indenture period." The Analyzer paused. "This is a matter of love, is it not? Is not love worth any cost?"

"I guess so," I said. But things were getting clogged up in my head. I was having trouble breathing, too. The air seemed sweet and dense. I stared at the face of the Analyzer as it flattened and deepened to the color of twilight. "I need a few beats to think," I said.

"Of course," said the Analyzer. "But we do expect price increases any day now."

I paced back and forth like a rat in a trap. I was a wreck, a mess, trying to figure which way to go. Every time I thought of her, I was sure it would be worth it. Every time I looked at the three gold nines wiggling happily at me, I wasn't so sure. And every time I imagined the pain, I was scared out of my golly. But I knew I couldn't just squid like the others. The only escape was straight ahead.

"But listen," I whispered. "It's not just the price. Won't it hurt a lot?"

The face became a flat slope, inclining backward into a cobalt distance. "New techniques have reduced the pain factor to point five on the Spinter Scale. However, the pain, you must realize, is an integral part of enhancement. You can only achieve complete and total enhancement when you experience the pain as well. No pain, no gain."

It wasn't the answer I'd hoped for, and I didn't know what to say. The Analyzer seemed to notice my fluster. The face brightened into its rosy yellow.

"Would you care to consult Dr. Spinter?"

"Free?"

"Of course."

The micro-momnie sank out of sight. In to its place popped a large turnip-shaped man in a surgical-green skintight jump suit. It covered him head to toe. Not one square inch of hide showed. Even his eyes were hidden behind pink-tinted goggles. He seemed surprised at first, like he had been nipped in the middle of something. He looked at the Analyzer and then at me,