

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 26, 2008

Photos courtesy of Specialty Records Archive

THE VERY BEST OF LITTLE RICHARD **CONTAINS THE ORIGINAL ROCK'N'ROLLER'S** **MOST VITAL SPECIALTY RECORDS SIDES**

25-song compilation contains all the hits along with two previously unissued tracks and liner notes by Billy Vera

LOS ANGELES, Calif. – When Little Richard recorded “Tutti Frutti” in 1955 at Cosimo’s Studio in New Orleans with A&R man Bumps Blackwell, rock ‘n’ roll was taken to a thrilling new level. The pounding piano, the high voice and trills, and the sexually suggestive lyrics catapulted the former Richard Penniman to the top of the charts and to legendary status.

On July 29, Specialty Records (now owned by Concord Music Group) will issue *The Very Best of Little Richard*, a comprehensive 25-track compilation, and the first in 20 years to showcase all the Rock ‘n’ Roll Hall of Famer’s Specialty hits. The collection also features an original pre-rock ‘n’ roll demo, 1955’s “Baby,” plus a rousing live medley of “Ain’t That a Shame/I Got a Woman”/“Tutti Frutti” recorded in Paris in 1964 and a rehearsal take of “Hound Dog” (1956). Billy Vera, himself a rock ‘n’ roll and R&B veteran, wrote the liner notes.

Little Richard’s demo for Specialty Records president Art Rupe was reportedly a series of run-of-the-mill blues songs. Nevertheless, Rupe bought him out of his Duke/Peacock Records contract and sent him to New Orleans to work with Specialty’s A&R man Bumps Blackwell. The all-star team of tenor saxman Lee Allen and drummer Earl Palmer were in place. But a hit just didn’t emerge during their first recording session, so the team adjourned for lunch.

While at lunch, Richard sat down at a piano and started singing a song called “Tutti Frutti, Good Bootie,” a ribald ditty from his live set. Blackwell heard something different, and the lyrics were toned down a tad. Back at Cosimo’s studio, as fast as you could say “a-wop-bop-a-lu-bop-a-wop-bam-boom,” a

hit was born and so was a star. The follow-up, "Long Tall Sally," certified gold, and "Rip It Up" and "Ready Teddy" became a two-sided hit. As annotator Vera writes, "Between his hit records and his thrilling live performances, Little Richard has now become a bona fide rock 'n' roll star, a hero to '50s teens and the epitome of crazy, man, crazy."

And the hits just kept on coming: "Lucille," "Send Me Some Lovin'," "Good Golly Miss Molly," "Jenny Jenny" and "Keep A-Knockin'."

However, while in flight during an Australian tour in 1957, Richard watched in horror as the airplane's engine caught fire. According to Vera's notes, "He vowed then and there to quit singing the devil's music and become a minister should he survive the ordeal." He survived, and jumped back and forth over the years between rock 'n' roll and the ministry. But by that point, Little Richard's hit-making streak had ended, and we can hear the lack of focus in a previously unissued rehearsal take of "Hound Dog."

Little Richard remains a living legend, frequently appearing in movies and television commercials. But there was a chemistry at Specialty in the mid-'50s that resulted in the rare energy you'll hear on *The Very Best of Little Richard*. No other label was ever able to match it.

#