

Life and work of little richard music essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

For years, people all over the world have dubbed Elvis Presley the King of Rock N Roll. His notoriety spans throughout almost every country and references about him can be understood in every culture. Contrary to popular belief, though, Elvis was not the originator of so many controversial topics in the fifties and sixties. While Elvis appealed mainly to the white crowds, Richard Wayne Penniman, also known as 'Little Richard', was performing for multicultural audiences with the same erratic music and flamboyant dance moves that made Elvis so controversial; so why is Elvis considered the king? Little Richard was one of the most influential and innovative artists of the rock 'n' roll era, and did it in a time where no one else was doing anything like it. Regardless of popular belief, Little Richard is the first king of rock 'n' roll.

Richard Wayne Penniman was born on December 5th, 1932 in Macon Georgia. He was third of twelve children in his family. He was born to Charlie and Leva Mae Penniman into the impoverished area of the city. The Penniman family was very religious, with both Richard's father and grandfather working as preachers in the area. In fact, church is where his singing career began when his parents formed a family singing group called 'The Penniman Singers' that consisted of Richard, his parents, and his siblings. Continuing in his religion, Richard had the opportunity to experience many different types of religion and churches. His favorite was the Pentecostal church because of its fun, dancing, and music. Richard also became a 'faith healer' in the church so that he could place his hands on people, pray for them, and they claimed to feel better afterward.

Little Richard was influenced by many people throughout history. He was involved in many travelling performing shows such as Sugarfoot Sam's International Show, Dr. Hudson's Medicine Show, and Billy Brown and his Orchestra, where he gained his stage name, Little Richard. In this time period, he was heavily influenced by the gospel singers of the 30s and 40s, and one of the biggest impacts was made by Sister Rosetta Tharpe. When Richard was at one of her concerts in 1945, she called him on stage to sing a song with her because she had heard him singing in the lobby before the show. As she was one of his favorite singers at the time, this event had a big impact on Richard's life. He was also heavily influenced by artists like Marion Williams, Mahalia Jackson, Brother Joe May, Esquerita, and Billy Wirght. Billy Wright also helped Richard get his start in the professional music career by setting him up with his first contract.

In 1951, Little Richard signed with RCA Camden records and began to try to find his sound without much success. He was struggling to find a sound that worked for him as an artist, and his label wanted him to sound more like other artists like Ray Charles, who was very popular in this time period. When Richard was out of his contract with RCA in mid 1953, he signed with Peacock Records. He was still having difficulties finding something that fit his personality and style. He released a record a year for four years and still didn't have a hit. In 1955, his contract was bought from Peacock Records by Specialty Records and he began working with Robert 'Bumps' Blackwell. In a frustrating recording session, just when Blackwell was almost ready to give up on Richard and told the band to take a break, Richard jumped up on stage and started plunking out a tune on the piano that would eventually become

one of his most popular songs, " Tutti Frutti". Richard had been playing this song on stage for years prior when he wasn't under contract and Blackwell was stunned by the fresh sound. He loved it so much that he immediately wanted Richard to record it. The only problem was that the song was not commercially acceptable as it was originally written. The label hired Dorothy La Boistre to clean up the lyrics in phrases such as, " Tutti frutti, good booty" to change them into, " Tutti Frutti, aw-rooty". The song became very popular.

The success of this first hit was followed by 16 hit singles in the following three years. Little Richard was slowly but surely taking the music industry by storm. Some other hits that were notable were " Rip It Up", " Long Tall Sally", " Lucille", " Good Golly, Miss Molly", " Keep A-Knocking", " Girl Can't Help It", and " Slippin' and Slidin'". " Long Tall Sally" was one of his most noted songs and hit number six on the R&B Billboard charts. Another favorite was " Girl Can't Help It" because it was written for the movie with the same title starring Jane Mansfield. Richard appeared in a few movies during this time period, mainly to provide a movie soundtrack. When asked about those movies, Little Richard reports that the white executives tried to contain him and his style. He said, " They didn't want me letting myself go. They kept wanting me to be stiffer, telling me 'Here's how a black man would perform this.' I said. 'Now how would you know that?'" Little Richard was a very unique person and he never stopped being himself.

Between 1955 and 1957, many of Little Richard's popular songs were re-done by other artists including Elvis Presley, Pat Boone, and Bill Haley. His popularity as an artist was growing and his fan base was continuously growing and becoming more diversified. Elvis Presley and Pat Boone both

covered " Tutti Frutti". Boone's version outdid Little Richard's when it came to record sales. Almost directly after, Boone did a cover of " Long Tall Sally", presumably expecting the same results. This time, however, Little Richard's original recording got better reviews and peaked higher on Billboard's pop charts. The same was true when Presley and Bill Haley each released a version of " Rip It Up" and neither gained the reaction that Little Richard did.

Little Richard was not only a role model for the sound of many of the pioneers of rock 'n' roll, he was an advocate for controversial issues of the time period. Little Richard's concerts were known mainly for their tendency to get extremely out of control due to his outrageous personality and performance style. He made history at a concert in Baltimore, Maryland when there were reports of police having to restrain people from jumping off balconies, and the show had to be stopped twice so that police could remove screaming fans from the stage. The fans that got onstage were attempting to gain souvenirs from Richard by ripping them off his body. It also goes down in history as being one of the first concerts where ladies ever threw their undergarments onstage for the artists.

With this type of concert response, it's no wonder Richard was caught up in constant parties and questionable acts throughout the mid 1950s.