



## **BBC Radio International**

### **Lou Reed: A Life**

The musician Lou Reed died just over four years ago. Demetri Goritsas, film and theater actor, reads Rolling Stone journalist Anthony DeCurtis's revealing account of the provocative music and equally provocative life of the troubled Long Island teenager who became godfather of rock's underground.

The programme also includes music extracts from Lou Reed's key tracks.

The total package consists of 5 parts, each is 15 minutes duration.

To audition the programme click here: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b09hmx2r/episodes/guide>

#### **Lou Reed: A Life**

#### **A revealing account of the troubled Long Island teenager who became a rock icon**

##### **Part 1: The Velvet Underground is formed**

Born in Brooklyn in 1942, Lou Reed moved with his middle-class Jewish family to Long Island when he was a young boy. A rebellious teenager, he discovered R&B and rock and roll and began playing in bands early on. He also began experimenting with drugs and sex, leading his parents to take a drastic decision that Lou never forgave them for. At Syracuse University, he came under the influence of the poet Delmore Schwartz, who encouraged him to take writing seriously and served as a role model for Lou's bohemian ambitions. When he moved to New York City, Lou took a song-writing job with the budget label Pickwick Records, and met avant-garde musician John Cale. With guitarist Sterling Morrison and drummer Maureen Tucker they formed the Velvet Underground, whose first paid gig was a now legendary appearance at a high school dance where they played three songs and by all accounts caused half the audience to flee for the exit.

##### **Part 2: Andy Warhol agrees to manage the Velvet Underground**

Lou Reed met avant-garde musician John Cale in New York City in 1965; before long they were joined by guitarist Sterling Morrison and drummer Mo Tucker, and the Velvet Underground was born. The combination of Reed's experimental approach to sound with Reed's tough, literate lyrics openly referencing drugs, sex and fetishism, created rock music that was groundbreaking and uncompromising. When Andy Warhol heard them he agreed to manage them, and the Velvets took on the role of house band at The Factory, Warhol's studio. Warhol insisted on bringing in German actress and model Nico to give the band a kind of glamour, and their first album, *The Velvet Underground and Nico*, came out in 1967. Although it wasn't a critical success, the album had a significant influence on other musicians, both in the US and the UK, who recognised and were inspired by the music's underground experimentation. As Reed's desire for control over the band grew, he first of all engineered Nico's departure, and not long after that a split with Warhol. Finally, after the release of a second album, *White Light/White Heat*, in January 1968, he threw down an ultimatum: either Cale should go or he would. Reluctantly, Tucker and Morrison agreed and John Cale left the band.

### **Part 3: Reed quits the Velvet Underground and goes solo**

After two groundbreaking but critically unsuccessful albums, Lou Reed's drug and alcohol consumption was as high as ever, and his clashes with other members of the Velvet Underground were growing worse. In August 1970 he left the band. His first solo album, simply entitled Lou Reed, came out in 1972, and although it failed to break him commercially the way he'd hoped, it brought him some useful public and industry attention. When David Bowie proposed that he produce Reed's next album, the collaboration perfectly reflected the musical innovation and sexual ambiguity that both performers were successfully exploring. The album that resulted, Transformer, included two songs that would go on to be among Reed's greatest lyrics: Walk on the Wild Side and Perfect Day. But the collaboration was not to last: Bowie couldn't cope with Reed's increasingly unpredictable behavior, and Reed claimed to have had enough of the glam-rock scene. "I don't wear make-up anymore," he announced.

### **Part 4: Marriage does nothing to curb Reed's drug and alcohol use, and he releases his most challenging album yet**

Marriage did nothing to curb Reed's drug and alcohol use, and his next album, Berlin, was a tough listen, documenting the violent breakdown of a relationship. Two successful albums followed, somewhat repairing his reputation, but Reed's self-destructive urge to reject popular success led him to release his most challenging album yet, Metal Machine Music. When his marriage ended, Reed began a relationship with an enigmatic transsexual male called Rachel. The relationship lasted for three years, inspiring the most romantic album of Reed's career, Coney Island Baby.

### **A band reunion is prompted by Warhol's death, another marriage ends – and Reed dies following a liver transplant**

After Andy Warhol's death, Lou Reed and John Cale put aside their old differences to record a tribute to him. When they performed some of the songs at an event in France, the two other members of the Velvet Underground joined them onstage, leading fans to hope for a reunion tour. The projected tour was short-lived, however, with Reed's need for control once again creating tensions with the band. In 1992, as his second marriage was coming to an end, Reed met Laurie Anderson, who would be his partner until the end of his life. Reed went into recovery from his addictions, and began to explore artistic outlets and collaborations outside rock and roll. Over the next two decades he collaborated with many artists and musicians on a wide range of musical and artistic projects. In 2013 he became seriously ill and needed a liver transplant. He emerged from the operation announcing he was a triumph of modern medicine, but his optimism was unfounded. He died, at home in Long Island, in October that year.

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