

RICHIE HAVENS

BIOGRAPHY 2008

Gifted with one of the most recognizable voices in popular music, Richie Havens has a soulful singing style that remains as unique and ageless as when he first emerged from the Greenwich Village folk scene in the early 1960s. It's a voice that has inspired and electrified audiences from the Woodstock Music & Arts Fair in 1969, to the Clinton Presidential Inauguration in 1993 - coming full circle with the 30th Woodstock Anniversary celebration, "A Day In The Garden", in 1999.

For over three decades, Richie has used his music to convey messages of brotherhood and personal freedom. With more than twenty-five albums released and a touring schedule that would kill many a younger man, he continues to view his calling as a higher one. As he told *The Denver Post*, "I really sing songs that move me. I'm not in show business; I'm in the communications business. That's what it's about for me". For the fans, it's about how Richie embodies both, and in the summer of 2008, Richie Havens delivers to his fans a bold collection of new material on his release *Nobody Left to Crown* (July 29, 2008 / Verve Records).

Born in Brooklyn, Richard P. Havens was the eldest of nine children. At an early age, he began organizing his neighborhood friends into street corner doo-wop groups and was performing with The McCrea Gospel Singers at 16. At the age of 20, Richie left Brooklyn to seek out the artistic stimulation of Greenwich Village. "I saw the Village as a place to escape to in order to express yourself," he recalls. "I had first gone there during the beatnik days of the 1950s to perform poetry, then I drew portraits for 2 years and stayed up all night listening to folk music in the clubs. It took a while before I thought of picking up a guitar."

Richie's reputation as a solo performer soon spread beyond the Village folk circles. After joining forces with legendary manager Albert Grossman, Richie landed his first record deal with the Verve label, which released *Mixed Bag* in 1967. This auspicious debut album featured standout tracks like "Handsome Johnny" (co-written by Richie and future Oscar-winning actor Louis Gossett Jr.), "Follow", and the striking version of Bob Dylan's "Just Like A Woman" that earned Richie the reputation of being a premier interpreter of Dylan's material. By 1969, he had released five more albums (*Something Else Again* (1968) became Richie's first album to hit the *Billboard* chart and also pulled *Mixed Bag* onto the charts).

But it was Richie's reputation as a live performer that first earned him widespread notice. His Woodstock appearance proved to be a major turning point in Richie's

career. As the festival's first performer, he held the crowd spellbound for nearly three hours, called back for encore after encore. Having run out of tunes, he improvised a song based on the old spiritual "Motherless Child" that became "Freedom", a song now considered to be the anthem of a generation. The subsequent movie release helped Richie reach a worldwide audience of millions.

Meanwhile, Richie started his own record label, Stormy Forest, and delivered *Stonehenge* in 1970. Later that year



came *Alarm Clock*, which yielded the hit single "Here Comes The Sun", and became Richie's first album to reach *Billboard*'s Top 30 Chart. Stormy Forest went on to release four more of his

own albums: *The Great Blind Degree* (1971), *Live On Stage* (1972), *Portfolio* (1973), and *Mixed Bag II* (1974).

Memorable television appearances included performances on two now-legendary programs, *The Ed Sullivan Show* and *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson*. On the latter program, the audience reacted with such enthusiasm that when the applause continued even after the commercial break, Johnny Carson asked Richie to return the following night. In the show's long history, the only other guest booked back-to-back nights based on overwhelming audience response was Barbara Streisand.

Richie also branched out into acting during the 1970s. He was featured in the original 1972 stage presentation of The Who's *Tommy*, and had the lead role in the 1974 film *Catch My Soul*, based on Shakespeare's *Othello*. In 1977, he co-starred with Richard Pryor in *Greased Lightning*.

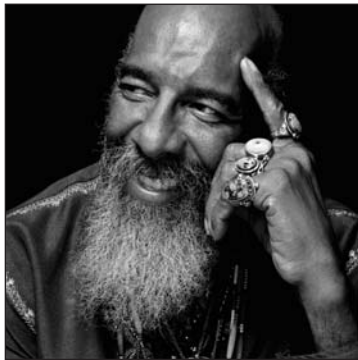
Increasingly, Richie devoted his energies to educating young people about ecological issues. In the mid-1970s, he co-founded the Northwind Undersea Institute, an oceanographic children's museum on City Island in The Bronx. That, in turn, led to the creation of The Natural Guard, an organization Richie describes as "a way of helping kids learn that they can have a hands-on role in affecting the environment. Children study the land, water, and air in their own communities and see how they can make positive changes from something as simple as planting a garden in an abandoned lot."

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During the 80s and 90s, Richie continued a non-stop world touring schedule and a steady release of albums. The release of 1993's *Resume, The Best Of Richie Havens* (Rhino) was a long overdue collection of his seminal late 60s and early 70s recordings.

Other highlights of the past decade include his triumphant set at the Troubadours Of Folk Festival at UCLA's Drake Stadium, where once again, Richie's capacity audience refused to let him leave the stage. He fondly remembers this event as a "Greenwich Village Class Reunion". At another Los Angeles appearance, His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked Richie to perform "Lives In The Balance" and "Freedom" to underscore his urgent message about the future of Tibet.



Richie greeted the year 2000 with a flurry of activity: he relaunched Stormy Forest and began remastering and reissuing his early recordings. Collaborations with Peter Gabriel and British dance duo Groove Armada presented Richie to a whole new audience, and sold out tours of Ireland and England were soon to follow.

In 2002, Stormy Forest released a new studio album, *Wishing Well*, which brought rave reviews from the press. *Acoustic Guitar* called the recording "lush and meditative". *Billboard* said "this acoustic soul giant truly seems to be getting more inspiring and graceful with age" and *Mojo* remarked "he's lost none of his power to enthrall and enchant".

In 2003, The National Music Council awarded Richie the American Eagle Award for his place as part of America's musical heritage, and for providing "a rare and inspiring voice of eloquence, integrity and social responsibility."

2004 brought another new, self-produced album, *Grace Of The Sun*, which again found Richie composing most of the tracks. Laden with the stunning guitar work of Walter Parks and Christopher Cunningham, and featuring contributions by world musicians Badal Roy (India), Jorge Alfano (Argentina) and Hasan Isakkut (Turkey), the result is an exotic tapestry that perfectly complements Richie's signature percussive strumming and rich, melodic vocals.

For Richie Havens, making music is a continuous journey; one that advances a step further with each album. "My albums are meant to be a chronological view of the times we've come through, what we've thought about, and what we've done to grow and change. There's a universal point to which we all respond, and where all songs apply to everyone".

The latest leg of Richie Havens' journey is entitled *Nobody Left to Crown*. A sense of timelessness rings through the album, as though the passing years have only strengthened the meaning of Richie Havens' soul-filled folk rock. Organically produced by Havens with Jay Newland and Brian Bacchus, *Nobody Left to Crown* attests that Richie Havens has never been more relevant, necessary even, than he is today – especially considering that the situation in America is not dissimilar to that of the 60s. "Songs that I wrote at the time are more pertinent today than ever, with this connection that links Vietnam and Iraq", maintains Richie. Indeed, his fiery cover of The Who classic "Won't Get Fooled Again" is anything but innocent and connects the rebellion of two generations, with Richie playing the role of ferryman.

As with much of Richie's work, *Nobody Left to Crown* puts the spotlight on recovery and confirms his talent for interpretation. The soulful covers of Jackson Browne's "Lives in the Balance", with the slide guitar of prodigy Derek Trucks gliding through it, and "The Great Mandala", a song by Peter Yarrow of the folk group Peter, Paul and Mary, are to be particularly savoured. "Standing On The Water", originally written by Andy Fairweather Low, is another highlight. Richie's own works are of a similar calibre and songs like "The Key", "(Can't You Hear) Zeus's Anger Roar", "If I" and "Fates" each relay a strong humanist understanding and political sensitivity.

Even if at times a certain melancholy emerges, Richie Havens is not a man to easily abandon his hopes for a better world. "We are at the dawn of major change", he declares with a broad smile. *Nobody Left to Crown* is his heartfelt and unwavering contribution to these fine aspirations.

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