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LOS ANGELES--- There is not a lot of Awop-Bop-a-Loo-Mop Alop-Bam-Boom within the humble Sunset Boulevard hotel suite in which Little Richard lives.

The one-room walls are disarmingly neutral while the third-floor view of Hollywood Hills is positively dazzling. The lone relic of a remarkable 37-year rock 'n' roll run is a well-kept black-and-white 1960 photograph of Little Richard holding hands with four lads from Liverpool who only wanted to meet someone famous.

The furniture arrangement is that of a man still on the move, combining hotel ambience with a couple of nicked pieces from a maple set that appears to have been with Richard since Long Tall Sally was short. A stack of weathered gospel records leans against a file cabinet, a dog-eared black Bible with paled gold pages rests bedside.

This sure isn't Graceland.

"Some people give you flowers when you're dead, but I don't know why they can't give you a bouquet while you're alive," said Richard, with his black-stockinged feet propped up on a modern double bed. "They can plant the garden while you're gone, but let you smell 'em a little bit while you're around. I don't get the credit I should be given. And from the bottom of my heart I believe a lot of it is racism. I started the music, I started the flamboyant dressing, I started the hard piano and I think if I was white, I'd get the credit.

"I am the originator, I am the quasar.

"I don't deny Elvis as a great entertainer and I never will say he isn't," he continued. "But I never will say that I'm not the originator, either, because I am. When I came on the scene, I didn't know nobody. I heard Mahalia Jackson, Joe Turner and Roy Brown. The first time I heard the word 'rockin' ' was from Roy Brown.

"Have you heard the news, there's good rockin' tonight?" Richard asked with a smooth smile that knew the rugged answer.

Good golly, there's more.

"I was recording for RCA Victor before Elvis Presley," he said. "But if you were black, they'd put you on a label called Camden. If you were white, they'd put you on RCA. And he recorded my songs right off of Camden. I appreciate him for that, and I thank God for Elvis Presley. But I started in 1950. Before me there was blues, but it wasn't rock 'n' roll."

Little Richard is in a remarkable, reborn form that denies his 55 years. He is wearing an open midnight-blue silk shirt and swinging black slacks, but it is the classic ebony gloss of his granite-like cheekbones that holds back the years. Thin jet black eyeliner highlight the fiery eyes that burn: No deposit, no return.

Little Richard was the first gone hepcat of rock 'n' roll. He blindly bent the most ostentatious elements of religion, jump music, sex and asexual costuming into a package that could only be marked "highly explosive."

Little Richard was dangerous.

When he last appeared in Chicago, some 20 years ago, his girlfriend, Lee Angel (a stripper with a 50-inch bust), had much of her clothes ripped off by aroused fans after a concert at the Civic Opera House.

In Atlanta, Little Richard discovered a down-and-out Jimi Hendrix with his guitar wrapped in a potato sack. As he toured in Richard's band, Hendrix slowly began to chisel his own charisma from the commanding presence of Captain Pompadour.

A registry of take-no-prisoners soul shouters cut their teeth on the road with Little Richard: Otis Redding, Joe Tex and Larry Williams. Only Little Richard remains.

And he will appear Thursday at the Holiday Star Theatre in Merrillville, Ind. The concert, featuring an eight-piece band, is a preliminary for his Saturday show with David Bowie at the Pontiac Silverdome near Detroit.

"There will be a lot of surprises," Richard promised. "My show is very colorful and very much alive. This is the first time I've worked with synthesizers - and light men, the sound men and so on.

"All the stage props that entertainers have today, I used to do all that myself. That's why I dressed the way I did. We didn't have that excess stuff. They don't have to work as hard today. James Brown, Tina Turner and myself are from the same school. You get used to working like that, and you don't stop. It's that drive, and I don't think props can make up for that. I think some people have a lot of props because they don't have the talent.

"There's nothing like real energy from a real person."

Richard will be updating the old in material such as "Lucille '87" and unveiling the new in tunes such as "Gosh Golly Goofy," which he wrote for the Disney Company. And last week, Richard finished recording with the Beach Boys on the soundtrack for a film called "Happy Ending."

There could be a sense of déjà vu at the Holiday Star. I spoke with Little Richard the day after Michael Jackson's "Bad" television special, and Richard was still revved about the show. "When I saw Michael last night, I saw Little Richard," he said. "I was the first black guy to dress flamboyant - the way Michael and Prince wear their hair, the way they look in their face - that's all me. I've got pictures where me and Prince look exactly alike. I saw Michael last night, and the cheekbones were like mine (both Little Richard and Little Michael have been nipped and tucked more than once) and so was the complexion.

"It's almost like a miracle."

But Richard is the one who retains the hard-edged rawness of growing up in Macon, Ga. "If you were black, you were not out front," he recalled with distant rage. "If a white boy won a race, you had to run seven times faster to win that same race. If a white boy won a talent show, in order for a black to win, they had to do something so outstanding that it couldn't be overlooked. It was hard-sweat work."

Richard began to model his theatrically tinged gospel singing around the traveling medicine shows that rolled through Macon. Colorful medicine men would wear lavish capes, robes and turbans leaving Richard hypnotized by the enchanting spirit.

"And racism was very heavy," he continued. "It is different from today. Back in that time, back in that era, Jews and blacks suffered together quite a bit. They lived in the same neighborhood. A family friend we used to call Jew Sam had a little store where we would get groceries on credit and clothes on time. They had hidden a synagogue in the basement of their store. That's how life was - we were kept back."

But the racism didn't daunt Richard Wayne Penniman in pursuit of his goal, which was to be the brightest star to soar across the Southern sky.

"My mother had 12 children and I always believed God would take care of us, which he did," Richard said. "And I always believed I would be a star. The teachers would say, 'Whatcha going to be when you grow up?' and I'd say, 'a star' and they'd always laugh. But I always felt that stardom was meant for me. I believe in a predestined time from my mother's womb."

"I'm a messenger of love, an ambassador of music from God to all races, creeds and colors."

Richard discounts the relentless rumors that he has left religion for the secular world.

"I'm just traveling in music again," he said. "I'd be crazy to leave God. I just got out of a terrible (1985 automobile) accident where he saved my life. I have 36 pins in my right leg. My tongue was torn up, my bladder was punctured and God spared me. I'd be a fool to leave somebody that good."

"Music is a ministry - a gift from God," Richard said.

"I never truly studied music," he added. "Nobody taught me or trained me about 'Tutti Frutti.' It was a gift. That's why I continue to spread his love and his joy, which I believe was the rock 'n' roll music of the '50s."

If there is any indication of control within the intrepid blueprint Little Richard designed for rock 'n' roll, it comes through gospel music and, specifically, the soul of Mahalia Jackson.

"What first attracted me to Mahalia Jackson was the way she looked," Richard said. "How she would have her eyes closed, how she would show so much feeling. That really got me. Her phrasing was unreal. And if you listen to her real good, you can tell I got my turns from her."

"From that I moved on to (rhythm and blues singer) Ruth Brown and then Brother Jo May - 'The Thunderbolt of the Middle West' - who was a gospel singer from East St. Louis, Ill. All of them sang with so much force and power.

"And when I'm onstage, I feel as if my body has been taken over, that God is directing."

One cannot mention Richard's almighty treble-twined piano playing without paying homage to hipster saint pianist Esquerita, who quietly died last year.

"He started me playing," Richard said. "If it wasn't for him, I wouldn't be playing piano today. He was my inspiration. I met him in my hometown when he was coming through with a preacher called Sister Rosa. I couldn't believe how he could go so high on treble without giving up bass. We talked a few weeks before he passed. He had a heart attack, and in fact, I still don't think his family knows he's dead. He was my best friend."

Since Richard stole the show with "Great Gosh A'Mighty" in the closing scenes of "Down and Out in Beverly Hills," his career has been on the upswing.

He has been offered a regular role as a next-door-neighbor in an upcoming television series loosely based on Richard Pryor's "Bustin' Loose," as well as a deluge of recording and video projects.

"I can't thank Paul Mazursky (director of 'Down and Out') enough," he said. "He made me live again. The young kids know me again. When I go out in the daytime with my chauffeur, I can't get out of the car because the kids are screaming like they used to.

"I love every moment of it.

"And I can enjoy it more than I used to," he said with a grin. "It feels better this time, I reckon because I'm older. I'm a different person altogether. I've learned how to take care of myself."

That leaves plenty of recklessness for the rest of us.

Shutter the windows, batten down the hatches, and tell Aunt Mary 'bout Uncle John. . . .

Little Richard is big again.