

The Absolute Universal Truth of RICHARD PRYOR

By Mr. Kevin Miles ©2006

Even if you're lucky enough to make your living as a wiseass, telling jokes and making funny—the older you get, the wiser you become. And the more you begin to understand that beyond the smoke and mirrors, the rose colored lenses and the subconscious security the sand our collective heads are buried in provides us within the Matrix of our daily lives, there exists a much greater truth than the truth we all blindly accept as fact. This is truth on a higher level—truth evolved.

This is Absolute Universal Truth.

Unlike the spoon fed truth we ingest on pure faith alone, day in and out, the truth we buy into from school, church, TV, radio, the Internet, conspiracy theories, the barbershop and out in the street, Absolute Universal Truth cannot be disputed, debated, challenged, argued, shaded, questioned or politically corrected. For Absolute Universal Truth, simply put, is what it is.

There was but one Richard Franklin Lennox Thomas Pryor III. And even if mankind somehow manages not to blow himself all to hell and exist for another billion years to come, we shall never see his like again.

For instance, Bruce Lee could kick your ass in his current condition, using only his shadow and two drinking straws held together by a piece of wet spaghetti while inhabiting Stephen Hawking's body while suspended upside down over Niagara falls in a straightjacket. Forest Gump could beat George Bush in a debate with his tongue stuck to a flagpole in the middle of Fargo North Dakota in the dead of winter while being roasted over a spit by a tribe of bloodthirsty South

American midget cannibals.

All kidding aside, there are such truths. And one such Absolute Universal Truth is this: Richard Pryor was the most gifted comic talent who ever walked the earth. While you marinate on that for a minute, don't think on it too hard. And don't let the endless debate over more arguable and far less inconsequential truths, such as who the greatest basketball, football, baseball player, or greatest pound for pound boxer of all time is or was, cloud your judgment. There are too many variables to be considered in such discussions to come to a definite consensus of opinion. And really, when you get right down to it who cares?

This is comedy we're talking about here. Serious business. And in the vast universe that is comedy, let there be no doubt. Let the evidence speak for itself. There was but one Richard Franklin Lennox Thomas Pryor III. And even if mankind somehow manages not to blow

himself all to hell and exists for another billion years to come, we shall never see his like again.

That's the Absolute Universal Truth for your ass.

True enough, Richard Pryor, The Godfather of comedy neither invented standup comedy or solo performance art. He merely reinvented it. Reshaped it, reworked it, reengineered it, redefined it, rearranged it, re-imagined it, remade it and regurgitated it. And then he flipped

the script once more, turned it on its head and took it to a whole different plane. It was only then that he blessed it, unleashed it out into the world, stepped back and glared out at his audience with those marvelous, wide, loving, dark brown doe eyes of his. Eyes that dared us all to let go and hang on at the same time, as he bared his soul and took us all along with him on the ride of our lives.

That his impact on comedy cannot be overstated is perhaps the greatest understatement of all understatements. So much so, that Absolute Universal Truth be told, any serious discussion on comedy as an art form can only be broken down into two eras—that which came before Richard Pryor and that which came after.

If you're a true student of comedy you know this inherently. If you don't believe this Absolute Universal Truth, you are simply confused, sadly mistaken, misinformed, or just plain wrong and more likely than not, the only taste you have is in your mouth. So you might want to pull your head out of your ass and recognize right about now. If on the other hand, you're a new jack and you just don't know your history and you're simply unaware of who Richard Pryor was, and why he is so highly revered above all other comics, not just by his fans, but by his contemporaries as well, fear not. Even though he is no longer walking among us, the Universal Absolute Truth of Richard Pryor is out there for you to discover for yourself.

You can find it in the immense body of work he left us in his many recordings. Richard Pryor...And It's Deep Too! THE COMPLETE WARNER BROS. RECORDINGS (1968-1992) is a good place to start.

It's there for you to discover in his exceptional movie career, too. In films like Lady Sings The Blues, Car Wash, Silver Streak, Greased Lightning, Which Way Is Up, Blue Collar, Stir Crazy, Some Kind Of Hero, and Jo Jo Dancer, Your Life Is Calling. And who could forget his groundbreaking genre defining concert films like Live On The Sunset Strip and the critically acclaimed Richard Pryor Live In Concert?

Pryor even made his mark on the small screen when in 1977 The Richard Pryor Show aired on NBC. And while it goes without saying he was ready for prime time, its censors were not, as evidenced by the deletion of perhaps the most brilliant opening scene of a new TV show in the history of the medium: Pryor's face appears on the screen in close-up as he reassures his millions of fans that he has not sold out to the man and that in point of fact he has "given up absolutely nothing" for the opportunity to have his very own show. It's at this precise moment when the camera pulls back to reveal a "nude" Pryor in a body suit with no genitals.

HILARIOUS ALLSTAR STAND UP KINGS OF COMEDY LIST....

- RICHARD PRYOR
- DAVID CHAPPELLE
- GEORGE CARLIN
- REDD FOX
- BILL COSBY
- LENNY BRUCE
- PAUL MOONEY
- FRDIE PRINZE
- DICK GREGORY
- FLIP WILSON
- EDDIE MURPHY
- CHRIS ROCK
- MARTIN LAWRENCE
- GEORGE LOPEZ
- GEORGE WALLACE
- SINBAD

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IN PRAISE OF PRYOR

- "Richard Pryor is an alchemist who can turn the darkest pain into the deepest comedy. [He] doesn't go for the jugular – he goes straight for the aorta." – *Robin Williams*
- "What would life be like without Richard Pryor and Mudbone? Dull, baby, very dull. There will never be another Richard Pryor. He is, and always has been, the funniest man alive." – *Whoopi Goldberg*
- "He's the kind of comedian that everyone calls him by his first name – like they know him. Richard!" – *Dave Chappelle*
- "Richard Pryor is the greatest comedian of all time." – *Chris Rock*
- "To fully appreciate the power of Richard Pryor as a stand-up comedian, you had to follow him at the Comedy Store. I did once, and I'm lucky to be alive." – *David Letterman*
- "I've always thought that a big laugh is a really loud noise from the soul saying, 'Ain't that the truth!' Richard Pryor is the truth machine. He has taken black street humor to its highest universal level!" – *Quincy Jones*
- "Richard Pryor is to comedy what Gretzky is to hockey, what Ali is to Boxing. He is The Beatles of comedy." – *Paul Rodriguez*
- "[Richard is] a gifted, raging, soaring, plummeting, deeply human man with the tender boy inside – the greatest pioneering comic artist of the last three generations." – *Lily Tomlin*
- "Richard is the consummate comic/jazz artist, and no one will ever touch his genius." – *Chevy Chase*
- "Richard had that thing where he could make you laugh so hard and then all of a sudden he'd break your heart." – Robert Townsend "Richard Pryor is truly one of the great artists of our time. His comic genius and influence remain unparalleled." – *Eddie Murphy*
- "His star shines fiercely in the universe of art, with a truth and intensity unlike any other." – *Kris Kristofferson*

Pure comic genius.

Speaking of which, Richard Pryor was hailed as a comic genius by his peers from the get go. Way back in the day when being recognized as such actually meant something. Today "comic genius" is thrown around so much it has about as much reverence as "hero". It has become patently interchangeable in much the same way Kleenex is synonymous with facial tissue. The bar for so called "comic genius" has been lowered to such a low point that now, just about anyone who can limbo under it and gets chuckles a few decibels above the murmur of canned studio laughter on Leno, or Letterman, is suddenly anointed a comic genius.

It's as we have all become French and every comic within earshot is Jerry Lewis in our eyes. To be truthful, this is more an indictment of the times we live in than a slam against Frenchmen and their distorted view of what constitutes comic brilliance. Sad times, when more often than not people are famous merely for being famous. Think what you will about his art, but Andy Warhol knew from which he spoke in regards to the hijacking of American popular culture by the power and reach of the mass media. Paris Hilton. William Hung. Pamela Anderson. Joey Buttafooco. Household names because they have been invited into our house-

holds without actually having been invited into our households.

The same can be said for the state comedy is in today. Where are the Richard Pryors of our generation? For that matter, where are the Bill Cosbys, Lenny Bruces, Andy Kaufmans, Paul Mooneys, Sam Kinisons, Freddy Prinzes, Don Rickles, Jonathan Winters, Lucille Balls, Carole Burnetts and Lily Tomlins?

Seriously, when was the last time you saw a comedic performance that really and truly rocked your world? When was the last time a comic made you change the way you look at the world and your place in it?

Richard Pryor was such a comic. In fact, it can be argued that Richard Pryor did far more for healing race relations in this country than the civil rights movement ever could. He was both a beacon of light in the darkness of the racial divide and our benevolent sensei in the dojo of our social consciousness. Where the civil rights movement changed laws and gave blacks opportunity and access for the first time in our history, Pryor gave white America the opportunity to access black America and vice versa. Welcoming whites into the black experience with wide open arms and an unflinching honesty that forced them to take a deeper look at blacks—beyond their ignorance, prejudices and stereo-

types. And simultaneously he forced blacks to take a closer look at whites, the two meeting somewhere in the middle where the universal absolute truths of our many differences and commonalities symbolically shook hands with each other in a way that no one before or after him ever has, or ever could for that matter. And lest we forget Richard Pryor managed to accomplish all of this with humor.

As hard as it is to fathom now, it seems Pryor was not destined to the greatness he achieved. No, Richard Pryor's gift, like so many artists was more a by product of the pain, anger, frustration, confusion and hurt he experienced in the dysfunction of his childhood, than the self-realization that he would soon become comedy's Chosen One. From the start, comedy, as was the case throughout the remainder of his life, was Richard Pryor's salvation.

It should be mentioned that over the years, much has been written about his many demons. If you want to know the sordid details about his long list of failings as a human being, you can read his autobiography. It is important to note however, that it is from some of these events that he mined some of his most memorable work. Material that was brave and remarkable in its poignancy, and was somehow, both laugh-out loud funny and heartbreaking all at once. Like the stories he told surrounding his attempted suicide by setting himself on fire and the heart attacks he suffered as a result of his reckless on again, off again relationship with drugs. His willingness to be so brutally honest about every aspect of his life and the generosity of his spirit are not a tribute to Richard Pryor the comic, but to Richard Pryor the man.

Every time you saw or heard him perform was like experiencing him for the very first time, regardless if it was the first time or the thousandth. Even if you knew word for word, precisely what he was going to say. And once you became one of his disciples, and how could you not—you couldn't help but remember every word, every nuance, every inflection and beat of every story he ever told. This is but one example of what separated Pryor then and now from everyone that came before or since.

Back in the day, comedians actually felt compelled to have something special to say to appear in front of a live audience. Now practically any fool able bodied enough can hop up on stage with a pock-

Performances

Television

- On Broadway Tonight (1964)
- The Wild Wild West (1965)
- Kraft Music Hall (1966)
- ABC Stage '67 (1966)
- The Ed Sullivan Show (numerous appearances 1960s-1970s)
- The Merv Griffin Show (several appearances 1960s)
- The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson (numerous appearances 1960s-1980s)
- The Young Lawyers (1969)
- A Last Laugh at the 60s (1969)
- Carter's Army (aka Black Brigade) (1970)
- The Partridge Family (1970)
- The Mod Squad: The Connection (1972)
- Comedy News (1972)
- The Flip Wilson Show (1973)
- Lily Tomlin Specials (1973)
- Mike Douglas Show, guest host (1974)
- Saturday Night Live, guest host (1975)
- The Richard Pryor Show (4 episodes; 1977)
- Barbara Walters Specials (1979, 1980, 1986)
- Hollywood: The Gift of Laughter (1981)
- Motown 25: Yesterday, Today and Forever, host (1983)
- The Academy Awards, co-host (1983)
- Pryor's Place (1984-1985)
- Funny (1985)
- Richard Pryor Biography: Biography (1987)
- The Comedy Store 15th Year Class Reunion (1988)
- Laugh, A Tear (1990)
- A Party for Richard Pryor (1991)
- The Meaning of Life (1992)
- What Is This Thing Called Love? (1992)
- The Comedy Store's 20th Birthday (1992)
- Mo' Funny: Black Comedy in America, executive producer (1992)
- HBO's 20th Anniversary: We Hardly Believe It Ourselves (1992)
- Martin (1993)
- Met Life Presents the Apollo Theatre Hall of Fame (1993)
- But...Seriously (1993)
- The Second Annual Comedy Hall of Fame (1994)
- 20 Years of Comedy on HBO (1994)

- Chicago Hope (1995)
- The 10th Annual American Comedy Awards (1995)
- Richard Pryor: Comic on the Edge (1995)
- Malcolm and Eddie (1996)
- The 27th Annual NAACP Image Awards (1996)
- Margot Kidder: The El True Hollywood Story (1997)
- The 12th Annual American Comedy Awards (1997)
- The Mark Twain Prize: Richard Pryor (1999)
- The Norm Show (1999)
- Sam Kinison: Why Did We Laugh?

Feature Films

- The Busy Body (1967)
- Wild in the Streets (1968)
- Bon Appetit (The Trial) (1969)
- The Phynx (1970)
- You've Got to Walk it Like You Talk It or You'll Lose That Beat (1971)
- Live and Smokin' (1971)
- Lady Sings the Blues (1972)
- Dynamite Chicken (1972)
- Wattstax (1973)
- The Mack (1973) Hit! (1973)
- Some Call it Loving (1973)
- Uptown Saturday Night (1974)
- Adios Amigo (1975)
- The Bingo Long Traveling All-Stars and Motor Kinds (1976)
- Car Wash (1976)
- Silver Streak (1976)
- Greased Lightening (1977)
- Which Way Is Up? (1977)
- Blue Collar (1978)
- The Wiz (1978)
- California Suite (1978)
- Richard Pryor Live in Concert (1979)
- The Muppet Movie (1979)
- In God We Trust (1980)
- Wholly Moses! (1980)
- Stir Crazy (1980)
- Bustin' Loose (1981)
- Richard Pryor Live on Sunset Strip (1982)
- Some Kind of Hero (1982)
- The Toy (1982)
- Richard Pryor Here and Now (1983)
- Superman III (1983)
- Brewster's Millions (1985)
- Jo Jo Dancer: Your Life is Calling (1986)
- Critical Condition (1987)
- Moving (1988)
- See No Evil, Hear No Evil (1989)
- Harlem Nights (1989)
- Another You (1991)
- The Three Muskateels (1992)
- Mad Dog Time (aka Trigger Happy) (1996)
- Lost Highway (1997)
- Is It Something I Said? ® Gold 1975/Platinum 1986/Grammy 1975
- Bicentennial Nigger ® Gold 1976/Grammy 1976
- Wanted: Richard Pryor Live ® Gold 1979/ Richard Pryor's Greatest Hits ® Gold 1980/Platinum 1986
- Rev. Du Rite ® Grammy 1981
- Richard Pryor Live on Sunset Strip ® Grammy 1982
- That Nigger's Crazy ® Grammy 1974/Gold 1986
- Black Ben The Blacksmith Craps (After Hours)
- Who Me, I'm Not Him Are You Serious???
- SuperN'gger
- The Wizard Of Comedy
- ...And It's Deep Too! The Complete Warner Bros. Recordings (1968-1992) ® includes 9 CDs/Grammy 2002
- Richard Pryor
- That Nigger's Crazy
- Is It Something I Said?
- Bicentennial Nigger
- Wanted/Richard Pryor Live in Concert Part 1
- Wanted/Richard Pryor Live in Concert Part 2
- Live On Sunset Strip
- Here and Now
- That African-American is STILL Crazy-Good Shit from the Vaults Anthology 1968-1992 includes 2 CDs (highlights from "... And It's Deep, Too!")

Recordings

Awards

- 2002 • South Sheridan Road renamed Pryor Lane in his hometown of Peoria, IL
- 2002 • Grammy for Best Comedy Recording for...And It's Deep Too! The Complete Warner Bros. Recordings
- 1999 • Awarded The First Annual Kennedy Center Mark Twain Prize
- 1997 • Lifetime Achievement New York Comedy Festival Award
- 1996 • Lifetime Achievement NAACP Image Award
- 1994 • CableACE Entertainment/Cultural Documentary or Informational Special TV • Award for: Mo' Funny: Black Comedy in America
- 1993 • Lifetime Achievement American Comedy Award
- 1982 • Grammy for Best Comedy Recording for Richard Pryor Live on Sunset Strip
- 1981 • Grammy for Best Comedy Recording for Rev. Du Rite
- 1976 • Grammy for Best Comedy Recording for Bicentennial Nigger
- 1975 • Grammy for Best Comedy Recording for Is It Something I Said?
- 1975 • WGA Award (Screen) Best Comedy Written Directly for the Screen for Blazing Saddles [shared award]
- 1974 • Emmy Best Writing in Comedy-Variety for Lily [shared award]
- 1974 • Grammy for Best Comedy Recording for That Nigger's Crazy • Richard Pryor's Hollywood Walk of Fame Star is located at 6440 Hollywood Blvd
- 1988 • Pryor was the first recipient of the Mark Twain Humor Award from the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts... • 5 Grammy Awards

etful of cuss words, dirty jokes and punch lines any six-year-old could spot from a mile away because they wouldn't know originality if they tripped over it.

Making audiences laugh when Pryor was coming up in the game was merely the cost of entry, not the whole ball of wax as is the case today. Comedians had to do more than entertain. They had to make you feel and think, often making you uncomfortable in your own skin as if calling you out personally, taking you to task the way a preacher might during a Sunday morning sermon.

In those days, being funny enough wasn't nearly enough. This was not because of any rules set in stone by the comedy establishment. It was because of the innate fire that burned deep inside comics like Pryor and his contemporaries—a fire that challenged them to try to create something boldly original and new that evolved the art form each and every time they stepped up on stage. Such was their love and respect of comedy and the audiences that came out to see them perform.

And by any measure, the comic with

the deepest love and respect for comedy and its legions of dedicated fans was Richard Pryor. Sadly, he never seemed to fully exercise the demons leftover from his childhood, so his life outside of comedy was never an easy existence. But when you consider what comedy gave him during the height of his success and all he gave to comedy, we can only hope that this brilliant man, unquestionably the greatest comic who ever lived, was able to look back from time to time at the Absolute Universal Truth of his life and laugh at himself.