

# Benatar gives her best shot to her music.

**By Stephen Hunter**  
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It's the lip.

You notice other things, of course. You notice the tiny, furious fists, which punch and jab. You notice the squared shoulders, almost insolent as they shake. You cannot help but notice the thighs, because her gold spandex bodice is cut so high over her black leotards that her thighs shimmer under the close black cotton. You notice the legs, you notice the boots. You notice the hair, the slightly bucked teeth, the dramatic eyes. But it's the lip –the lower one –that gives Pat Benatar her lure. Called by some the first lady of rock 'n' roll, her new album "Precious Time" is hot stuff.

She looks like sex up there, she generates it. She gives it off, she sends it out. But she also looks a little dangerous, 5 feet and 90 pounds of tough.

It's a careful equilibrium, shrewdly calibrated by a great many people, including Benatar, but also her lead guitarist, boyfriend, co-author and unofficial guidance counselor, Neil

Geraldo, as well as her management and her record company.

On stage, clouds of smoke seem to accumulate physical weight in the air above the crowd, cut by and also illuminated in the piercing lights. Peculiar odors linger. Everybody's up. Oceans of teens wearing jeans and T-shirts shake mightily. "Hit me with your best shot" she dares them, strutting and bounding. Her face a snarl, she punches the air. She has them.

At 28 she's 10 to 15 years older than the kids, and the trek to the entourage of 35, the plushly outfitted bus, the hit albums, the Rolling Stone cover, the wild, raving needs of the crowd has been typically long.

As Pat Andrejewski, she had a "normal" Catholic upbringing on Long Island, N.Y., was even a cheerleader and sang in the choir, took part in theater. After giving up on opera, she got married and moved to Richmond, Va., with her husband, Dennis Benatar, who was in the Army at the time. She spent 2 1/2 years as a bank teller. She began singing in lounges in the Richmond area, in sleazy bars and Holiday Inns. Divorced, she returned to New York she tried to crack the rock scene and underwent a period of poverty.

She was signed in 1978 by Chrysalis Records, after appearing at a New York nightclub called Catch A Rising Star, which nurtures young talent. Chrysalis teamed her with Neil Geraldo, a young veteran of the group Derringer.

She had the voice, Geraldo provided the direction – and some spectacular guitar riffs. Her breakthrough single was “Heartbreaker,” a driving, heavy-metal arrangement, which featured a riveting moment when all the instruments shut down and Benatar carried the momentum of the piece on sheer, driving voice.

Her first album, “In the Heat of the Night,” which although released at a moment when several other female heavy rockers –Carolyn Mas and Ellen Shipley, to name two –had just put out albums, surprised everybody by doing exceedingly well.

But that first album also established the Benatar persona: It’s jacket featured the pouty, sweaty, disheveled little tramp – the lip again, plump and prominent – who looked like she’d do anything or had done everything. It’s an image she’s not, to this day, comfortable with.

“It’s such a mixed thing. I understand that sex sells everything in America,” Benatar says. “It makes you a little sick. But that’s not all I do, all I am. I sing too, you know. What p---- me off about it (the sexy hard sell for her albums) was that it seemed to say, ‘This is all she IS.’ So we had a meeting. It’ll be different from now on.”

One of the other things she does is the remarkable “Hell Is for Children,” which many believe is her single best song. Whatever, it is one of the rare rock ‘n’ roll songs about a serious social issue – child abuse. She wrote it with Geraldo.

“It started with a curiosity. I didn’t know much about it, and I began to look into it. It was a big surprise to me.”

“I wanted to write about it. I wanted it to be a great rock ‘n’ roll song –but it was never meant to be a commercial success. I didn’t care if it succeeded. I figured people would either really hate it or love it.”

Side bar: “Pat Benatar plays Friday, Saturday and Sunday at Pine Knob Music Theatre, I-75 and Sashabaw Road at 7:30 p.m. David Johansen opens.”

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