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RICHARD PRYOR: THE REAL LIONHEART 1940-2005

By Mumia Abu-Jamal

Richard Pryor the real lion heart, 1940-2005. The great comedian Richard Pryor has left us, arguably the sharpest most brilliant comedian of his generation, Pryor spent the last twenty years in the throes of multisclerosis and died at sixty-five. There a few of today's working comedians, who can say that they didn't steal something, if only sensibility from Pryor. In his heights he shocked, inspired and enlightened all within ear shot. I remember listening to Richard Pryor, in Goddard College's third world studies dorm in the wintry woods of Plainfield Vermont, a group of brothers from Washington D.C, from Nairobi, from Harlem and Philadelphia, huddled around the record player, rapped with attention to a young, black, skinny comedian. Hit by his punch lines as it struck with some of us rolling on the floor, eyes full of tears, choking on laughter. But there was far more to Pryor than his jokes. Woven with in his jokes, was a deep in abiding love of black people, perhaps best personified in one of his characters called, "Mud bone" Mud bone was always portrayed, with a deep ebonic southern accent. He was an old man, one extensively uneducated, and who never failed to elicit appeals of laughter, while dispensing brilliant pearls of wisdom, hidden within the humor. For an all to brief period, Pryor hosted a T.V network variety show, where he again, broke through the fifth glass wall. It was funny of course, but it also was undeniably black and proud. His skits told about life unlike any of his contemporaries. In one skit he portrayed a black preacher doing a telethon. The phones were silent, until he announced that donations will be used to cover costs of sending blacks back to Africa. Then the phones rang of the hook. In another skit, Pryor played a bearer carrying tools for two white archeologists, at an Egyptian tomb dig. Pryor enters the darkness, lights his lantern and marvels at the array of dark faces staring down at him from antiquity. Pryor says, "Hey look at this, the ancient Egyptians were brothers man, they were black." The two archeologist act as if they neither hear him, nor see what he sees. They mutter to themselves, "Okay oh boy I don't see anything here do you?" "Ah no Nigel it looks like there is nothing here." Meanwhile they cover up the hole and leave Richard alone, in the dark Egyptian Crypt. His best therefore, was either on wax on Network T.V. or live on stage. He was proud, brilliant, racked by the craving for crack cocaine. Fearless enough to use it in his act, wild and crazy before comedian, Steve Martin, used the phrase tortured, and yes did I say brilliant. Though dozens of young people, perhaps hundreds of them claiming him as their daddy, when comic stages today, around the world and around the nation, though few shine as brightly as did he. For years to come, he will make us laugh and think. From death row this is Mumia Abu Jamal author of We Want Freedom a Life in the Black Panther Party.

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