

Late is definitely better than never

By ED BEESON
Herald News

Sometimes all that separates a work of art from a collector of dust is a bit of cash.

In 1986, the rocker Richard X. Heyman, a Plainfield native who spent much of the '70s living in Paterson, was on the road to record his magnum opus — a debut solo album that was to be a 20-song romp through the bluesy Brit rock of the '60s, music that had shaped Heyman as a songwriter.

Written, arranged and recorded almost entirely by himself — he sang all the lead and backing vocal tracks and played nearly every instrument from the guitar to the doumbek — the album could have introduced Heyman to the music world as a masterful stylist who could handsomely craft new songs from deeply dated influences.

Then his bankroll went dry. And so what Heyman ended up releasing were the six songs he was able to complete. Packaged on a 12" EP, Heyman somewhat ironically titled the release "Actual Size." It turned a few heads but

never took off in the marketplace, and for the next two decades Heyman's career glided below the radar. He released a few independent albums, made a failed attempt at major label success, and never revisited the 14 songs left off that ill-fated debut.

Until now. On his new album, "Actual Sighs," Heyman finally puts those unrecorded tracks to tape. Listening to it, you can't help but to wonder how Heyman made it through these past 20 years with this material bottled up inside him. The songs are fun, passionate and

varied enough to keep the listener attentive throughout the album's almost too-long running time of 70



Special to the Herald News

Richard X. Heyman

RICHARD X. HEYMAN

When: Saturday, doors open at 7 p.m.

Where: Mazer Theater, 197 East Broadway in New York's Chinatown

Info: Tickets cost \$12 advance, \$15 door. For more info, call 212-780-0800, ext. 278, or visit www.richardxheyman.com.

minutes. (In addition to the 14 lost tracks, Heyman has included the "Actual Size" EP at the album's end.)

While Heyman is not an inventive songwriter — each track on "Actual Sighs" could be cataloged according to the '60s band that influenced it — he is a great stylist; and rock is nothing if not full of great stylists who mine yesterday's music to create would-be hits of tomorrow. In Heyman's lexicon, one hears the Beach Boys, the Beatles, the Byrds and the honky-tonk of blues rock.

The one thing that you don't hear is nostalgia. Though Heyman's music hails from some

long-gone era, and his lyrics occasionally reflect on earlier periods in his own life — the album's first song, "Kenyon Walls," refers to the garage on Kenyon Avenue in Plainfield where Heyman made his first recordings — there's no bitterness in his delivery. What Heyman thinks of modern radio rock, or the course of his own career, is not at issue; all that the listener gets to hear is the brilliant chemistry that rock music produces in Heyman's mind.

Because of this, "Actual Sighs" comes off sounding like a long-lost classic. It's kind of sad. Considering how many newer musicians have made respectable careers out of re-envisioning '60s rock — the tragic hero Elliot Smith and the hipster favorite Of Montreal come to mind — it

seems a shame that Heyman was never been able to reap the same reward.

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