

in such a richly contextual manner deserves high praise and has resulted in a collection that will serve as a valuable resource for years to come.

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Little Richard, *Here's Little Richard* (remastered and expanded). Specialty Records CD 2100, 2012.

Saying that Little Richard invented rock 'n' roll is like saying Darwin came up with the theory of evolution on his own. Just as the great English scientist had numerous precursors and was aided in his quest by such contemporaries as Sir Charles Lyell, Thomas Henry Huxley, and Alfred Russell Wallace, so, too, did Little Richard draw on decades of earlier music and work alongside such pioneers as Wynonie Harris, Bill Haley, and Elvis Presley to create a sound that has changed the world. There is no single identifiable first rock 'n' roll song, but the press release that accompanies the Concord Music Group's reissue of Little Richard's first album is correct in identifying his best-known song, "Tutti Frutti," as the "first great rock 'n' roll record." (The album was released in 1957, though many of the songs, including "Tutti Frutti," appeared as 45s in 1955.) A chaste rewrite of a roadhouse anthem that praised the joys of illicit sex, "Tutti Frutti" rose to #2 on *Billboard's* R&B chart and #17 on the pop chart; *Rolling Stone* puts it at #43 on its list of the greatest 500 songs of all time.¹

That "Tutti Frutti" was even recorded in the first place is something of a miracle. The story begins with the arrival at the Los Angeles office of Specialty Records founder Art Rupe of a demo tape in a wrapper that, as producer Bumps Blackwell—quoted in Lee Hillebrand's liner notes—said, looked "as though someone had eaten off of it." Although initially dubious, Rupe and Blackwell decided eventually to take a chance on the unknown Richard Penniman, not only signing him to a contract but also saving the wrapper, which appears, in all its greasy glory, as the cover to the booklet included with the reissued CD.

That booklet begins enthusiastically if inaccurately by reproducing the notes from the original album liner, stating, for example, that Little Richard was born on Christmas Day, though he was actually born on 5 December 1935. However, the bulk of the booklet consists of Hillebrand's thoughtful and informative discussion of the events of 13–14 September 1955, when, in Cosimo Matassa's cramped New Orleans studio, Richard recorded "Tutti Frutti" as well as most of the other songs for which he be known.

¹ Originally released on LP as Little Richard, *Here's Little Richard*, Specialty Records SP-100, 1957. *Rolling Stone*, 9 December 2004.

The disk features Little Richard's best-known hits, including "Tutti Frutti," "Long Tall Sally," "Ready Teddy," "Jenny Jenny," "Rip It Up," and "Slippin' and Slidin'," among others. All of the songs were recorded in New Orleans, with the exception of "True, Fine Mama" and "She's Got It," both of which were recorded at the Specialty studio in Los Angeles.

There are also two bonus audio tracks, the demo recordings of "Baby" and "All Night Long," the muddy sound of which is balanced by a certain this-music-was-made-by-ordinary-people-like-me quality that one only gets from an amateurish recording. There are two videos as well: screen tests of "Tutti Frutti" and "Long Tall Sally" that led to movie roles for Little Richard (in *Don't Knock the Rock* and *The Girl Can't Help It*) during his heyday. Together, this material provides ample evidence of Little Richard's monumental achievement. In his notes, Hillebrand describes the work produced during the twenty-five-month period between September 1955 and October 1957 when the artist recorded for Specialty (he had also made records for RCA Victor in 1951 and Peacock Records in 1953) as "quite possibly the most exciting and incendiary recordings in the annals of popular music and constitute a body of work upon which Richard's reputation as one of the primary architects of rock 'n' roll is measured."

The real treasure on this reissue, though, is a 1997 interview of slightly more than nine minutes with Art Rupe, who recounts the two years that were Little Richard's golden age, from the arrival of the demo tape at the Specialty offices to the singer's abrupt denunciation of "the devil's music" and his conversion to gospel. Rupe still seems sore about his star's defection; "Richard could have blown his nose and we could have recorded it and sold it," he says. It's hard to imagine anyone disagreeing with Rupe's description of Little Richard as "a real enigma," though rhythm and blues fans might balk at his assertion that, "if he would have taken direction a little better," he might have had a career like Frank Sinatra's.

Today, Little Richard continues to toggle between the devil's music and godliness, though his recent touring schedule suggests he has found the former does a better job of paying the bills. The start of his long, strange trip is well documented in this new release. But part of the trip's strangeness is that somehow ordinary chronology doesn't seem to apply: that brief period in which Richard Penniman laid down a handful of tracks that changed the world was a beginning but an end as well.

David Kirby



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Victor Herbert, *Works for Cello and Piano, Solo Piano Works*. Jerry Grossman, cello; and William Hicks, piano. New World Records CD 80721-2, 2011, 2 CDs.

This double-disc set is devoted to short works for piano and cello composed by Victor Herbert (1859–1924). It is an intriguing choice for *The Foundations of*