Raitt, Bonnie (1949-) Encyclopedia Article

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Raitt, Bonnie (1949—)

Although she is one of rock 'n' roll's biggest names, Bonnie Raitt has always been more concerned with musical integrity and social activism than with easy fame. The daughter of Broadway musical star John Raitt, Bonnie was raised in Los Angeles in a politically active Quaker household. She began playing guitar at age nine, but only began to pursue a musical career while attending Radcliffe, where she played at Cambridge, Massachusetts, blues clubs. Becoming a dedicated student of African-American musical traditions, Raitt dropped out of college to sign with Warner Bros. and released her first album in 1971. A white woman performing classic black blues, Raitt's virtuoso guitar playing and appealing voice made her a critical darling. But she devoted as much time to her political activism as to her music and, struggling with alcoholism, by the late 1970s, her career began to wane. Raitt became sober in the mid-1980s and, in 1989, she released *Nick of Time.* At age 40, after almost 20 years of being overlooked by commercial audiences, Raitt was an overnight success, winning four Grammys. Now one of the music industry's most successful artists, Raitt continues to eschew formulaic pop albums in favor of work that reflects her musical heritage and political beliefs, making her that pop culture rarity—a best-seller with integrity.

Further Reading:

Bego, Mark. *Bonnie Raitt: Just in the Nick of Time.* New York, Birch Lane Press, 1996.