

# Pat Benatar: Westbury Music Fair

-Dave Gil de Rubio

*The Island Ear, December 1-14, 1997*

Four years after her last album, *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pat Benatar parted ways with her label of 14 years and spent two years on what eventually became this year's *Innamorata*. Now a mom of two, Benatar's latest is more of an adult album; AAA fare that fits neatly alongside anything by John Hiatt or Bonnie Raitt. Her latest stylistic turn is a welcome rebirth for an artist whose immense talents were often overlooked by critics more concerned with the height of her heels or the length of her skirt. After a summer season that found Benatar opening for AOR bores Styx, this most recent tour has been of smaller venues like Westbury Music Fair (November 5), allowing the diminutive singer to play longer and dig deeper into her considerable catalog.

Sporting a short blonde hairstyle to go with her red velvet crush dress and short black jacket, Benatar and her husband/music director/guitarist, Neil Geraldo, trotted out on stage as the crowd enthusiastically welcomed this local girl home. Opening with an acoustic version of "Shadows Of the Night", the duo were soon joined by Allison Cornell (violin/keyboards), Mick Mahan (bass) and Ray Brinker (drums), who reprised their roles from *Innamorata* and followed up with "River of Love". Benatar's nearly two hour show featured a mix of new material, blues, some hits and quite a few obscure tracks that prevented this evening from being a typically rote "Greatest Hits" show.



Although she currently lives on the West Coast, Benatar's genuine love of her old stomping grounds emanated over a crowd that was seemingly made of die-hard fans, friends and family. Skipping around her canon, years melted away as Benatar went back 17 years for "So Sincere" and followed it with "One Love", a song that hasn't been played live in ten years. Even though these nuggets brought back memories of spandex and hair spray, the sight of a more pretentious fan holding a lighter aloft in one hand and a cell phone in the other during the acoustically rendered "We Belong" ensured that we were in 1997 and not 1987.

A particular highlight of the evening was a mini-blues set going back to 1992's *True Love*, an album of exclusively blues material that was critically dismissed but a musical rejuvenation for Benatar, who was in a creative rut at that point of her career. This segment featured Benatar ripping in the jump blues of "I Feel Lucky", growling out a convincing "Paying the Cost To Be the Boss" and vamping it up with hubby on "True Love". Following the indulgence of this bluesy jones was a one-two punch of "Love Is A Battlefield" and "Hell Is For Children" that earned Benatar and her band a standing ovation.

A ferocious "Heartbreaker" and equally powerful "Promises In the Dark" sandwiched the newer "Papa's Roses" (picked by fan requests via the official Pat Benatar website) and brought this intimate room back to the early '80s – right down to girls with big hair shouting out all the words without

missing a note. Capping off the homecoming was “All Fired Up”, Benatar's last hit that ended the evening on an up note.

*\*photo NOT from Westbury show*