

1973

After the successful release of *Transformer* Lou Reed returned to Amsterdam to give another concert. This time the Concertgebouw was sold out, and again, the audience wasn't prepared for what it was about to hear and, above all, see.

Reed recorded his third album, *Berlin*, for RCA Records in London during the summer of 1973. On this occasion he worked with the young producer Bob Ezrin, who, after the success of *Transformer*, was able to get a number of incredibly good first-class musicians together in the studio.

Reed was in top form when it came to writing poetic lyrics. He came up with a collection of songs about the destructive, triangular relationship between Jim, Caroline and the narrator, which had been violent and was drenched in drugs, and came to an end with Caroline's suicide. The story was mainly based on the younger years of Bettye Kronstad, Reed's wife at the time, and on their relationship. Ezrin created a perfectly orchestrated sound for these songs, which enhanced the story that was already quite harrowing as it was.

Reed was determined not to take the easy road; in fact, he never did during the whole of his career. According to Reed, he just *had to* make *Berlin*. Releasing the compelling concept album *Berlin* following the success of *Transformer* would be like commercial suicide. RCA Records shared this opinion, and they insisted that *Berlin* would be released as a single record, instead of as a double. They also made Reed promise that his next album would be more accessible, and that he'd release a live album. Plans for large-scale live performances and even for a theatre version of *Berlin* came to nothing. It wasn't until 2006 that a full rendition of *Berlin* was performed.

Nonetheless, the record company praised *Berlin* in an advertising campaign, and described it as 'A film for the ear'. It was, and in retrospect still is, considered to be Reed's best album, and it proved that he could still produce great albums after his time with The Velvet Underground. It didn't change the fact that *Berlin* also received bad reviews, however, and it didn't sell well.

Concertgebouw, Thursday September 20, 1973

This wasn't until after the concert in Amsterdam had taken place on Thursday, September 20. *Berlin* was yet to be released, although Reed did play two songs that would appear on the album. The rest of the set consisted of songs from *Transformer* and of The Velvet Underground. This time Reed was accompanied by a great band, which included guitarists Steve Hunter and Dick Wagner who created a kind of heavy metal sound, and played long solo's in a number of songs, stretching them out, without spoiling the sense of excitement. Reed didn't play the guitar on this occasion; he sang and danced and clearly took on the role of frontman, albeit one who was maniacal and sinister. During the show, the dim lighting was on him only. It turned out to be a legendary show.

Reed appeared on stage after a long, instrumental intro. He was dressed in black leather and wore a black shirt under his jacket. His curly hair was slightly longer than the last time. He was wearing heavy make-up again: his face was white with black-rimmed eyes, which made him look like a panda. It was the *Phantom of Rock* presenting himself in a spectacular act. During his last performance he'd hardly moved at all, but this time he stumbled over the stage, shaking all over and knocking over his microphone stand, while getting entangled in cables. He had the disoriented and uncontrolled appearance of a speed freak. Reed appeared incapable of communicating with the

*Concertgebouw,
September 20 1973:
without guitar, white face
with black-rimmed eyes*

