

Richie Havens

Richard Pierce "Richie" Havens (*January 21, 1941 – April 22, 2013*) was an American folk singer and guitarist. He is best known for his intense and rhythmic guitar style (often in open tunings), soulful covers of pop and folk songs, and his opening performance at the 1969 Woodstock Festival.

Early life

Born in Brooklyn, 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.

Early career

At age 20, Havens left Brooklyn, seeking artistic stimulation in Greenwich Village. "I saw the Village as a place to escape to, in order to express yourself," he recalled. "I had first gone there during the Beatnik days of the 1950s to perform poetry, then I drew portraits for two 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."

Havens' reputation as a solo performer soon spread beyond the Village folk circles. After cutting two records for Douglas Records, Havens signed on with Bob Dylan's manager Albert Grossman, and landed a record deal with the Verve Forecast label. Verve released *Mixed Bag* in 1967, which featured tracks like "Handsome Johnny" (co-written by Havens and future Oscar-winning actor Louis Gossett Jr.), "Follow", and a cover of Bob Dylan's "Just Like a Woman".

Pre-Woodstock rise

By 1969, Havens had released five more albums. *Something Else Again* (1968) became his first album to hit the Billboard chart and also pulled *Mixed Bag* back onto the charts. Two of those albums were unauthorized "exploitation albums" released by Douglas Records (or Douglas International: *Electric Havens* (released June 01, 1968) and *Richie Havens Record* (1969):

This [*Electric Havens*] was one of two albums (the other being *The Richie Havens Record*) comprised of overdubbed solo demos, probably from sometime between 1963-1965, that Havens had done prior to recording for Verve and making his official recording debut. In the late '60s, as Havens rose to stardom, producer Alan Douglas took the original solo demos and overdubbed them with electric instruments. The albums were pulled from circulation and are hard to find today. The eight-song set is oriented toward the kind of traditional material that he was likely doing in clubs around that time, such as "Oxford Town", "C.C. Rider", and "900 Miles From Home" as well as an early Dylan cover, "Boots & Spanish Leather". Havens sings with his usual spontaneous conviction, and although the electric backing sounds a bit awkward -- and, unsurprisingly considering the circumstances, wavering in time keeping -- it's not overdone, or completed in such a fashion that it's difficult to enjoy the performances.

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Woodstock: opening act



Havens' reputation as a live performer earned him widespread notice. His Woodstock appearance proved to be a major turning point in his career. As the festival's first performer, he held the crowd for nearly three hours (in part because he was told to perform a lengthy set because many artists were delayed in reaching the festival location), and was called back for several encores. Having run out of tunes, he improvised a song based on the old spiritual "Motherless Child" that became "Freedom". The subsequent Woodstock movie release helped Havens reach a worldwide audience. He also appeared at the Isle of Wight Festival in late August 1969.

Following the success of his Woodstock performance, Havens started his own record label, Stormy Forest, and released *Stonehenge* in 1970. Later that year came *Alarm Clock*, which included the George Harrison penned hit single "Here Comes the Sun". This was Havens' first album to reach Billboard's Top 30 Chart. Stormy Forest went on to release four more of his albums: *The Great Blind Degree* (1971), *Live On Stage* (1972), *Portfolio* (1973), and *Mixed Bag II* (1974). Memorable television appearances included performances on *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, Carson asked Havens to return the following night.

Havens also branched out into acting during the 1970s. He was featured in the original 1972 stage presentation of *The Who's Tommy*, and appeared as Othello in the 1974 film *Catch My Soul*. He also appeared in *Greased Lightning* alongside Richard Pryor in 1977. In 1987, he landed a role in the Bob Dylan vehicle *Hearts of Fire*.

Havens increasingly 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 Havens 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."

1980s–1990s

During the 1980s and 1990s, Havens continued a world touring schedule and a steady release of albums. The release of 1993's *Resume, The Best Of Richie Havens* Rhino collected his late 1960s and early 1970s recordings. In 1982, Havens composed and performed a promotional slogan for NBC's 1982-83 television season entitled, *We're NBC, Just Watch Us Now*. He also

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performed slogans for CBS and ABC, and recorded commercials for Amtrak, singing the slogan "There's something about a train that's magic." Havens has also done corporate commercial work for Maxwell House Coffee as well as singing "The Fabric of Our Lives" theme for the cotton industry.

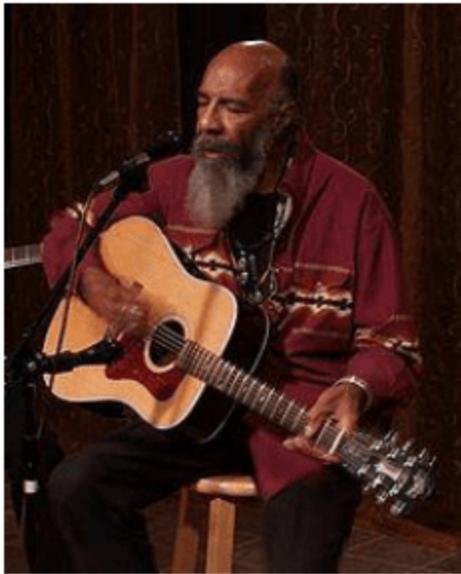
In 1993, Havens performed at the inauguration of President Bill Clinton. Among the selections was the "Cotton" song, made famous by a series of television ads in the early 1990s. In 1999, Havens played at the Tibetan Freedom Concert for an audience of more than 100,000.

Havens also played a small role as a character named Daze in a 1990 film named Street Hunter starring John Leguizamo.

Havens was the 20th living recipient of the Peace Abbey Courage of Conscience Award, presented in Sherborn, Massachusetts, on April 12, 1991.

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2000s



In 2000, Havens teamed up with the electronic music duo Groove Armada for the retro 1970s-style song "Hands of Time". The track was featured on the soundtrack for the film *Collateral*, starring Tom Cruise and Jamie Foxx; the same song also used in the films *Domino* starring Keira Knightley, and *Tell No One* with François Cluzet. Havens was also featured on *Little By Little* and *Healing* on the band's third album *Goodbye Country* (Hello Nightclub).

In 2000, Havens published *They Can't Hide Us Anymore*, an autobiography co-written with Steve Davidowitz. He maintained his status as a folk icon and continued to tour. In 2002, he released *Wishing Well*, followed by the 2004 album *Grace of the Sun*.

In 2003, the National Music Council awarded Havens 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."

On October 15, 2006, Havens was inducted into the Long Island Music Hall of Fame.

In 2007, Havens appeared as "Old Man Arvin" in the Todd Haynes film *I'm Not There*. In a classic front-porch jam scene, he is shown singing the Bob Dylan song "Tombstone Blues" with

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Marcus Carl Franklin and Tyrone Benskin. Havens's version of the song also appears on the I'm Not There soundtrack.

Havens was invited to perform at the 2008 Cannes Film Festival opening ceremony. He played "Freedom" in tribute to his fan and jury president, Sean Penn. He also performed at the London, Ontario, Blues Festival in July 2008.

In March 2008, Havens released a new studio album titled Nobody Left To Crown. The first single release was country-tinged "The Key".

Havens appeared in the acclaimed 2009 film Soundtrack for a Revolution, which provided a general history of the modern Civil Rights Movement, and had modern artists performing many of the era's musical classics. In the film, Havens performed a haunting rendition of "Will the Circle Be Unbroken".

On May 3, 2009, Havens performed at the fundraising concert in honor of Pete Seeger's 90th birthday. In June 2009, he performed at the fifth annual Mountain Jam Festival. The event, hosted by Allman Brothers Band and Gov't Mule guitarist Warren Haynes, was held at the Hunter Mountain Ski Resort in Hunter, New York. As is the tradition, the festival took place on the weekend following Memorial Day. On June 20, 2009, Havens performed at the Clearwater Festival. On July 4, 2009, he performed at the Woodstock Tribute festival in Ramsey, New Jersey. On August 8, 2010, he performed at Musikfest 2010 at Foy Hall at Moravian College in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

On March 20, 2012, Havens announced on his Facebook page that he would stop touring after 45 years due to health concerns. On April 22, 2013, Havens died of a heart attack at home in Jersey City, New Jersey. He was 72.
