

# RICHIE HAVENS *grace of the sun*

PRODUCED BY RICHIE HAVENS

AT RADIO JULY 13 • IN STORES JULY 20

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## BIOGRAPHY

Richie Havens is gifted with one of the most recognizable voices in popular music. His fiery, poignant, always soulful singing style has remained unique and ageless since he first emerged from the Greenwich Village folk scene in the early 1960's. It's a voice that has inspired and electrified audiences from the Woodstock Music & Arts Fair in 1969, to the Clinton Presidential Inauguration in 1983 -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".

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 1950's to perform poetry, then I drew portraits for 2 years and stayed up all night listening to folk music in the clubs. It took awhile before I thought of picking up a guitar". Nina Simone was a key vocal influence early on, and Fred Neil and Dino Valenti were among the folksingers who had an impact on Richie during this period.

Richie's reputation as a solo performer soon spread beyond the Village folk circles. He recorded two albums worth of demos for Douglas International in 1965 and '66, though none of the tracks were released until his first two albums caused a stir. 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 him the reputation of being a premier interpreter of Dylan's material.

*Something Else Again* (1968) became Richie's first album to hit the Billboard chart, and also pulled *Mixed Bag* onto the charts. That same year, Douglas International added (unapproved) instrumental tracks to his old demos and released two albums, *Richie Havens' Record* and *Electric Havens*. Less than a year later, Richie's first co-production, the two-disc *Richard P. Havens, 1983* (Verve 1969), gave fans a taste of his exciting live sound.

It was, in fact, as a live performer that Richie first earned widespread notice. By decade's end, he was in great demand in colleges across the country, as well as on the international folk and pop festival circuit. Richie played the 1966 Newport Folk Festival, the 1967 Monterey Jazz Festival, the 1968 Miami Pop Festival, the 1969 Woodstock Festival, the 1969 Isle of Wight Festival, and the first Glastonbury Festival in 1970.

Richie's Woodstock appearance proved to be a major turning point in his 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 Barbra Streisand.

Richie also branched out into acting during the 1970's. 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-1970's, 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".

During the 70's and 80's, Richie continued a non-stop world touring schedule and a steady release of albums, including *End Of The Beginning*, *Mirage*, *Connections*, the Italian-made *Common Ground*, *Simple Things*, and *Now*.

He continued that live performance pace throughout the 90's including a landmark Madison Square Garden appearance at the Bob Dylan 30th Anniversary Concert in 1992. Richie's show-stopping performance of "Just Like A Woman" was hailed by the press as one of the all-star show's finest performances.

1993 heralded the release of *Resume, The Best Of Richie Havens* (Rhino), a long overdue collection of his seminal late 60's, early 70's recordings, and 1994 brought the new studio album, *Cuts To The Chase*.

Other highlights of the past decade include his triumphant set at the Troubadours Of Folk Festival at UCLA's Drake Stadium, where, once again, a capacity audience refused to let him leave the stage. Richie 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.

In the summer of 1999, Richie's first book was released. The title, *They Can't Hide Us Anymore*, referred to Richie's thoughts as he flew in a helicopter over the crowds at Woodstock in 1969.

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, including a return to England's legendary Glastonbury Festival, where he played with his own band and then joined Groove Armada on stage for a performance the BBC would call one of the highlights of the three-day festival.

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".

And now this year brings another new, self-produced album, *Grace Of The Sun*, which finds Richie again 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 and compelling tapestry that serves as the perfect musical complement to Richie's own signature percussive strumming and rich, melodic vocals.

For Richie Havens, making music is a continuous journey, and 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".