



*Settin' the woods on fire*

# LITTLE RICHARD

*the Reprise rarities*

## *Side One*

1. THE RILL THING RADIO SPOT A
2. MONEY IS
3. MISSISSIPPI (INSTRUMENTAL)
4. STILL MISS LIZA JANE
5. IN THE NAME (VERSION 4, TAKE 3)
6. SETTIN' THE WOODS  
ON FIRE (INSTRUMENTAL)

## *Side Two*

1. DO IT = TO IT
2. OPEN UP THE RED SEA
3. WHY DON'T YOU LOVE ME
4. IN THE NAME (VERSION 2)
5. SNEAK THE FREAK
6. SHAKE A HAND (IF YOU CAN)
7. THE RILL THING RADIO SPOT B

COMPILATION PRODUCED FOR RELEASE BY LEE LODYGA AND CHERYL PAWELSKI



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Side 1, Tracks 1, 3–6 and Side 2, Tracks 2–5, 7 originally issued on  
*King Of Rock And Roll*, Rhino Handmade RHM2 7888 (01/05)

Side 1, Track 2 and Side 2, Track 1 originally issued on  
*\$ (Music From The Original Motion Picture Soundtrack)*,  
Reprise 2051 (02/72) • Produced by Quincy Jones  
Also issued on *The Second Coming*, Omnivore Recordings OVCD-398 (2020)

Side 2, Track 6 originally issued on Reprise single 1005 (03/71)  
Produced by Jerry Wexler and Tom Dowd at Criterion Studios, Miami, FL  
Also issued on *The Rill Thing*, Omnivore Recordings OVCD-396 (2020)  
along with Side One, Track 1 and Side Two, Track 7

Side 1, Track 5 and Side 2, Track 5 also issued on *Southern Child*,  
Omnivore Recordings OVCD-400 (2020)  
Original Album Produced by Richard Penniman and R.A. "Bumps" Blackwell

Side 1, Tracks 2, 6 and Side 2, Tracks 2–3, 5 also issued on  
*King Of Rock And Roll*, Omnivore Recordings OVCD-400 (2020)  
Original Album Produced by Richard Penniman and R.A. "Bumps" Blackwell

COMPILATION PRODUCED FOR RELEASE BY LEE LODYGA AND CHERYL PAWELSKI

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Business Affairs: Glenn Schwartz

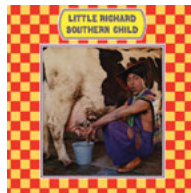
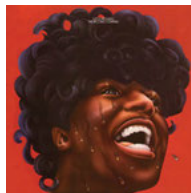
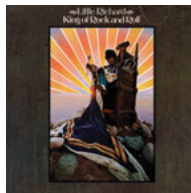
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# Little Richard returned to glorious, glittering prominence at the turn of the 1970s,

tirelessly exhibiting a public persona that frequently tumbled into outrageousness. The piano-pounding screamer flamboyantly rocked mainstream television variety programs that had ignored him back when he created a seismic impact with his seminal “Tutti-Frutti,” “Long Tall Sally,” “Rip It Up” and “Good Golly, Miss Molly” during the mid-’50s. Richard Penniman had been deemed downright dangerous in those days by stodgy powers-that-be. Now he was just right for the times.

Signing with well-established Reprise Records helped fuel Richard’s career momentum. Reprise had been founded by no less than Frank Sinatra, who would seem at first glance to be the anti-Little Richard. But they had one thing in common: each was tops in his respective field. Reprise had come a long way since the Chairman founded it back in 1961 with artistic freedom heavy on his mind and fellow Rat Packers Dean Martin and Sammy Davis Jr. among the logo’s early signings.

At that early stage, Reprise hosted nothing in the way of rock and roll. By 1970, when Richard released his first Reprise album *The Rill Thing*, the label’s roster skewed a lot younger and a great deal rockier: Jimi Hendrix, Jethro Tull, and Neil Young were also on board. Fats Domino had squeaked onto the charts for Reprise in 1968 with an out-of-left-field cover of the Beatles’ “Lady Madonna,” so the company had belatedly come to respect the genre’s pioneers.

It had been a long and bumpy road for the self-proclaimed King of Rock and Roll. Born in Macon, Georgia on December 5, 1932, he was already fairly experienced in the recording studio by the time he broke through, having done two 1951–52 RCA Victor sessions in Atlanta and a couple more for Don Robey’s Houston-based Peacock label in ’53. Richard hadn’t quite perfected his earth-shattering vocal attack back then; he was one more talented jump blues singer in a field loaded with them. But once he assembled the first incarnation of his band, the mighty Upsetters, Richard got down to creating something explosive that would rock the world.

Art Rupe, owner of Los Angeles-based Specialty Records, signed the tenacious young shouter, sending him to New Orleans along with A&R man Bumps Blackwell in September of 1955 to record at Cosimo Matassa’s studio. That’s where genuine magic happened. While taking a meal break, Richard sat down at a piano and launched into a ribald ditty he called “Tutti-Frutti.” Bumps saw that it was a potential smash if its filthy lyrics could be cleaned up, so he summoned local songwriter Dorothy LaBostrie. With Richard hammering the 88s, Lee Allen on volcanic tenor sax, and drummer Earl Palmer keeping locomotive-stoked time, Little Richard laid a song on tape at Cosimo’s that propelled him to rock and roll eminence before year’s end.

After that, mammoth hits came easy for Richard, mostly done with the same savage Crescent City crew. “Long Tall Sally” (like “Tutti-Frutti,” blandly covered by Pat Boone for the pop market) and its flip side “Slippin’ And Slidin’ (Peepin’ And Hidin’),” “Rip It Up” and its plattermate “Ready Teddy,” “Lucille,” “Jenny, Jenny,” “Keep A-Knockin’” (cut at a Washington D.C. radio station with The Upsetters), and “Good Golly, Miss Molly” catapulted Richard to the forefront of rock and roll royalty, his microphone-melting banshee wails a clarion call to a legion of rabid followers. He guested in a series of classic rock and roll movies, scorching the screen with his Upsetters even if they weren’t actually on the recordings they were miming.

That first incredible blast of stardom came to an abrupt halt during an Australian tour in the fall of 1957, the launch of the Russian satellite Sputnik totally unnerving the pianist. “Richard thought the world was gonna come to an end,” recalled The Upsetters’ late drummer, Charles Connor. The Georgia Peach told his band, “When I come back to the United States, I’m gonna give my life to God. I’m gonna be a Seventh Day Adventist minister.”

True to his word, Penniman retreated to the sanctity of an Alabama bible college in early 1958, subsequently performing and recording religious music exclusively. However, he eventually began to backslide. On a 1962 tour of Great Britain co-headlined by Sam Cooke where he thought he’d only sing gospel, Richard was cajoled into revisiting his old repertoire, tearing the joint apart. A subsequent U.K. jaunt cemented Richard’s first official comeback.

He recorded fresh rock and roll back home for Specialty, then Vee-Jay, Modern, OKeh and Brunswick. By 1968, his initial momentum had dissipated like air from a leaky tire as he tried to squeeze into contemporary soul rather than belt rock and roll.

It was time to mount another comeback that would emphasize his inner outrageousness. Modeling crazy threads, wearing even heavier pancake makeup than he had back in the ’50s, and indulging in audaciously campy behavior, Richard finally made some of the media inroads that were previously denied to him. Reprise signed the revitalized rocker and dispatched him to Muscle Shoals in 1970 to record the scorching *The Rill Thing*.

This collection consists of rarities from Richard’s Reprise catalog that in many cases have never seen vinyl issue. They were mostly unearthed decades later for various CD compilations, thus denying microgroove devotees their obvious charms. Happily, *Settin’ The Woods On Fire: The Reprise Sessions* rectifies that unfair situation once and for all.

Recording *The Rill Thing* at Rick Hall’s FAME Studios in Muscle Shoals with Bumps in attendance as his manager rather than his producer (Richard handled that duty himself) and its latest house band at their behest clearly rejuvenated the Quasar of Rock—his trademark wall-shaking screams and vicious rocking rhythms were back in dazzling abundance. “He was at his peak with his vocals there,” marveled Travis Wammack, Hall’s new house lead guitarist. “He was just singing his booty off!”

The album boasted Richard’s first pop hit in nearly half a decade, the defiant “Freedom Blues,” along with the blistering “Dew Drop Inn,” which miraculously rocked every bit as hard as his ’50s classics yet remained contemporary, and a swampy “Greenwood Mississippi” that Wammack had demoed for Richard on his pickup truck’s cassette player. No outtakes seem to have survived for future compilers to mine, but this collection offers two radio spots originally pressed up on a promo 45 as Reprise placed its considerable promotional muscle behind the LP. Richard narrated both in all his whooping glory between song clips, less than humbly labeling himself “the man that started it all” and shamelessly proclaiming his new set “the best thing that I’ve ever done!”

Continuing his tour of southern soul capitals, Richard stopped off in early 1971 at Mack Emerman’s Criteria Studios in Miami to lay down an emotionally charged remake of Faye Adams’ churchy 1953 R&B chart-topper “Shake A Hand (If You Can)” (written by her bandleader, trumpeter Joe Morris) supported by tight horns, chorines, and a steady-surgin groove. Richard had previously cut a slower version of “Shake A Hand” for Specialty in ’56. With Atlantic Records honchos Jerry Wexler and Tom Dowd at the production controls, you’d think his Reprise revival might have merited some notice, yet it slipped through the cracks as a single.

Then it was back to Richard’s adopted homebase of Los Angeles to cut his 1971 Reprise encore set *King Of Rock And Roll* (he apparently crowned himself with that regal sobriquet) at Music Recorders with veteran producer H.B. Barnum in charge. This time plenty of outtakes were left in the vaults. The released version of “In The Name,” the lone Richard original featured on the set, was a surging R&B workout, but this alternate take, marked as “Version 2,” borders on country, dispensing with the horns and backing singers (he didn’t tinker with its intriguing lyrical narrative, however).

That sudden country bent extended to rousing revivals of two Hank Williams classics. Kicking off his remake of Hank’s 1952 smash “Settin’ The Woods On Fire” with the ultra-familiar guitar lick from “Johnny B. Goode” certainly set it well apart from anything Hank envisioned, Richard threatening to bust his larynx with his incendiary vocal. The Chuck Berry fret homage is nowhere to be found on the instrumental reprise of the tune showcased on this album, rocking just as hard but utilizing a slightly different feel. There was no earthly reason not to include Richard’s storming treatment of Williams’ ’50 C&W chart-topper “Why Don’t You Love Me” on the original album—it was another brilliant recasting of a country landmark and would have fit in seamlessly.

Also hailing from those April ’71 *King Of Rock And Roll* outtakes, the Penniman composition “Still Miss Liza Jane” opens with a blast of bone-chilling a cappella vocalizing before bringing the studio band in to deliver a pounding rocker. Richard’s thundering boogie piano prowess defined the torrid instrumental “Open Up The Red Sea” along with a leather-lunged saxman, while the guitar-powered throbbler “Mississippi” may have been a backing track that never quite attracted Richard’s vocal attention.

Industry heavyweight Quincy Jones found room for Richard on his Reprise soundtrack for the bank heist film \$, writing, arranging, conducting and producing the thundering rockers “Money Is” and “Do It – To It” (the latter seemingly custom-penned for Richard with a couple of his favorite catchphrases gracing its first stanza) at Los Angeles’ Record Plant in the autumn of 1971 with guitarist David T. Walker, bassist Chuck Rainey and drummer Paul Humphrey laying down funk-steeped support. “Money Is” saw single release the following March.

“He was wild in the studio every time I saw him,” said Walker of Richard. “He was one of the most colorful people I’ve ever run into, or ever worked with.”

By any yardstick, 1972 kept Richard hopping in the studio. He was working on two Reprise albums, but only one saw light of day. *Southern Child* was supposed to come out first, but its release was canceled at the last moment. Possibly Reprise’s bosses recoiled at the set’s concept of Richard singing actual country music, and not the kind of lavishly orchestrated chestnuts Ray Charles had cashed in with a decade earlier. Richard wrote himself a sheaf of fresh material that producer Blackwell recruited legit country musicians to play on. That may have simply been too much of a stretch for Reprise’s suits. The ostensible album cover photo of the rock and roll pioneer milking a cow might have been a bit much to swallow as well.

They were seemingly more comfortable with *The Second Coming*, issuing it as Richard’s third Reprise long-player. It was more typical Richard—wild R&B-rooted rock and roll that reunited him with New Orleans émigrés Lee Allen and Earl Palmer at the Record Plant. David T. Walker was part of an all-star guitar contingent along with George Davis, Adolph Jacobs, and Mike Deasy, while Chuck Rainey manned the bass.

The torrid instrumental “Sneak The Freak” likely dates from those April/May 1972 sessions but didn’t crack the track lists of either album. A decided New Orleans feel permeates the workout, Richard rattling the ivories with a bit of a Professor Longhair boogie flair over sax-soaked support.

Richard returned to “In The Name” yet again at these dates, still apparently searching for the ultimate version (the one included here was marked “Version 4, Take 3”). Richard backed his intimate reading with only acoustic guitar this time, resulting in a downhome, almost delicate approach. Having already graced *King Of Rock And Roll* in more aggressive fashion, there was no hope of this considerably different rendition also finding release.

Growing disillusioned with major label status, Richard exited Reprise after *The Second Coming*. He would record for other companies large and small and unleash more exciting music, but his Reprise catalog remains one of his most fascinating later phases. These outtakes and rarities only add to its significance.

—Bill Dahl

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## SOURCES

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