

# HIPFiSHmonthly

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## North Coast Rock Revival

# BONNIE BENTLEY

A NEW BAND, A NEW EP AND AN UNDYING PASSION TO ROCK

**I**n the early 80's, there are some of you who packed a little bar called Kokko's and danced to local band The New Creatures. Astoria had seen nothing like them before, blowing away the malaise of that era's tired covers bands, bluegrass and DJ Disco nights. A sound where the blues of Keith Richards meets up with the punk poetry of Patti Smith and sires Bonnie Bentley, all five foot five full of spunk and sass, a wife & mother in her 30's emerging from the house with a hungry need to rock 'n roll. Writing and singing gritty and real songs such as Half Tough, Leave Me Alone, and I'm No Angel (a song that became her anthem).

Kick it forward to Now, and she's still nobody's angel, still slaying audiences with her version of bluespunk, still writing great songs that'll leave you humming and hip shaking. When you head down to KALA on July 19th (and trust these jaded ears, you should), her new band The Phantom Teardrops will be setting it on fire with new songs Black Slip, From A Distance, Not The Right Girl (all recorded last month at local studio Bentrabbit). She still sounds like "The Patti Smith Of Astoria", one can still hear the influence of Marianne Faithful (both young and old), still enjoy her rhythmic shards of guitar chords with that Keith Richards attitude.

But now her voice is smokier, the blues more deeply felt, while her spirit and passion remain the same. "I have an edge to me that's unpredictable, a little unsafe, that's why the guys like to play with me 'cause they have to Watch It!" After deciding what color to dye her hair (perhaps fushia?), what guitar to strap on (perhaps the baby blue Casino?) and what "pirate's plunder" to wear 'round her neck,

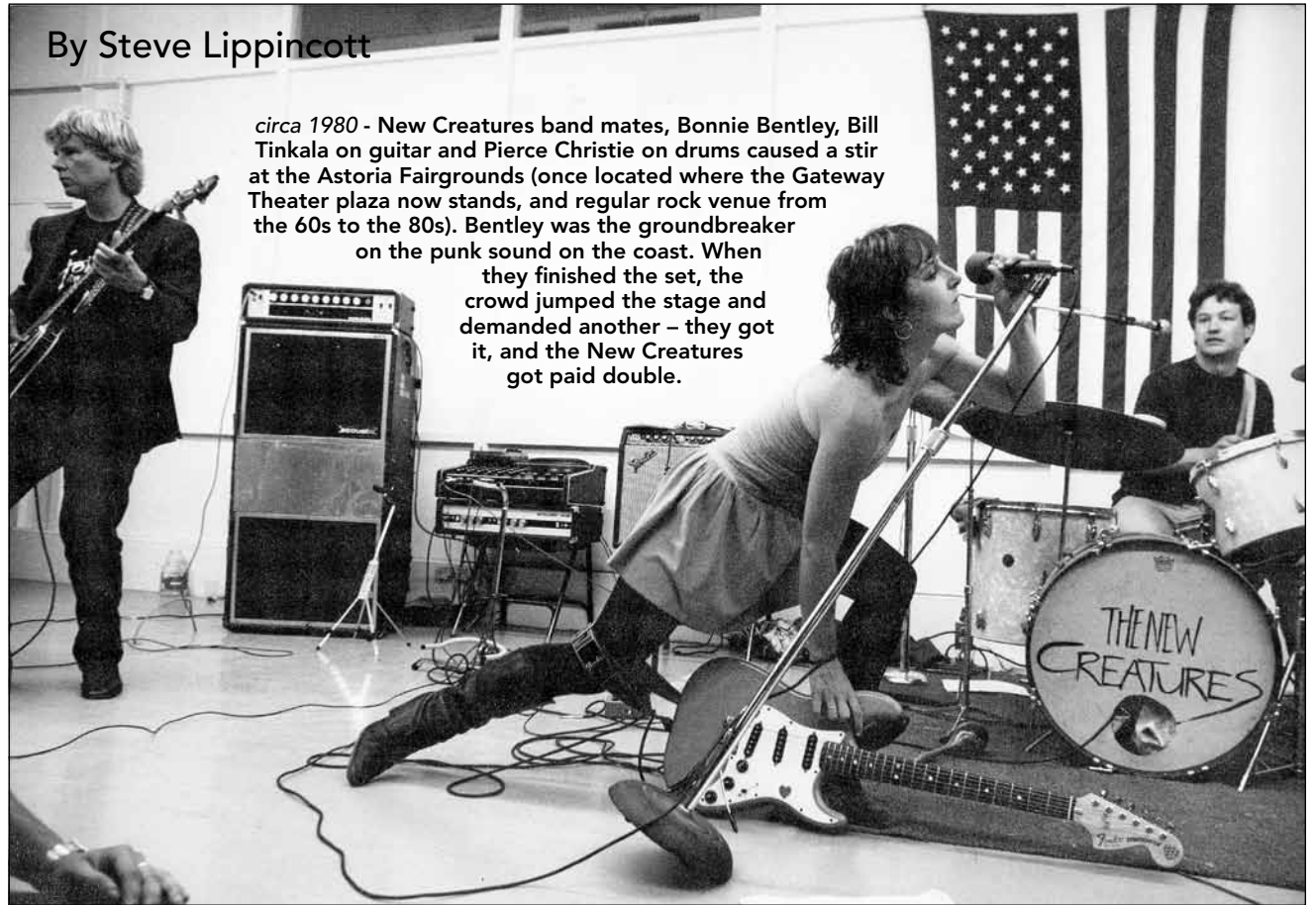


The tWist. Bonnie Bentley, Sylvia Hackathorne, Pat Baum, and Margaret Wise. Rehearsing in a condemned hotel across the street from the White Eagle - the tWist also made their debut there at a party. "I remember we drank a lot of coffee at those rehearsals, and it smelled like rats."

she'll once again be sharing the stage with bassist Arthur Beardsley, so simpatico with Bonnie after two decades of playing together. He knows when she's about to "break down" and stretch out the song, with her playing with the lyrics and bantering with the crowd. You can hear it on Slim Harpo's Got Love If You Want It when Arthur locks in the groove, drummer Jeff Carden slows it down to a smoulder and Patrick Lines' wailing harmonica enshrouds Bonnie's vocals like satin sheets. A plaintive offer of loving arms and a kick-start for those who came out to dance. When Jeff ups the tempo and the band slides into John Lee Hooker's Hip Shake, the dancers go wild.

A word of warning about Bonnie, seriously,....do not piss her off or she'll write a song about you! In "Not The Right Girl" she sings: Well you took me for a walk around the block, you said it was love but I guess it was not, it didn't take long to realize, Well, I, I, I, I'm not the right girl for you. The repeated I's sound like nails being hammered into the dick-for-brains now-Ex. From A Distance (in a song by that title) she sings that in hindsight, she could have walked away but was too close to see.

By Steve Lippincott



circa 1980 - New Creatures band mates, Bonnie Bentley, Bill Tinkala on guitar and Pierce Christie on drums caused a stir at the Astoria Fairgrounds (once located where the Gateway Theater plaza now stands, and regular rock venue from the 60s to the 80s). Bentley was the groundbreaker on the punk sound on the coast. When they finished the set, the crowd jumped the stage and demanded another - they got it, and the New Creatures got paid double.

The world, and love itself, being a lot safer once you keep your distance. The song is all the better with her Patti Smith-like sneering delivery. And, again similar to Patti, when they play the song live, her banter goes on and on, almost a hip hop thing. Patrick says it's a song people hear and think they've already heard, but they haven't yet.

In perhaps her best new song, Black Slip, Bonnie salaciously channels Etta James. Like a jilted Goldilocks, will she choose the pink slip (too sweet) or the red slip (too hot), or the black slip that's just right to bring home her errant lover, back into her loving arms. Only to dance and eat alone. It's a work of stunning nuance; almost a sonic noir film clip. "You be careful, Bonnie," said Dave Gager, who engineered the recent Bentrabbit studio session, "because someone will want to rip that one off". Bonnie equates the creative process to the analogy of throwing out your fishing line and watching for when the float starts bopping under the water's surface and back up with the silvery, squirming idea. "I'm standing at my kitchen counter, 10 o'clock at night, and here comes the incoming words and I'm scribbling fast to keep up and get it down. I ran over to the guitar, wrote out the chords, banged it out. I posted on Facebook that I think I just wrote a song for Etta James to sing. The next morning I find out that she had just died. So I said, oh my! thank you Etta for sending me this song. I tell that story before we play it live and people get the chills.

Patrick jokes that "we're not here because we are The 'Phantom' Teardrops." For him and Arthur, their sole goal is to make Bonnie shine. Patrick is the only one playing leads but is also watching Bonnie's boots to time out his rhythmic chugs on the harp. Arthur doesn't play a gazillion notes nor solely the root chords (as so many



bassists do), rather he chooses his notes carefully, walking the beat, moving it around and fills in the color. It was Dinah Urell of KALA who, after seeing them as a trio, suggested adding a drummer. Jeff and Arthur are now a solid rhythm section that propels the band forward.

Amazingly, she is writing some of the best songs of her 3 decades long career, and, at 62, has such passion, not only for her song craft, but for her spirited performance as well. That Rolling Stones album 12 X 5 that first awakened in her a love for the blues lead her to the source of the old blues greats, who were never too old, and were at their best in their 60's and 70's.

That tired adage "I hope I die before I get old" was for wimps, a wooden nickel given currency back when rock 'n roll was a young man's thing. Check out the latest albums by Bonnie Raitt, Dr John, John Cale and many others; they are at the top of their game. In a recent show, a group of women were dropping money in the tip jar, giving thumbs up and telling her "Rock On!". In those recent recordings, Bonnie sounds like she is 26. But she is so much more special precisely because of the age that she is, with a deepening of her craft thru experience. "I've written so many songs, I've forgotten many of them". Which is a good thing because we get to hear the new ones that she has yet to write, when she throws out her fishing line and sees what she catches.

Its only been in the last year that she's returned to writing and, after cajoling from Patrick, to performing as well. "I dropped out for about 10 years. I didn't want the obligation of gigs and being in a band. I still loved tunes. I still sang around the house. I was still a "pop-in" guest in a friend's band. But I had a 100 excuses for not doing more than that, like being too old. But some events happened that reminded me that this is what I do....write songs and make music. What happened was my son found this online Farm Town site that had an interactive chat feature, My granddaughter wasn't into it but I started



**Gomper. Bentley's (in the middle) '69 all-female band named for a Stones tune off "Their Satanic Majestic Request." Playing for a high school assembly (Portland), the backdrop being The Sound of Music.**

planting and growing things, just for fun. One evening, this guy calling himself "Clark Kent" asked if my fake name "Pirate Jenny" was from the song Mack The Knife. "Why yes it is," I replied. Turns out he's a drummer, about my age, and we became friends. At some point he emails me an mp3 of some music he had recorded. I said it was a really cool song but it doesn't have any words. Go For It, he says. So I listened to the music, scribbling down lyrics and shot them off to him within 48 hours. The words then went to two other players he knew in Colorado and, the next day, he sends their version using my words. They called me a genius that day. So the next week, these guys sent me another mp3 of new music, asking for lyrics. And within 48 hours, I not only sent lyrics but I went to a friend's house to record

my singing of them so they could hear the melody. They say, "Do you know what you are?". I reply that, well, I am a songwriter. "Oh, you are much more than that!" they told me. So that got me going.

"I started building a home studio, sharing these music files with these outside musicians. And re-connected

with my Portland musician friends, like Sylvia Hackathorn, who had been in the band The Twist with me. I wanted her to contribute guitar to some tracks. I also became friends with Patrick Lines, a local harmonica player, and I sent him an

mp3 of "Black Slip", asking if he's be willing to lay down a track. When he came over, he had it charted out. But wouldn't you know my computer fizzled out. It took us a year to finally record that one. I said, oh well, see you next week. I'll

re-learn three more songs. We've gotten together for music night every Tuesday since. He's my kick butt fire starter, he's lately become my musical guider. He's also Canned Heat all over the place!"

"What I am," retorts Patrick, "is prepared. When there is a gig, I make sure there is a working PA system. Write up the set list. I suggested we should start playing out, sharing Bonnie's songs out there" At first she was reluctant, thinking she was too old to be a star and front a band again, thinking maybe she could sell these songs to somebody, collect royalties ("who knows, people like them") but she quickly warmed to the idea of performing again. When Arthur came out from Portland to the coast, for one of their Tuesday music nights, Patrick said that's the only bass player he wants for any projects and for as many gigs because he is the true sound. "With him, we have a rhythm section that is killer".

Arthur first met Bonnie in the early '80's when her Astoria based New Creatures came to play at Louie's La Bamba. By this time, the band was playing out 3 or 4 nights a week, from Long

Beach to Cannon Beach and all of Portland's downtown clubs. Many of them showcase gigs with a lot of bands on the roster, lots of exposure. When Pierce Christie first joined the band in '81, he was replacing Liam Dunne on drums,

and Ben Hunt and Nile Carrol were on bass and guitar, respectively. But by the time the Portland gigs started happening, Larry Haas had come in as guitarist and Bill Tynkila was on bass. Pierce remembers, "these were the best players I had ever played with. They gave The New Creatures



**Backstage Louis's La Bamba in Portland, 1981.**

a powerful, high energy dynamic that suited Bonnie's style and added an extra WOW factor. It was a heady time and we had a good sound but it was Bonnie's drive that gave us something different from the rest of the up and comers, like Billy Rancher, The Crazy Eights, Steve Bradley and Robert Cray."

Sitting with friends at La Bamba, Arthur saw this gal walk by and wondered, "Whos'that? It wasn't just that she had a pretty face, she carried herself with a confident, authoritative manner. She walked like a star. I stuck around to catch her band and she reminded me of Chrissie Hynde and Patti Smith combined. Real pop sensibility but playing real aggressive guitar, and had all the rock moves. She seemed a performer on the pathway to greatness. I thought, Man, it would be fun to play with her! But I didn't see that happening. Later though, a friend of mine, Mark, who was playing in Bonnie's Portland based band, now called New New Creatures, told me they needed a good bass player and asked me 'round to jam. He didn't know I was interested in leaving the band Walkie Talkie, as they were changing over to be a covers only band to make more money and I, having done that once, felt that was too much like being in a job. I took that opportunity to jam with Bonnie's band and soon saw that she had every right to carry herself as she did. Because she wrote good material, good, solid stuff. It had pop sensibility but with a real punky edge to it, and with a lot of energy. At that time, women fronting bands were not players, just singers, but they had this Diva attitude like: Well, I'm the talent here. Whereas, Bonnie knew what she wanted, and what she wanted out of people but she had a way of expressing it without expressing it. And so I fell into being her bass player, not just with the New Creatures but for many years and many bands since then".

Dan Haley, who was in the much loved Ed & The Boat, remembers sharing the bill often with The New Creatures at that time and was suitably impressed. "She was rad, a real pioneer. It was just unheard of for a woman then fronting a band playing cool rock n roll guitar. I think it may have been a blue Fender jaguar. She played really good leads on that thing." On listening to



a recording called "Lost Sessions" with Bonnie, Arthur and Jeff Hudus (of the Rockin' Razorbacks), its easy to hear that it was a formidable band, and understand why it was making waves in Portland. On the song Desperate Eyes, Bonnie plays leads that call to mind Tom Verlaine of Television. And, interestingly, there is a point where Bonnie decided to develop her guitar chops, playing more lead and not just rhythm. She suggested Arthur take over the band and she become the guitar player, no longer fronting the band. Arthur wrote the material and she did the guitar parts. "I just told her the chord progression and she did her thing. Which was always wonderful because I loved so much the way she played."

That band became known as The Rudders, fitting in with a nautical theme at what was to be their debut gig. A friend of Bonnie's, Rhys Schrock, was doing a farewell concert at Satyricon for his band The Titanics, as he was just leaving for a 2 year stint traveling thru Europe, and he asked Bonnie to perform. Also playing that night were Ed & The Boats so the nom de plume of The Rudders seemed apropos. It was the first time guitarist Sylvia Hackathorn of The Titanics met Bonnie. Later they would band together in the all girl group, The Twist. "Bonnie showed up for the show in full pirate regalia and the Rudders were totally great". It was the first time she played where she was not singing, and just being the badass guitar player. Says Bonnie, "I

wore a big, black hat which totally hid my face, which was the point."

Eventually, however, it wasn't quite what she wanted and Arthur and she had an amicable musical separation. They had been doing some of her songs but she was loath for it to become another Bonnie Bentley band. Arthur went in search of another female guitarist, but knew there wouldn't be another one like Bonnie, eventually settling on Ian Miller, Chris Miller's 16 year old brother, a total punk shredder, and changing the name to Pink TV. Arthur still played occasionally with Bonnie, notably in The Fundamentals but later filling in on the early gigs of her new band, The Twist, with Pat Baum of The Neo Boys and Sylvia Hackathorn of The Titanics. "This was before they found Margaret Grgich to come in on bass. "Because of Bonnie's reputation, and Pat & Sylvia's connections, they had gotten some gigs and I helped on bass. It was really fun, with all new material from Bonnie and another, different, dynamic."

Bonnie had first met Pat Baum years earlier when Pat worked the board recording Astoria based New Creatures at the club Euphoria in Dec of '81. A great show featuring Bonnie originals like Pleasin' Teasin' and Black Out (about forgetting to eat, falling asleep and the band not being able to rouse her) and covers of Patti Smith's Space Monkey and Grinding Halt by The Cure. Five years later, Pat walks into Satyricon, sees Bonnie, and asks her what she is currently doing. "I'm doing nothing. I'm just watching." And Pat said, if you get an idea, let me know, I'm doing nothing too."

"I had finished up with the boy bands and decided I needed a new vision. You know what hap-

pens when you play in a band, loading, setting up, soundcheck, doing your gig. If everything goes right, you are out of there. And so, a lot of the times, I was not hanging around and nor was I going out to other clubs because I was playing at another one. So I took the summer off and went dancing. So a month later, I call her up and I said I had an idea. An all girls group that's danceable but the "twist" is we have 3 guys in tuxedos dancing on the side. We called them The Davetones and they were the boowop shoobop guys. Role reversal where the girls were the meat and the boys were the foo foo's. And it worked. We always made the W a capitol letter for "women": the tWist.

"We were very serious about our music but wondered why at gigs the audience were giggling and smiling so much. We were too busy to see the antics of The Davetones behind us, such as on the song Desperate Eyes, they wore springy eyeglasses. They'd lean into the mics and the eyes would spring out. It was fun, lighthearted and danceable. What made it different was Sylvia played multiple string instruments and was a killer Irish style player. She can totally rock but in the nuances you would hear these runs that gave the band a very different sound."

Sylvia likewise found Bonnie wonderful to work with and, even tho she was the songwriter of the band, Bonnie was very open to collaboration in the musical arrangements. "We worked closely to create a melodic interplay between our two guitars. And she was a consummate show woman in every way; the rest of us being confirmed introverts gave her a lot to make up for!" Original bassist Margaret thought it was great fun playing with the Twist. "We attracted an art crowd. I loved our first gig at Pat Baum's warehouse studio" which was across from the White Eagle Tavern. "Bonnie's prolific songwriting abilities" says Pat Baum, "seemed to come in great creative waves; anything she ever wrote for the TWIST was marked with her signature mix of 60's folk-rock, ode to Keith Richard guitar riffs and heart-felt girl-to-woman meets boy-next-door lyrics. The music was straight

ahead rock: 3 chord, verse /chorus / versus / lead; in that sense she never strayed far from her roots, yet her music constantly evolved to encompass new genres, like new wave and punk.

"Her enthusiasm for our all-woman band continued even after she moved to the Oregon coast and took a job at a gallery. She'd come to Portland on her days off on the bus for band rehearsals, bursting with enthusiasm over a new song she'd just written for us. Or we'd go to Cannon Beach to play, then stay up late after the gig, slumber-party-style in jammies and listen to our fave women-rockers, like Marianne Faithful and Patti Smith or watch cult movies like, Jack Cardiff's, "Girl on a Motorcycle."

Bonnie left Portland in '87, but continued playing in the band until '89 when a great vinyl single was issued on Funhouse Records, by which time Nancy Burroff was on bass.

The song Wolves with a B side of Scared (Of A Woman), a tasty slab about making ends meet and keeping the wolves at bay followed by a song telling a man not to be afraid of a woman who is fancy and free and doesn't need no sympathy. "When it comes to the pain of love, you know you can hurt me with just one little shove, the scary truth is I'm just like you, and I've had my share of broken hearts too."

What is amazing is that, for all its power pop shredding '80's sound, the sentiments would fit remarkably well with her recent songs like

Not The Right Girl or From A Distance, only recorded a month ago. Perhaps she'll pull it out for the setlist for the upcoming gig at Kala Gallery, which will be something of a career retrospective. She is already promising to play "The Pervert Song", a song she wrote in her old folky days in the late '60's when she was performing at the Ninth Street Exit with people like Paul DeLay, Jim Mesi, and Steve Bradley.

What you will definitely hear is an Oregon Rock 'n Roll pioneer and a writer of songs from the heart playing with a white hot band. And so, when you head down to KALA this month, be sure to feed the tip jar and tell Bonnie to "Rock On"



## BONNIE BENTLEY & THE PHANTOM TEARDROPS

**BONNIE AND PHANTOM TEARDROPS @ KALA  
FRIDAY, JULY 19**

A RETROSPECTIVE PERFORMANCE  
AND EP RELEASE PARTY  
DOORS OPEN 8:30PM  
SHOW AFTER 9PM  
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The Rudders. Arthur Beardsley, Laurance Gillian, Bonnie Bentley.



Phantom Teardrop at Moodies. Patrick Lines harp, Arthur Beardsley bass, Bonnie, and Jeff Carden on drums. Photo: Heidie Aphrodite.