

# VOICES

IN HER WORDS



## BONNIE RAITT

SINGER, ACTIVIST, SMARTPHONE CYNIC / INTERVIEW BY HOLLY GEORGE-WARREN

### FIND THE FUN IN YOUR JOB

"I spent a year writing songs for my new album, and every few months my band and I would go out on the road to keep the coffers full and have a good time. If I had to go a year without touring, I'd shoot myself. I'd be so lonely."

### BE IN THE MOMENT

"I ask people to enjoy my concerts in real time—and not hold up their phones. I can't sing when people are recording my performance. I want to look out into the crowd and see that people are paying attention. Otherwise it's like, why are you here?"

### PASSION FIRST, CAREER SECOND

"Growing up, I played Joan Baez, Pete Seeger and Bob Dylan records. I performed songs around the fire at my summer camp. When I took a break from college to be the opening act for some blues artists, people were saying, 'Who's this redheaded white girl from California?' Then I got a record deal, which was a total surprise to me."

### WHAT I LEARNED FROM SOBRIETY

"I used to keep my substance abuse to the evenings, after I finished a show, because I couldn't sing when I was messed up. I've now been sober 29 years. But sobriety isn't just about not drinking or using. It's about being accountable for your actions and remembering you have the choice to pull yourself out of a situation that makes you unhappy."

### FINDING THE NEXT BONNIE RAITT

"When Fender came to me in 1995 and said, 'Can we do a Bonnie Raitt guitar?' I said, 'No. I don't want to sell stuff.' Then I realized we could raise money for a good cause. So we did the guitar and donated the profits to opening 200 Boys and Girls Clubs that would offer free guitar lessons. The kids may not know who I am, but at least they get access to instruments."

### DO SOMETHING FOR THE LONG HAUL

"I would like to have this job when I'm in my eighties and nineties. The people I know—mainly folk artists—are chugging along in their sixties and seventies. They never think about retiring. They just do it until they can't do it anymore."

### STAY OPEN TO POSSIBILITIES

"It's hard for any long-term relationship to stay vital. Even when I was in my twenties, after eight years with somebody, I'd forget why we got together. Sometimes I think I'm done with relationships; it's not worth the pain. But at 66 I'm learning to not write anybody off, including myself. Just around the corner something could happen that will open your heart again."

**BONNIE RAITT**, 66, IS A 10-TIME GRAMMY-WINNING ARTIST AND ROCK AND ROLL HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE. HER 20TH ALBUM, *DIG IN DEEP*, IS DUE OUT THIS MONTH, AND SHE'LL LAUNCH A NATIONAL TOUR WITH HER LONGTIME BAND IN MARCH. RAITT, WHO IS DIVORCED WITH NO CHILDREN, LIVES IN NORTHERN CALIFORNIA. @TheBonnieRaitt

This interview has been edited and condensed.