

Pat Benatar: True Love Paves the Way For Gravity's True Grit

-Jim Nelson

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For a decade, Pat Benatar did pretty much what was expected of her – both from her label and from the multitude of fans she'd accumulated. At times she had attempted to become her own artist, free to make her own music, but ultimately the pressure would return, the pressure to follow the prescribed formula. Certainly there could be no complaints about the level of success she was attaining – from 1979 to 1988, Benatar achieved three Top 5 selling albums and sold in excess of 10 million copies in America alone – but something just didn't feel right to Pat Benatar. So, she did the one thing that made any sense at all.

Pat Benatar effectively tuned in, turned on and dropped out.

In eschewing her rock 'n roll shoes for *True Love*, 1990's collection of mostly blues standards, Pat informed anyone listening that she'd had enough. She could no longer play it safe for the sake of clutching on to the commercial accomplishments to which everyone around her grown accustomed. Pat Benatar was burnt out on the business of making pop music.

True Love was never designed to make Pat Benatar a star in the blues realm. In retrospect, that album really was done to cleanse the palate in preparation for what would hopefully come next.

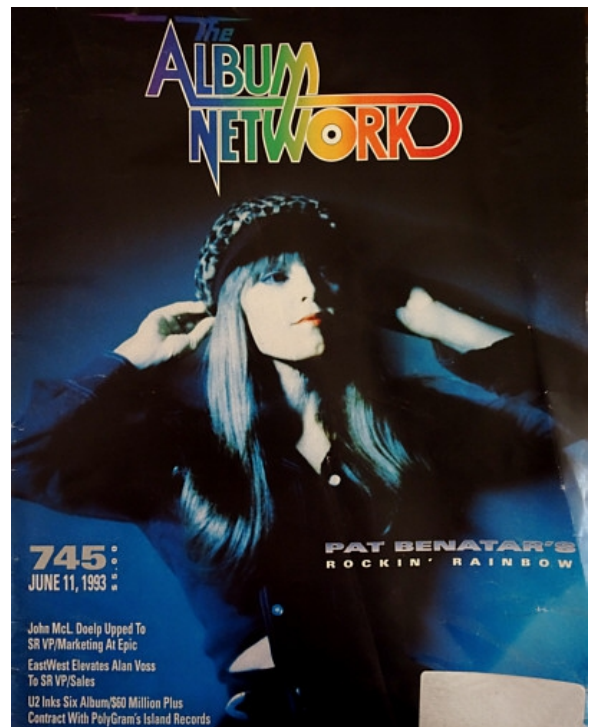
“The plan was to do *True Love* and try to get rejuvenated and maybe be able to go back and do another contemporary record. But we never knew if that was actually gonna happen. After you do something that's so removed from what you do, you're really kinda starting over, which was what we were hoping would happen. We just went in (to do *Gravity's Rainbow*) with no baggage, like it was the first record.”

Pat was not the only one sick of the situation. Her husband, Neil Giraldo, who, as guitarist, keyboardist, chief songwriter and producer, is really half of the Pat Benatar team, had also had his share of the whole game.

“I gotta tell ya, I felt like selling every piece of lumber I own just to not ever have to play again,” he recounts. “I mean, *Wide Awake In Dreamland* was one of the worst experiences in recording for me. So while we were in the middle of *Dreamland*, I said, 'This is driving me crazy.' So I took up surfing. It was a strange period in our lives.”

But surely Pat and Neil had already set themselves up for life with their hit records, so why the need to carry on in the face of that kind of frustration?

“Because it's a muse, inside, whether you want it there or not,” says Pat. “Sometimes you really wish it



would go away (laughs), because it runs your life. But, you know, there's not anything you can do about it. You are totally addicted – it's just in there. And I think when you speak to anyone artistic, it seems to always be the same thing. You do whatever it is you do because you have to make a living and all that, but the reason you begin is always the reason you continue: Because you cannot live without it.”

But, as the rest of the world wondered if Pat and Neil would ever make a pop album again, there was at least one person who was confident of the eventual outcome. “I knew all along what we would end doing on *Gravity's Rainbow*. In fact, half of the ideas on the record were already written before *True Love*.”

What Pat Benatar and Neil Giraldo (his surname has been misspelled as “Geraldo” off and on for years) committed to digital memory is 11 songs, written entirely within the Benatar camp (a first) that basically have two things in common. The most obvious connection from cut to cut is the bare bones, guitar-oriented arrangements.

Benatar believes, and rightfully so, that Giraldo has long been overlooked for his extraordinary guitar work and record making skills. Like no other album before it, *Gravity's Rainbow* underscores this conviction. “For me, as his wife and as his partner in music, this is the culmination of everything. It was a long time coming, and I hope that (recognition for Neil) happens now, because nobody deserves it (more). Neil is one of the nicest and most talented people I know.”

Not to be outdone, Neil casts his vote for MVP. “I'm so happy about my wife,. She's starting to write so much more now, and I'm so excited about her writing. I love where she's coming from on the spiritual side of her lyrics.”

Though *Gravity's Rainbow* primarily takes a more worldly view, Mr. and Mrs. Giraldo do reveal a side of their relationship on “You and I” that must be difficult to keep separate when you are lovers and parents together, in addition to being a creative force in a business venture of sorts. “This is not one of the easiest bands to be in, because it's very incestuous,” Pat laughs, as she does frequently throughout our conversation. “I mean, there isn't one fiber of what goes on that isn't tied to the other, you know? Which makes for rally great, cosmic stuff, and really difficult times also. So it's hard. But the stuff that comes out of it, because (we're) so tied to each other, I think is good.”

Pat Benatar's 10th album is named after Thomas Pynchon's 1970's novel about our need to strive for survival despite an overwhelming instinct to drag ourselves down. Pat deemed the title a snug fit when she began to see a lyrical pattern to the songs, not unlike the theme of Pynchon's tome. Songs like “Disconnected,” “Ties That Bind,” “Sanctuary” and “Tradin' Down” speak in general terms of some of the trials and tribulations we struggle to overcome. “Rise (Part 2),” “Kingdom Key” and “Every Time I Fall Back” balance the album with optimistic hope.

And then there's “Everybody Lay Down,” the Top 5 Rock Radio cut that lets the listener fill in the missing pieces, deciding for himself or herself what the song means. Pat intended the lyrical ambiguity of “Everybody Lay Down,” but the rough, not-quite-finished feel of the music was pure synergy. You see, the version that wound up on *Gravity's Rainbow* is, in fact, the first time Pat, Neil, drummer Myron Grombacher and bassist Frank Linx had ever played the song together!

“We went in just to check (it), like we were gonna cut the track in the next day or so. We said, 'We better play this one time.' And, truthfully, that's the original vocal, because when it got to the part in the

chorus where it goes, 'Everybody say heyyy,' I really didn't know if I was gonna do that (vocal) jump or not. We got there and I really flipped out and didn't know where I was supposed to go, so I just jumped up to that high thing (laughs). It was such a surprise! And I just did it for the rest of the song.”

“And we thought, 'This is great, but we probably should try to play it again and get a real song out of it.' And we never could, so we just kept that one (laughs)!”

If all you want from Pat Benatar is crafty, guitar-rock songs, then *Gravity's Rainbow* will clearly suit you. If, however, you're interested in looking a little deeper than the surface, this album offers so much more. Perhaps the finest example of this is a song (and heavy-hearted, yet hopeful video) called “Somebody's Baby.” A neat little pop tune at first glance, “Somebody's Baby” turns out to be Pat's attempt to reconcile a world where so many of her fellow people have become disenfranchised. “Somebody's Baby” divulges much about Pat Benatar.

“Writing for me is very cathartic,” she reveals. “I can't keep my hands out of stuff, you know – I always want to be the rescuer of everything. You do as much as you can, but it doesn't make that feeling of frustration go away. Even when I do hands-on work it's not enough.”

“And the thing that makes me very sad is that I see people turn their backs on (other) people, like they don't exist, like they were dirt. These are people! I understand it's much more comfortable to turn away, but you can't do it. It's certain death for all of us to do that.”

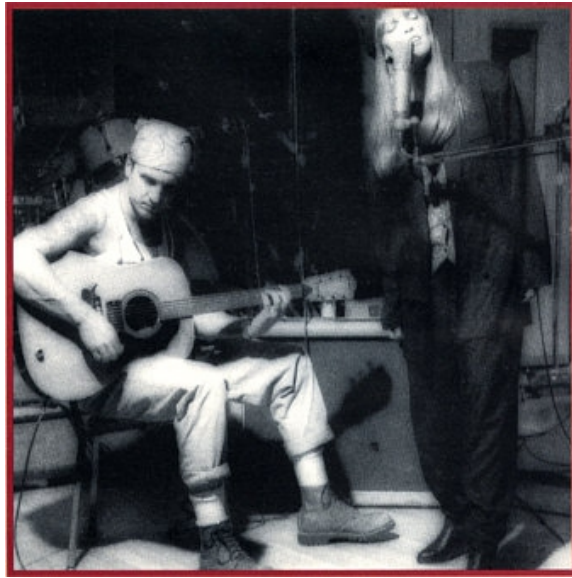
Being a mother herself, Pat has a deep-seated need to comprehend the process by which a person who must have been adored as a child can wind up so alone. “When I see someone, I can't look at them like they're nothing. I wanna know, 'How did this happen?' Somewhere, someone had this child. Someone was holding him, someone was rocking him, loving this person – what the fuck happened? I wanna know!”

Gravity's Rainbow has just been given to us by Pat and Neil, so it's too soon to tell whether it will return Benatar to the upper reaches of the national sales charts. But that doesn't really matter to them, because this dynamic duo buckled under to no one, finally making an album of which they can be completely proud.

“Artistically and musically I'm very satisfied with this record,” Pat declares. “Commercial success? It would be nice. You don't want to make what you do in a vacuum, even though it is very insulated and egocentric. I mean, what you're hoping is that you've taken the good things you've learned and shared that with other people. I know commercial success will ensure that more people will hear it, but I've already been satisfied.”

“Aside from what it's lyrically saying, hopefully touching things in people's lives,” Neil adds, “I think it says that we are not gonna ever be told what kind of record we will make in the future...not from any one person, any record company or any one thing. We will do what's in our hearts, what we believe is the absolute true and right thing we should be doing. (And we will) not be afraid of anything. That's what *True Love* broke.”

“*Gravity's Rainbow* tells me that we have something to say and we are not gonna ever go backwards,” he concludes. “We are only gonna go forward, and hopefully retain the spirit we started with.”



“This is a killer record that will bring back her old fans for sure!”
-Rachel Morris, Tower Records

How cool can it be to write, produce and perform an entire album with your husband, and then dedicate that album to your child? And not only that, think about how cool it would be to write great songs for that album that you really believe in and that kick ass? Ask Pat Benatar because that is exactly what she has pulled off with *Gravity's Rainbow*.