



Richie Furay Celebrates 80 Years with a Belated Birthday Bash at SOPAC

Transcript

Story by Gina Marie Rodriguez

[MUSIC: "A Little Wiggle"]

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (00:04):

This is Gina Marie Rodriguez and you're listening to the Jersey Arts podcast.

Today we're talking to music icon - singer, songwriter, and guitarist, Richie Furay who boasts a 60-year musical career, having played with acclaimed groups such as Buffalo Springfield, Poco, the Souther-Hillman-Furay Band and of course, his own solo ventures.

He is an inductee of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame as well as the Colorado Music Hall of Fame. But perhaps most importantly, he's a family man. The balance between home and career has defined much of his life and artistic pursuits.

This is a topic touched upon in the upcoming documentary detailing his journey from musician to rock & roll pastor. And if that's piqued your interest, you can see a sneak peak of the film as he celebrates his 80th Birthday bash with a Farewell Concert at SOPAC in South Orange this August.

Furay has accomplished a great deal over the years and while we may have only scratched the surface in this short interview, I certainly learned a lot, including geography. I hope you will too.

RICHIE FURAY (01:12):

I guess we're ready to go.

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GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (01:13):
We're ready to go. How are you?

RICHIE FURAY (01:16):
Well, good. We're sitting here in the midst of a bunch of fires that are starting to pop up in Colorado, and so it gets a little, I can't even see out on the planes right now. It's really pretty serious.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (01:28):
Oh, wow. I am sorry to hear that.

RICHIE FURAY (01:31):
Yeah, me too. It's part of living in Colorado though.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (01:35):
Yeah, I was going to say, I know nothing about living in Colorado. I have shamefully not traveled much of the US, so I kind of only know the East Coast.

RICHIE FURAY (01:43):
Well, you're going to have to get out west.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (01:45):
I know, I've been talking about it, but I don't know. Should I start with Colorado? Maybe not right now, but-

RICHIE FURAY (01:51):
Not right now.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (01:53):
In the future.

RICHIE FURAY (01:54):
But it is good. Anyway, thanks for working this out.

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GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (01:57):

Of course. Thank you for taking the time. What is it? It's 9:30 your end?

RICHIE FURAY (02:01):

Yeah, 9:30 here. We're getting ready to head up into the high country. I got a concert tomorrow.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (02:06):

Wow. Exciting. You say things like high country, and I don't know what that means.

RICHIE FURAY (02:10):

Well, we live in what's called the foothills. I live just in the foothills, a little bit west of Boulder, and then the high country is where it gets up into the, what you would consider the Rockies up near Vail and up into the ski country.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (02:25):

Okay, okay. Those were all names that I do know, so that was helpful.

RICHIE FURAY (02:29):

Awesome.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (02:30):

Thank you. Well, I guess we can just jump right into this. You're going to be at SOPAC in South Orange coming up on August 23rd, so that's really exciting for us in Jersey.

RICHIE FURAY (02:41):

Oh, great. Yeah, we played there a few times and it's always a great crowd and a fun little venue to play, and we like coming back there.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (02:50):

Wonderful. Well, they're saying that this is going to be your farewell concert. Is that true?

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RICHIE FURAY (02:55):

Well, as long as I can get out there and people want to come to a concert, I'll still do the ones that I choose to do. It's not like I'm just going to stop and hang everything up 'cause I think that's dangerous for old people like me. Got to keep busy, but it's not going to be where I'm going to do any major tours. I mean, I'm just going to go out and okay, hey, here's one here. I've already got maybe five or six of them already planned that even go into next year. So, there's a few, but they're the ones that I pick and choose.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (03:29):

Well, I think that's sensible. It's almost like a partial retirement, not quite a full retirement. You can still enjoy what you love to do, but at your own pleasing, I suppose.

RICHIE FURAY (03:41):

Yeah, sure.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (03:43):

We'll go with that, but happy belated 80th, I believe.

RICHIE FURAY (03:47):

Wow. Can you believe it? Those numbers don't compute.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (03:50):

Well, you don't look it, so I'll give you that.

RICHIE FURAY (03:53):

Well, thank you very much.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (03:55):

I always give these interviews and I remind whoever I'm talking to that I'm not a musician. I know nothing about music, so you can talk to me like a five-year-old when it comes to explaining musical things. I love listening to music. I just don't understand music theory and different types of instruments and steel guitars versus classical guitars. All that stuff is a little bit above my head.

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RICHIE FURAY (04:21):

Well, that's just fine. No problem there. I have some difficulty with some aspects of it myself.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (04:28):

There you go. That makes me feel so much better. Thank you. Thank you for placating me. But you've been in this industry for, oh gosh, nearly 60 years, over 60 years.

RICHIE FURAY (04:40):

Yeah, nearly 60 years.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (04:41):

And now you're celebrating at SOPAC, this quote-unquote, "farewell" concert, and I want to know what it feels like to look back at such a storied career, a retrospective really.

RICHIE FURAY (04:54):

Well, sometimes it's like, wow, did this really happen or was I really there? Or sometimes it's just hard to even look back that far into, I mean, I see all the things that come up with Buffalo Springfield or with Poco, and I remember well when we got together, how we got together, what happened along the way and what we did, but it seems like another lifetime sometimes.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (05:22):

I understand that. There's almost, like, a dissociation between our younger selves and our present selves, and I can only imagine that when you've also achieved so much in your younger years that it feels like a different guy did that. Who was that?

RICHIE FURAY (05:36):

Yeah, it's definitely been a journey and one that I'm proud of as far as the musical history that we have, the groups that I've played with have definitely left an impact on the world of contemporary music, so I'm blessed in that regard.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (05:53):

Absolutely. You should be very proud of what you've accomplished. I want to talk a little bit more about SOPAC, because that's what we have coming up. So, this performance, I think the most special part of it

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for me as a filmmaker, is that you're also featuring a partial preview of your upcoming documentary, and I'd like to know what does that look like? How did that come about? What are your thoughts on the documentary?

RICHIE FURAY (06:20):

Well, that is something that I, in a million years, would've never thought of doing, but my manager at the time, who passed away in April, and it's just, it breaks my heart. He's such a dear friend and had such passion for me and my musical career and my life, and became dear friends. When I first met David Stone, I thought he was a stalker. This was a few years ago, but I was back east with a friend of mine, and we were just doing a few little coffee shops and things just playing acoustically, and everywhere we went, there was this family, and I said, oh my goodness, who are these people? And then I did a couple things in some other parts of the country and there they were again. It's like, oh boy, I got some stalkers now. But David turned out to be just such a dear friend, and it was his passion to really document my life, even though my name isn't really a household name like Neil Young or Stephen Stills, he felt that the story of my life was really worth putting together.

RICHIE FURAY (07:25):

So, he and his partner, Denny Klein, started this process and we've just done so many interviews with not only people that I've played music with, but people in the business that I've been associated with. And it's going to be a little bit different documentary. It's not necessarily all 'pat this guy on the back, he's such a nice guy,' but people that we've had difficulties with because playing music is like a family. You have difficulties in family sometimes, and then you work through those difficulties and you move on. But it was actually David Stone's passion and his desire to put this together. We've got Cameron Crowe who's on board with us as helping us out. He's more than an advisor. He's doing some voiceover dubs and things. So, I was Cameron's first interview when he was just a 15-year-old kid, so he owes me. No, just kidding. But it's going to be really good. I just hope I'm around to see it because with Covid it got stopped and everything. We've had a few difficulties and hurdles to jump through, but we've managed to do it and it is in its final stages right now, so it's something that I think I'm going to look back on and be very proud of.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (08:51):

I think you will too. And first I'd like to say, I'm so sorry for your loss, but what a lovely tribute that this passion project that he wanted so dearly to complete is being completed. I think that's wonderful, and

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it'll be something to look back on for many reasons. You can remember him, and you can remember your own experiences in the industry, but better than that, your kids and your grandkids get to look at it in the future. And that's what I love, that the journey will live on through you, through them.

RICHIE FURAY (09:24):

Yeah. Actually, one of my granddaughters has a little part in it. She wrote a song when we were doing some interviews up here at the house, a couple, I guess it was maybe three years ago. She sat down with a little ukulele and started playing a song that she wrote, and so they filmed that. But now we've filmed her, what, three years later? She's 11 years old now, and we filmed her in the studio two weeks ago playing the same song. So, there'll be a little spot. I mean, you know how that goes. There's a three-minute thing and it'll be down to 15 seconds or something, but she's carrying it on, and that's really a lot of fun, and that's a blessing. It was fun to see her in the studio.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (10:03):

I can imagine. That's so cool. Grandfather granddaughter doing the same thing. Is she the only one who's showing an interest in music?

RICHIE FURAY (10:13):

Well, her mother, my daughter is actually playing with me. She plays with me. She has for the last maybe 12, 15 to 15 years. And she actually started, maybe a career was going to, she was thinking about starting maybe a career of her own, but then her first daughter, Brooklyn, was born. And that kind of shifted gears on her. But I've been really blessed to have Jesse be out there on the road with me when I do go out and travel because it just makes, with having family there, it just makes it so much better, so much more enjoyable. Fact is if she wasn't along then I don't- it would be my last appearance back there or any place. But she just makes it so much more fun. She's very talented, very gifted, and her daughter's name is Pepper, who did this a little spot on the documentary, and she's following in her mom's footsteps. But Jesse has kids that are very, very talented. One of her daughters, Brooklyn, plays the violin, and so there's musical talent in that group, in that family.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (11:21):

I love that. I love that It's a family affair.

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RICHIE FURAY (11:24):
Yeah.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (11:25):

That actually, it makes me think of something that you'd said, I was watching, I think a previous interview that you'd done, but you've said on the record before that there was a time when you were chasing the same kind of fame and notoriety of your peers, and you mentioned some of them before. You ended up choosing home life, right? Family was more important to you. But I want to know what advice you would give to up and comers who are struggling with or will be struggling with that same kind of dilemma. Do you have any wise words?

RICHIE FURAY (12:00):

Well, I'll tell you what, the music business is very difficult. And it's even getting, from what I can see right now, even more difficult. And along the way, you read reviews and what people say about you, yes and no. And boy, when they write something nice, ah, this is great. And when they say something negative, I just think somebody that's starting out or along the journey, you got to keep a level head and you have to decide what do you want? Because you know what? This isn't- it's like a football player or a baseball player. You play when you're young, basically. But here I'm probably, well, I shouldn't say that because there's a lot of guys my age now that are still playing music, but it's something that I want to do. But that all goes in a moment in time, and I think there are things that come up in life that make you choose what is the most important part of life. Is it really having your name written in lights on Carnegie Hall or the Hollywood Bowl, or is it really waking up in the morning and knowing that you have a wife of 57 years beside you and four daughters and 13 grandkids and all of that. And that's so much more important than anything that the music business really could have offered.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (13:21):
Wow. Did you just say 57 years?

RICHIE FURAY (13:25):
Yeah, we've been married 57 years.

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GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (13:27):

Oh my gosh. Well, congratulations to you. I can't make a relationship last longer than three months. I'm impressed.

RICHIE FURAY (13:35):

She's got a lot of songs written about her too.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (13:38):

That's wonderful. I mean, I think that's really good advice for most artists. I think when we're young, especially with the way the media is today, there's this idea of, oh, I want to be a social media influencer. I want to be a TikToker, I want to be famous. Fame is somehow the profession, and it's something that children are aspiring to today. So, I like to ask that question just from people who've been there, who've experienced it, and maybe encourage younger audiences that fame is not the goal and the art should be the goal. But everybody's going to live their life in their own way.

RICHIE FURAY (14:17):

Yeah, they are. But I just think they need to really realize and know that it is really a moment in time, and there will be challenges in life that will make you just ask yourself the question, what is it that's important? What do I really want to get out of life? I remember hearing a friend of mine who was a pastor of a church, and we were talking about stars, and he says, stars burn out and eventually stars burn out. And if it's stardom that you're looking for, it's going to burn out.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (14:50):

That is a very valid metaphor. I like that one. Definitely. I'm going to pivot. So I want to go back to the incredible discography that you have, and you've been in multiple bands now. You've been solo, you've been this and that. When you're doing a concert like this at SOPAC, how do you decide what goes in? How do you choose your set list, I suppose, what is important to you to include in something that is being promoted as your farewell concert?

RICHIE FURAY (15:22):

Well, it's kind of neat for me because I'm able to look back on all my career now. I know people will come to hear Buffalo Springfield, they'll come to hear Poco. So I've got to sort out those songs that kind of had some kind of influence on me or that I really liked during the time that I was in those bands, and

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the Souther-Hillman-Furay as well. And then myself. So I mean, I've got such a catalog. It's not just necessarily songs that I've written, but songs that I participated in. I know I've kind of resurrected a medley of Neil Young songs that I sang on the very first Buffalo Springfield record. It's kind of funny, when Buffalo Springfield did a reunion about, I guess it's been 12, 13 years ago now, Neil called, he said, come on out to California let's you and me sit down and just go over a few things before Stephen and Joe and Rick get here.

RICHIE FURAY (16:18):

And so, I said, okay, yeah, fine, no problem. And so he said, well, what do you think we should play in our set? I said, well, I've got a memory of your songs that I've been doing, and maybe we should start there. And he said, no, every song has to stand on its own. So when I play that medley now, Neil's not there, so I could play it, whether I could play it in a medley or whatever. But anyway, so I have a lot of songs to just choose from and pick and songs that I liked to play years ago. And so I will have a band at SOPAC this year, a band that I've played with, that I met in San Diego when I was doing a house concert for somebody that had donated to the documentary and almost said, I don't want these guys in my band.

RICHIE FURAY (17:10):

I mean, somebody said, these guys are going to back you up when you come to California. They, they're playing at the same house concert. And I said, no, no, no, no, they're not going to back me up. I don't play three chord blues songs. He says, no, these guys are really good. And so a little back and forth with this friend of mine, and when Jesse and my friend Dan Skarda went out to do the house concert, we played six, seven songs on our own. And then we brought that band up to play four or five songs that they had learned, and we hadn't played one chord together. And when we started, it was like we all looked at each other and said, wow, these guys are good. So, I've played with them on numerous occasions. I brought 'em back to, it's kind of difficult today because of the economics of everything, but I have played with them back east and they love playing with me, and I love playing with them. And so, I will have a band there, and then the next night I'm out on Long Island with just my daughter and Dan and Dan. And so, we do it both ways. I love the intimacy and I love having the band because it gives you that energy, but I have such a catalog to choose from. And so that's what I do. I try to pick from Buffalo, Springfield, Poco, Southern-Hillman-Furay, and my solo music, and here we are.

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GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (18:35):

I love that. I love the versatility of the way in which you can play, whether it's with your daughter or a smaller group or a larger band. I think that's what's really cool about being a musician. As somebody from- looking in from the outside, I think it's awesome that you can have a different experience every time you're on stage.

RICHIE FURAY (18:56):

It is really cool, and I love these guys because we don't get to see each other very much. They all live in San Diego, so I mean, we don't get to see each other. But I tell you what, when we step on stage, it's like we played together for years and years and years, and they're just really great guys. They're great musicians, but I have to have more than just a great musician. If I'm going to play with somebody, I have to have a person that is real, and these guys, they're so much fun to be around, and I almost didn't have them. It's like unbelievable.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (19:33):

Well, it's kismet that you did meet them and that you played and that they worked out and turned out to be really good guys. Okay, you are not fully retired, but I think that you're now at a place in your career where you get to pick and choose, like you said, what you want to do. So, what is it that helps you make that decision? What is the one defining feature that says, oh, yes, that I have to do? I can't turn it down.

RICHIE FURAY (20:02):

There are places that I haven't played that much. That's one thing that goes into the equation. And if I can get someplace where actually people want me to come, people want to see me, it's the convenience of it. I don't want to really play in the north in the wintertime. I would rather do just things like that. But there are just places I like to play in now, this small, well, places like SOPAC, they're not over- because I love the intimacy of an audience. Actually, when my daughter, Jesse and Dan and I play in some of these theaters, I like to just engage the audience and I will actually talk to the audience, take questions from the audience while I'm playing. So, it's the venue and it's how easy it will be for me to get there and back. And so those things play into it. But as long as there's people out there that still want to see this old guy come out and play, I'm willing to be there.

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GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (21:10):

I think those are all really extremely smart reasons, ways to go about choosing a performance. So, it sounds like SOPAC has a lot in store for them. There's mention of a special guest. Are you allowed to hint at who the special guest is?

RICHIE FURAY (21:28):

Sometimes I don't even know.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (21:30):

Well, there you go. You know what? It'll be a surprise for everybody on stage.

RICHIE FURAY (21:33):

It's going to be a surprise for me too. I think that- I know that there was some of my friends that were planning on coming when we were going to do it in, when was it? In May. And I got sick. We had just done some concerts in California, and Jesse and Dan and I all came down with something, but it was all different and I had to cancel. But I know that they had some people lined up. I don't know if these are the same people. If they are, it'll be a real great treat for the people there.

GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ (22:07):

A treat indeed. Richie Furay will be gracing the stage of the South Orange Performing Arts Center on August 23rd at 7:30pm.

For more information, please visit sopacnow.org

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This episode was hosted, edited and produced by me, Gina Marie Rodriguez. Executive producers are Jim Atkinson and Isaac Serna-Diez. And of course, my thanks to Richie Furay for speaking with me today. I'm Gina Marie Rodriguez for the Jersey Arts podcast. Thanks for listening!

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