

**A Conversation with Richard Julian**  
**by Frank Goodman (5/2008, puremusic.com)**

There are certain singer/songwriters that rise above the crowd for reasons that do not include shameless or expensive self-promotion or the "push" that labels big and small used to be known for, when such things were more fiscally sound.

At the very small risk of sounding over-flattering, there isn't anything I don't like about Richard Julian's music or stage act. His between song patter makes me laugh if I just think about it a year from the last time I've seen him. I can barely remember what he said, but I remember the way he said it...

It's his songs, though, that confound and inspire me--they're funny and very smart, very hip and usually have a groove that eludes most in the s/s camp. They're jazzy without being jazz, folky certainly without being folk, and pop from a certain angle that's hard to name. Although Mitchell Froom as producer was going for a Mose Allison vibe and essence on this disc, the difference in Julian's ethic and influences rendered that a good but mere blueprint, thankfully. (And Froom, as ever, does a stellar job of presentation and optimization of the artist and not himself, forever to his credit.)

And Richard is in excellent form here, working the words, the melodies and the changes, and the records keep getting better--something, again, to which many in the s/s realm can lay but pale claim. Whether you catch him in NYC or L.A. with a stellar combo supporting or solo in other places around the globe, he will entertain and inspire you.

To be a great singer/songwriter in the age where one's artistic cache is often measured by the number of bullet holes they have survived is no small feat, I assure you. And Richard Julian continues to rise with grace, groove, and wit. We hope you enjoy this conversation with one of our favorites.

**Puremusic:** How you doing?

**Richard Julian:** Doing all right, man. Working my ass off.

**PM:** Right. Well, that's just what it takes. Luckily you have the goods. But that's something we'll get into, I'm sure, in the course of this conversation. I love the new record--*Sunday Morning in Saturday's Shoes*.

**RJ:** Oh, thanks.

**PM:** Sounds like a broken record, but I think it's the best one for sure.

**RJ:** Wow. Well, thanks, Frank. That really means a lot coming from you. You've been down for a lot of them. It's a tall order, usually, trying to impress the same people.

[laughs] I get like this anyway. I get hooked on people's shit and I sometimes create a sentimental attachment.

**PM:** The old one was better--sure. No, you actually keep on going. When I first opened it up, I realized that I was thinking even out loud--okay, well at least you know this is gonna be *good*.

**RJ:** Cool.

**PM:** Multiple blade wit, great melodies and playing--just satisfying. What song is AAA radio playing, "If You Stay"?

**RJ:** [laughs] If they're playing anything, they're playing "If You Stay." XM's hit some stuff, which has been nice. Some people hit "Spring is Just Around the Corner," too. That seems to kind of do its own thing. People get up with it. I've sequenced the record wrong and should have put some of the harder hitting songwriter stuff up front, like "Syndicated"--even though that's kind of a classically counterintuitive way to go.

**PM:** [laughs]

**RJ:** I think for what I do, it might help it. It might help more people listen to it, because that stuff is more--what would you say--different.

**PM:** Well, I would say that you couldn't hardly go wrong with "If You Stay" up front, and it's close enough to up front. I mean, "Spring Is Just Around the Corner" is quintessentially Julian-esque. I love that feel. But to me, you've gotten into some deeper stories and some different grooves. "Syndicated"--that's a very quick kind of Lovett-esque swing groove, and I think you're doing different grooves in different stories very well on this record, and that's why it's further on. That's why it's evolved.

**RJ:** I finally bought a Lyle Lovett record. I caught a lot of comparison press to him when I did The Little Willies.

**PM:** Oh, really? That's where you caught it?

**RJ:** I'm not that hip. I saw Lyle Lovett once in 1988, and I bought a record of his in '94 that I barely listened to. [laughs] Then I just get this all the time. It's like, Lyle Lovett, Lyle Lovett, Lyle Lovett, and I finally checked it out. I downloaded his first one on iTunes just a couple of weeks ago.

**PM:** Yeah, you're not gonna escape some of those, just because you're some of the only guys that are really writing good witty songs. The combination is kind of lazily apparent.

**RJ:** I see what you mean. I think I was reading that as well--that people were comparing it 'cause of the humor. I think there's also a vocal thing going on. But it's funny. When I

play shows, if people haven't heard me before and they've come up at the CD table or something, it's always--you sound like Lyle Lovett, you sound like Bruce Coburn.

**PM:** Bruce Coburn?

**RJ:** I don't know either artist's music, really. It's just funny. It's like, all right--well, I better check this out.

**PM:** I don't get the Bruce Coburn thing. [laughs]

**RJ:** I think it's a guitar styles thing, maybe. I don't know. There's something kind of edgy about his guitar. I've been trying to figure it out, too. Finally this year, it was like, I can't keep going--gee, I don't know those artists. I thought it was making me look catty or jealous or something, or like I was hiding something. I ought to know what I'm talking about.

**PM:** As amazing as it is, there aren't that many guys or women that both write great songs and play the guitar very well. It's like, well, which do you want? Well, I want them both. Excuse me. Your guitar playing keeps getting better, too, which a lot of songwriters--for some reason their guitar playing doesn't keep getting better. I've never understood that.

**RJ:** Well, New York provides a lot of opportunities to hear people and to ask questions. I would think a lot of my guitar style has developed less from listening to records than it has from just practicing and checking people out in New York. It's almost like a mutated version of something. I don't really know.

**PM:** That's exactly what I mean. The only way it really gets better is--come on, people. You gotta practice. [laughs]

**RJ:** Practice. [laughs] How do you get to Carnegie Hall--you know, the old joke.

**PM:** Exactly. But yeah, you're still playing for fun. You're still practicing. I can hear it--there are new chords, there are new progressions, there's new voicing for chords, there's new right hand stuff. It's all a product of still liking to play your guitar.

**RJ:** It's a funny thing you're saying about the songwriters, though, and the guitar playing. I heard this Jackson Browne cut recently. He did this record with just himself, solo acoustic live. I always liked his first record, and a couple other ones--*Late For the Sky*--

**PM:** That's about where I jumped off.

**RJ:** A lot of people jumped off there, I think. I think he got kind of political after that. He went really hyper-pop and then hyper-political after that, and he lost some people.

**PM:** Right.

**RJ:** But I heard these live tracks that were just from the last couple years. He was playing some songs and playing them just alone on the guitar, and I was expecting to just hear kind of a strummer, like what you're talking about. Sounds fine, but they're just going to do the bare minimum requirement to get it across. It wasn't like that at all. The dude is a killer guitarist. I was having that same thought about songwriters and guitar, because I heard Jackson and he was great on guitar. I was thinking to myself--wow, it is really not often--usually you're picking one or the other. Usually you're going to hear musicians or you're going to hear songwriters. They don't meet in the middle that often.

**PM:** And that's where the Coburn thing comes from, for sure, because that man can really play.

**RJ:** He's good. Richard Thompson is another one.

**PM:** Oh, yeah.

**RJ:** He's just a stone cold guitar man.

**PM:** I met a cool woman coming back from Thailand recently who was a folk promoter in Boston. She said she just had to cancel a Richard Thompson show because he got bit by a scorpion in Mexico and cancelled the whole tour.

**RJ:** Holy shit.

**PM:** [laughs] Bit by a scorpion. That sucks.

Hey, getting back to that song "If You Stay" seeming to have the single treatment production-wise. How about that bitchin solo? Who's making that beautiful noise there?

**RJ:** That's me playing guitar, and [producer] Mitchell Froom is mimicking it on top on the--I don't remember what keyboards he uses. He has about 75 crazy keyboards.

**PM:** No doubt.

**RJ:** It's funny--he's not as scientific as I had presumed from hearing his records. He produces the same way that I write tunes, which is kind of hunting and pecking. He'll just pull out a keyboard and it won't work--he'll throw it out and just keep trying out things 'til it's good. [laughs]

**PM:** Really?

**RJ:** It's not like he's the genius with the perfect keyboard at the chosen moment--he just tools at it 'til it sounds right, and that's it. Flailing around in the dark, looking for a spark of something. [laughs]

**PM:** Part of the new epic depth that I think's being plumbed on this record comes across most assuredly in "The Man in the Hole." What inspired that song, and where did it go down?

**RJ:** It's a new thing that I started doing on this record. I started trying to follow through with ideas that I would have for songs, and try to follow them all the way through, as opposed to starting them and then letting them kind of do what they wanted.

**PM:** Wow.

**RJ:** For better or for worse. Paul Simon always says, "Don't worry about the meaning, worry about the sound of the words." That's the philosophy I've lived by for a really long time, up until some of the tunes that you mentioned on this record. "Man In the Hole" started as just a weird little inspiration. I was sitting outside in my car on 28<sup>th</sup> Street waiting for Sasha [Dobson, his s/s girlfriend] to come down when we first started dating. I just had the idea of this guy that would dig for treasure. He wouldn't fail at it--he would find it, but he'd be too far gone by the time he got there.

**PM:** Right.

**RJ:** I called and I left it on my answering machine, and it stayed there for probably about a year and a half. Finally one morning, I said--I'm just gonna do it, I'm just gonna write the tune, and I did. As usual, as soon as you start, the X marks the spot, or wherever I started--I don't even remember what--it started carrying away with itself. It wanted to say something else, or just go into these kind of wackier places that were just more stream of consciousness. It's really hard for me to resist following those things, but I wanted to write the tune the way I'd conceived of it and try to make it flow. It was almost like a project, like a school project or something for me--just to see if I could focus on one idea and not be led astray by folly. So that was it. I just stuck with the inspiration. What it's about or who it's about, I don't really know. All of your songs are ultimately about yourself, so that would be the easiest answer, although that's not too flattering.

**PM:** [laughs] Or a possible outcome of oneself--not necessarily the only self you're going to be, but a self that you could be.

**RJ:** Exactly. Yeah, that's true. Sometimes you're just writing inside a little--you're just making a chapter.

**PM:** Yeah, you pick a probability and run it down.

**RJ:** Yeah. It's funny, man--every time we got done mixing that tune or running it down, playing an overdub on it or whatever we did, Mitchell would burst into this sort of confused laughter and ask me why I wrote it. [laughs] I knew he must have liked it because I sent him other songs that he didn't like, ones he didn't wanna work on.

**PM:** Really?

**RJ:** He had picked that one. He wanted me to cut it down to five verses. He thought it would be more musical that way, and he was right, and I did it. I actually did an edit on the tune where I cut the girl out of it--the girl that brings the cinnamon buns--I cut her out and kind of blended the top half of that verse with the next verse to try to speed things along. But I really missed her human presence in the song. Without her, it just became almost like this kind of cold biblical myth, as opposed to kind of a modern--I don't know. There was just something about not having her in the tune, so we just had to figure it out musically how we were gonna make it build. That was the trick. If it was gonna be six verses, well how do you arrange it? It still has enough disjointedness where you have to arrange it. It's not like a Dylan tune or a Leonard Cohen song where it just picks a one-verse format and you just keep circulating it--it's got all these little turns and shit.

**PM:** Good point, because yeah, it couldn't have survived that treatment.

**RJ:** Yeah. It's not "Isis."

**PM:** [laughs]

**RJ:** You don't just sit down and let the drummer show up in the middle of the tune.

**PM:** It makes me wonder when you say that Mitchell turned down some tunes that he didn't wanna work on--how many tunes did you write on your way to picking these eleven?

**RJ:** I think fourteen.

**PM:** Not so many more.

**RJ:** Yeah. Not as many as I used to have. I'm getting older. [laughs] It starts to get a lot dryer. The dry spells last longer, so you don't have all that extra material that you have in earlier records.

**PM:** And also, you probably get busier and busier.

**RJ:** You get busier and busier, but the reaction that it had for me on this record was, it made me really focus on the ones that I did have--try to make them better. I hope it doesn't sound like it, but I did a lot of work on the tunes. Sasha has this yoga class she does at 5:30, so I'd wake up with her, 'cause we live in kind of a rough neighborhood, so I'd wanna see her out. That would kind of wake me up and I couldn't get back to sleep, so I started thinking, maybe this is the time to start writing the record. So just every morning--just wake up and maybe pick the bridge of one of the tunes and inspect it, like a song inspector, you know?

**PM:** Absolutely.

**RJ:** Does this work, or is this good? Did I settle for less than the most I felt I could get out of it? If the answer was yes, then you just try to find something else or maybe it just needs a tweak to give it some personality--a chord change, a passing chord--maybe it needs to be overhauled all the way. I just kind of worked on the same tunes a lot.

**PM:** I believe in that, and I believe in the early morning hours, too. I'm a 5:30 guy and that's my best stuff.

**RJ:** Yeah, definitely. What's the first thought, you know?

**PM:** Right.

**RJ:** Did a lot of good guitar stuff like that--just wake up, pick up your guitar. It's crazy. Your hands--they'll just play something, and you haven't played it before. You don't know why it's there. So I think it's good to try to keep a record of some of that stuff. It doesn't always work out, but you can always get interesting stuff if you just get your head out of it and let the consciousness flow.

**PM:** Yeah, you wake up out of a dream and you forget that you can't hardly play, and you start playing some crazy shit.

**RJ:** That's it, basically. Yeah.

**PM:** "Brooklyn in the Morning" I dig a lot. On top of being a great song, it's a very sharp guitar number. Is that an altered tuning?

**RJ:** No, it's standard tuning. I'm capoed up on the fifth--well, on the sixth on my guitar 'cause I tune down a half step for certain songs.

**PM:** That's what I like, too--standard tuning--or maybe just dropped D.

**RJ:** Usually, the chord progression starts a certain way, so you're moving the tune through a chord progression. But those chords--it has an augmented chord and a minor nine, and some of those chords can get real clumsy in the wrong positioning, or they'll just sound sort of wrong, even though mathematically they work with the bass leading and everything. So on guitar, you're just always trying to find the spot where those chords can open up the open resonance of the guitar. It's like, well, if I position it up here and I don't bar, how many open strings can I get into this chord without sounding like Yanni or something?

**PM:** [laughs]

**RJ:** Not that Yanni plays guitar, but you know what I mean. That stuff can start to sound too new-agey and stuff, too. But regular tuning I think really helps it from getting too new-agey, because it's always gonna create these sort of odd configurations that you're not gonna come up with on your own. You're kind of asking the guitar where it wants to

play it to make it interesting and to give you something to play. The more complicated you make the part--in the case of "Brooklyn," which is a difficult part to play--it's better when you're performing because it keeps you from thinking about shit when you're performing. [laughs] You're just hoping you can make it through the tune. It takes away all that neurotic baggage that comes along with being in front of people. All you can think is, I just wanna hit this note--make sure I hit it--as opposed to, why did I wear this shirt, or why is that person looking at me like that or whatever else goes on in your mind.

**PM:** Brother Billy wanted me to ask about your writing process. You've already mentioned that Sasha's yoga schedule may be making an earlier riser out of you. [BTW, I just caught a set of Sasha Dobson at Barbe's in Brooklyn recently, and she's great--check her out.]

**RJ:** Yeah, it just depends, 'cause I go hear music a lot, too. I'm kind of all over the place. I don't have a schedule when I'm home. This last January I finally got a good chunk of time off--January, February. I taught myself how to cook a lot more, and I did kind of get into a real domestic scene for a minute, which was nice. But even still, you go hear music and then you run into friends, and then the next thing you know, you're waking up at noon or one. But then you get tired from that. Next thing you know, you're waking up at six or seven 'cause you've gone to bed early. It just depends. I love waking up early in the morning. I love it when it happens. I just don't have the discipline to make it happen. Sasha does. She just sets her alarm and goes into the city to do yoga. She teaches, too. She's like a yogi.

**PM:** Oh, wow. Well, lets take the segue opportunity to talk a little about two of your cohorts, Sasha Dobson and Jesse Harris.

**RJ:** Okay.

**PM:** Educate the readers a little bit, if you will, about the great Sasha Dobson.

**RJ:** Sasha is a singer from Santa Cruz. She sang jazz primarily for several years in New York after she moved here. She moved here really young--seventeen or something. She comes from a jazz family. Her dad was Smith Dobson, who's an amazing jazz pianist that worked with Bobby Hutcherson, people like that.

**PM:** Wow.

**RJ:** Her mom's a singer too, and her brother's a really great drummer in the Bay area--an incredibly musical family that got raised on music. We met up about three years ago and I think she was just getting kind of tired of singing jazz. She'd done it since she was eight. They'd had a family band, too.

So we kind of hooked up and she started doing some of my tunes. Then she did some of Jesse's [Harris, the celebrated songwriter that wrote the Norah Jones hits] tunes, too, and some original sounding covers. She did that tune "Modern Romance" by the Yeah Yeah



Yeahs--great song. She's just kind of been branching out. Now she's killing it on guitar. She's been working at that for the last three years, and now she's accompanying herself mostly and she sounds great--writing a lot of new stuff, a lot of really cutting edge stuff.

**PM:** Wow. Playing electric or playing acoustic?

**RJ:** Playing both, actually. When she plays electric, she plays it the same way she plays acoustic. It's not like she's wailing like Jim Campilongo or something like that. [laughs] But she's become a really, really good accompanist--really solid time. You talk about practicing, man--she plays more than anybody I know, and plays to a metronome, too, and everything.

**PM:** Wow. Talk about a lost art.

**RJ:** I think it's ingrained in her from her upbringing. I think her family--in some kind of haphazard Santa Cruz way, they were still conservatorial.

**PM:** Right. Wow. What about Jesse Harris? I saw him on McDougal the other day in front of my favorite pizza joint. I talked with him for a couple of minutes--

**RJ:** He told me he went there. He said the pizza was good. Over at Arturo's.

**PM:** Yeah. I like that joint.

**RJ:** You ever been out to Difara's in Coney Island?

**PM:** No. But I'm keen to check it out.

**RJ:** It's great, but it's a long wait. I can't tell you that it's worth the wait. You have to go out there, put in your pizza and then go around the corner and have a drink for a couple hours. By the time you get it, you're wasted. Only one guy makes the pizzas, and he's been there since 1960. This dude just makes unbelievable pizzas, and there's nothing kitschy about it. He just makes these awesome pizzas with fresh tomato, and he cuts this basil across the top of them at the end. It's a little old guy, man. He just sits there making pizza after pizza all day long. The place is never not jammed.

**PM:** Wow. And I sure like Stromboli's down on St. Mark's and 1<sup>st</sup>, too.

**RJ:** I've never had that.

**PM:** That's a good one. So are you seeing much of Jesse Harris? Do you guys do stuff together? Are you still good pals?

**RJ:** We're playing tonight together, and we're producing a project starting tomorrow with this Japanese artist that opened for us when we were in Japan last time. He's coming to the states. So yeah, we do stuff together lots.

**PM:** What's the Japanese artist's name?

**RJ:** His name is Yuichi Ohata.

**PM:** Is he kind of in your area musically? What's he do?

**RJ:** Yeah. It was amazing. The first night of the tour, we're in Kyoto or something, I heard this guitar downstairs. I'm like, man, who's playing that? I went down and this guy was really great. He plays lap steel, guitar, all of it--kind of Kona guitar. Next thing you know, we had him sitting in all the time.

**PM:** He plays Kona guitar? Boy, he's a real hipster, this guy.

**RJ:** Oh, yeah. He is, actually. He doesn't speak hardly any English. He came to the states a couple months ago and it was so good to see him, but it was like, well, hey man--and that's about it.

**PM:** [laughs] Yeah, right.

**RJ:** Go out to eat and just kind of stare at each other and sort of experience each other's good vibe--try to throw off a couple sentences here and there.

**PM:** It's hard.

**RJ:** He'll have an interpreter with him, and hopefully we're doing the right thing. It's gonna be a really interesting record in terms of just the blend of culture that's happening on it. He's from Japan and kind of brings this sensibility to it, and then we're gonna have the percussionist Maura Refosco from the Brazilian band Forro in the Dark on the session, too.

**PM:** Wow.

**RJ:** And then Jesse and I will be playing a lot, too. He wants Sasha to sing on something, too, but I don't know exactly how that's going to happen with the language thing. I guess we're gonna figure it out when he gets here.

**PM:** Hey, what's that beautiful little black archtop in the liner notes? What is that guitar?

**RJ:** That was my grandfather's guitar--he passed away about a year and a half ago and left it to me. He was a lefty, so I got it switched over. It's just a boxy-sounding little thing, but I write on it a lot. I wrote a lot of the tunes on this record on it. Big thick neck--it's from the 20s. He bought it used in 1935 for forty bucks or something like that.

**PM:** [laughs]

**RJ:** I've taken it to a few guys and tried to figure out what it is, and nobody knows what it is. Even over at Mandolin Brothers, although he guessed that it was a Montgomery Ward assembly line. But it's called a Bronin or something like that. The only guess that's been put out there so far is that it's Montgomery Ward.

**PM:** Excellent. Last time we talked in this particular way, you'd just had the two Norah Jones cuts. Did that end up changing your life much, one way or the other?

**RJ:** Yeah, definitely. I mean, I own a house now.

**PM:** That's beautiful.

**RJ:** I own part of the house. I moved from Manhattan to Brooklyn because of that, and I staved off the day jobs long enough to at least get a foothold in my touring potential. I was able to go out and lose money and not sweat the consequences as much. So yeah, it was a big help. The Norah thing--my association with her is always a very strong ghost, whether it's good or bad. On the good side, yeah, all of that happened and I toured with her, and of course the community, just on a creative level, the community of musicians here that Norah's kind of a centerpiece of is awesome. But then sometimes it's hard for the press to move you away from that association and create your own thing.

**PM:** Let you be yourself.

**RJ:** Yeah, or write about you in your own context without them writing everything through the prism of that. I'm happy to get press at all, or just be doing whatever I'm doing, but sometimes it's just a little weird because I don't feel like my music or my songs has a lot to do with that. That's more Jesse's thing. They did the band together; it wasn't me. It's kind of strange to be shoved into this prism that--it feels like a clunky fit--that's the only thing about it.

**PM:** Right, exactly. In our case, our association has very little to do with that.

**RJ:** Yeah. I don't think when people read that stuff that they really get what it is that the music is, is all I'm saying. I don't think it's the right prism to describe what's going on. It's sort of a headline.

**PM:** So let's say something about the enviable rhythm section of Tim Luntzel and Dan Reiser that continue to do so much more than accompany you.

**RJ:** Yeah. I've been working with those guys for a long time. They always get the first call. I was working with a quintet before this record, but these songs didn't seem quite as piano/organ friendly.

**PM:** That's right. I remember seeing you last time with that incredible B3 guy. Who was he?

**RJ:** John Dryden.

**PM:** Holy Jeez.

**RJ:** Yeah, he's a real incredible musician. I still work with him and I still work with Dred Scott, too, but I didn't work with them on this record. It seemed silly to fly a keyboard player all the way out to L.A. if I'm doing the record with Mitchell.

**PM:** Right.

**RJ:** And of course there's also budgeting--

**PM:** Constraints--

**RJ:** --to be concerned about. Mitchell didn't wanna put any keys on it. He was reluctant to even put the stuff that he did in the end. He wanted it to be a straight-up trio record. He wanted to make like a Mose Allison record, basically, is what he kept saying. He thought that that was where the heart of my thing is, is kind of like writing these compact tunes and playing them with these guys. It's not jazz, but these guys have that background, so they can create that type of back and forth.

**PM:** Yeah, but then the rub is, when you do it like Mose, you get what Mose got.

**RJ:** Yeah, exactly.

**PM:** And he never got what he deserved.

**RJ:** Oh, man--Mose is just--he's one of the very greats.

**PM:** One of the greatest.

**RJ:** Absolutely, yeah. When Mitchell was talking about Mose so much, whenever I would say, man, don't you think we should get a horn on here or whatever, he'd be shaking his head and basically saying no. He brought the Mose Allison record out one time--one of the ones from the early 60s, I think. Then it got inside my head to where even when I was singing "Can't Go Back" or tunes like that, I felt like I couldn't get Mose's phrasing out of my head. [laughs] I didn't wanna sing like Mose.

**PM:** That's funny.

On a different note, what do you think about the Hillary/Barack face-off?

**RJ:** Oh, man. I think it's turned into a real drag. It was fun for a while, and now it's just like a baseball game that's entered the 26<sup>th</sup> inning.

**PM:** [laughs] Yeah, right. Will somebody frickin' hit one out of here, please.

**RJ:** Yeah. You almost don't care if your team wins anymore. It seems to me like she's hanging on to something that's not really gonna be able to happen, and I don't believe that she's hanging on because she thinks that he's not qualified. She's even said that she would be the vice--she even has supported that idea a couple of times of the dual ticket. All I could think was, "Every day you're out there making the case this guy's not ready, but you would be his vice president?" It just seems like incredible double-talking.

**PM:** Yeah.

**RJ:** I never liked the Clintons anyway. I didn't like Bill Clinton, either. I voted for him. There was no other option, really.

**PM:** Right. You did what you had to.

**RJ:** Yeah, but I didn't like him. Frankly, the whole Lewinsky thing--I never thought he should be impeached. I thought that was some right-wing bullshit gone awry for sure. When the story first broke, and he didn't know that she had the dress, he tried to make her into some kind of crazy person. He denied it and then he had his people out there working a job on her, basically saying, "Yeah, we've been worried about her in the White House--she's almost stalking the president." I don't know if you remember all that.

**PM:** Oh, sure.

**RJ:** She could have killed herself or something, and she didn't even do anything. It's not even like she went to the press, like she deserved that kind of treatment. He was sleeping with this girl and then he turned on her like that. I just always thought that was--it was kind of a shame that the Republicans took it over and Ken Starr took it over in this really right-wing type of way, because I think they spoiled the real story, which was, this dude's a jerk. [laughs] Then he perjures himself over this shit. This guy's a jerk. You don't want your daughter with this guy, you know what I'm saying? But anyway, that's just my humble opinion. [laughs]

**PM:** Yeah, but I like it.

**RJ:** And Hillary, they just seem--I think Barack, up until recently, he ran a very dignified campaign, and it was kind of like Gandhi. It's that--when someone's beating you up, you just lay there and let the cameras film it, and it'll make them look like the asshole. He had that going for a while. Now he seems like he's been dragged into the mud. I don't know how long he'll keep it going, but it was fun to watch for a while--him sort of expose the Washington establishment just by doing nothing but being articulate and smart.

**PM:** Yeah. But I think it's gonna get nasty now.

**RJ:** I think he's gonna win it. Hopefully Indiana and North Carolina will be decisive for him, and the other super delegates at that juncture will just say, "We're doing this--deal with it." I'm kinda hoping in two weeks, we can move away from this.

**PM:** So this is the second CD now with Manhattan and the Blue Note label group, right?

**RJ:** Yeah.

**PM:** Has that been a good relationship? Is that a good home?

**RJ:** They're lovely people. I didn't have a label before, so I wouldn't know the difference between them and another label, but they seem to work hard at it and try to get it out there. The marketplace these days is insane for selling CDs. Nobody knows how the labels are gonna survive. I see it when I'm out there on the road, 'cause I'll pull into a market like Portland, Oregon, or Portland, Maine--some places I've hit already. I'll have a good crowd there and hardcore fans--people asking for tunes--and I start hearing people ask for tunes on the new record--play "Man in the Hole," play this or that. You go home, you look at the soundscan for that area, and you're not selling those records, and you're thinking--man, how do they know the tunes? [laughs] What's up with that? It's okay with me, because people just keep showing up and you just keep performing and kind of building it like that and having your life. I don't worry about it too much, but I worry about the label and what they're gonna do if they can't move physical product.

**PM:** Do you sell off the bandstand anymore, or no?

**RJ:** Yeah, absolutely. People buy them at the shows. They'll buy them there, so that's cool. I don't make a ton doing that, because I'm on a label, you know.

**PM:** Right. You're making a buck a record instead of ten.

**RJ:** When I went on the road with Norah the first year, I had *Good Life*, which is independent release, and I made a lot of money out there. It was great. There were some good times, baby.

**PM:** Yeah, right. Then you could make \$1000 at a gig selling 100 CDs.

**RJ:** Exactly.

**PM:** Can you sell your previous CDs at your current gigs?

**RJ:** Oh, sure. They can't tell you what to do in that regard, although I wonder if the labels will move into that kind of model. Like some of these deals you're hearing about--these promoter deals like Madonna--I wonder if that's gonna be the wave of the money spending industry, because it's the only thing that really makes sense for them is to own all of you, and have their hands in all the pots. Put the money up front, make it worth your while, and then take home all the t-shirt money.

**PM:** And then they're coming for your publishing, yeah. Yeah, that's what I hate--when you hear them coming for artists' publishing and songwriter royalties and all kinds of stuff. But yeah, they're cutting whatever deal they can out there, the money lenders.

**RJ:** It's dangerous, though, for the artist to get that deeply involved with one entity. In the old model, you'd have a publisher, you'd have a label, then you'd have your manager, then you have your booking agent. You've got all of those things. One year, your label might just be into some other band or be too busy to pay attention to you, and you hope that those other people aren't, and that you can still keep your scene rolling from the interest of the other components of your posse. If you get inside some of these promotion deals that's so all-encompassing, if they decide to drop you like a hot potato, you'd be hard-pressed to know what to do next.

**PM:** Yeah, you're right all around. Before we sign off, I wanna know if you read anything good lately that I've gotta check out.

**RJ:** I've been reading a lot, actually. I read Steve Martin's autobiography. That was a fun little read. I just read this novella of Saul Bellow called *Seize the Day*. It was okay. I'm trying to think of what I've read that just really knocked me out lately. I don't know. I just picked up some Cormac McCarthy book. Not *No Country for Old Men*, but--I don't even know what I bought. I haven't started it yet.

**PM:** I like him, though. Most anything.

**RJ:** Yeah. I read *All the Pretty Horses*. He's got a brutal sense of life.

**PM:** I remember that was a beautiful book to listen to when I was crossing the country. I can't remember who was reading, but that was a particularly good audio book--*All the Pretty Horses*. [The excellent reader was Frank Muller.]

**RJ:** I keep Henry Miller with me all the time. I don't even leave on the road without some Miller.

**PM:** He's a staple.

**RJ:** Yeah, that's the bible. That's the thing where you just--if you're really feeling out of sorts, you just open up to any page. You just start going. It doesn't matter. It's not an obligation to have one of his books. You could read four pages of it and it makes your camel hump go up for a long time.

**PM:** [laughs] Well, it's a pleasure always, Richard, to talk with you. I think more than ever, this record shows who you really are in this kind of fragmented, fractured scene. For lack of a better phrase, you're the funny Bob Dylan. You're the urbane Lyle Lovett. I really think that when the smoke clears, that you are the dude.

**RJ:** Well thanks, man. Let's hope more people get to hear the record and just keep going out there. I think I'll be in Nashville early July. I don't know that it's firmed up, but it's on the calendar.

**PM:** Great. Where will you be playing this time?

**RJ:** I think at the Bluebird, actually.

**PM:** I've been getting up to the city a little bit lately. I've got a funeral in Tenaflly this weekend, but I come back quick. I'll call you when I'm up next. Let's see if we can grab a coffee.

**RJ:** Sounds good. It's good to hear from you, Frank.

**PM:** Likewise, Richard. Hi to Sasha and take care.