

Modern Rock's Modern Lover

Richman's still a rock god

Jonathan Richman is a rock and roll god. Maybe he's not on the level of say, an Iggy Pop or a Lou Reed (one of Richman's early influences). But he definitely sits nicely with the likes of Tom Verlaine, Bob Mould and even a less volatile Mark E. Smith. And although Richman has tailored a highly acclaimed solo career, his fame blossomed from one fateful record from 1976, *The Modern Lovers*.

According to a self-penned 1983 press biography, Richman's impetus for starting his own band came when he first heard the music of The Velvet Underground. The story continues that when Richman was 18, he left home for New York to hang with the Velvets. After a brief, transient affair on the couch of the band's manager, Steve Sesnick, Richman relocated to the notorious Hotel Albert, where he first hashed out some early versions of Modern Lovers classics such as "Roadrunner" and "Pablo Picasso." Jaded with his lack of success at getting anything solid going musically, Richman returned to Boston, where he connected with his old friend John Felice, who was 15 at the time, and The Modern Lovers name was coined. Soon after, Richman and Felice picked up drummer David Robinson and keyboard player Jerry Harrison.

Between 1971 and 1972, Felice left the group to eventually form punk progenitors the Real Kids, and Richman, Robinson, Harrison and bass player Ernie Brooks went on to record the first few songs of their one and only LP, the posthumously released *The Modern Lovers*. This album was originally intended to be released by Warner Bros. records; the label had offered up producers like John Cale and Kim Fowley to record the band. However, after some growing dissatisfaction led Richman to disband the group, Warner Bros. and Richman went their separate ways. It wasn't until 1976, when Beserkley Records, the label Richman would record

for until 1981, bought the album that it actually saw the light of day.

After the band's break up, Robinson went on to co-found The Cars and Harrison connected with David Byrne and the Talking Heads. The band's mastermind, Richman, went on to reform The Modern Lovers under several different lineups and also forged a solo career replete with nearly a dozen albums. But it was the early, three-chord, Velvet Underground-influenced, proto-punk sounds of that first Modern Lovers album, with its seminal "Roadrunner," "Pablo Picasso" and "Girlfriend," that truly entrenched Richman's reputation in rock history. Don't miss this chance to catch a modern rock god. **EW**

Jonathan Richman feat. Tommy Larkins, Laura Kemp
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