

If there was one defining thing about Ray it was his passion, the sheer enthusiasm for the music. It was intense but fully backed up with a deep knowledge and a feel for how it worked. He didn't just sit and listen, he lived it, devoured it and really needed to know everything about it. He was also the king of the air blues guitar, but he played guitar pretty well and this gave him a great ear for particular musicians. Ray could really put a story together around a record, drawing on his knowledge, including conversations with musicians involved, a voracious reading habit and a deep understanding of the information on the label.

Like most enthusiasts he could be frustrating, possessive of his knowledge and at times it was all just too much for him. But in calmer moments he was a delight to sit and listen to, so full of stories. I spent many many hours in studios, hotels, diners and cars with Ray in the US. Often he was enthused by the day's haul of tapes and he would regale me with stories, theories and speculations about the music and the musicians. I learnt a lot about how it worked from those times.

In his own untutored way Ray was professor of blues and rhythm and like any good academic he was never afraid to speculate, to lay out his views even if this at times brought the derision of his peers. But Ray would plough on regardless, never afraid to challenge the current view. Besides his interest in a huge range of American post war music, he also had a comprehensive knowledge and collection of books on Native North Americans and it wasn't based on cowboys and injuns.

Now I don't know if any of you out there ever tried to sell Ray a record ~ Ok Ok calm down I know it could be a frustrating experience. In LA we once went to one of those 'cut above you' Jazz shops selling precious records at high prices and you should be thankful to be allowed to buy them at that. Drove me nuts and I was ready to resign over the attitude. But Ray hits the counter with a few albums and starts to negotiate this particular 10" album of an RnB flavour down from around \$40 to \$20, finally pissing the guy off into conceding. 'How could you even deal with those guys' I say to Ray on the way out. Turns out the Sam the Man Taylor album was a 400 bucks rarity, but Ray had still chiselled them for 20.

Ray stories are fairly endless as was his habit of leaving records behind that he would pick up later. So out there in whatever is left of the retail record world are countless little bags of records that Ray put aside. If you have one of these, then let us know and we'll call in the deal. Chances are they are great records and have great stories attached.

Roger Armstrong