

Ted on Ray

I first met Ray in September 1971 when he came to my newly opened record stall in a flea market in Golborne Road. Rapidly rifling through the records in a practised fashion, while interrogating me about where I had obtained my stock etc, Ray eventually handed over 25p for an obscure US 45 from my 'bargain box'. (Some years later he admitted that this disc was in fact an ultra-rare rockabilly recording that was now worth in excess of £30.)

Ray became a regular at both the Golborne and Soho branches of Rock On. When the Camden Town shop opened he would be in twice a week, attracted by the hundreds of ex-jukebox US 78s that we stocked. By this time we had started Chiswick Records and I had just licensed a bunch of old Link Wray Swan label masters. I happened to mention this to Ray one day and, as I knew little or nothing about Link at this time, he offered to help me pen some sleeve notes. In addition, Ray lent us the iconic vintage picture of Link posing with his Danalectro guitar which we used for the LP cover.

Next on the schedule were some compilations of masters licensed from Johnny Vincent, owner of the original Ace Records in Jackson Mississippi. Again, Ray stepped in to provide biographical information on all of the artists. It would have been around this time (early 1978) that Ray suggested that we contact "Pappy" Daily, George Jones' record producer and an original partner in Starday Records, to see if we could license some of his old masters. And so began Ace's longest term sub-licensing agreement with Glad Music, Pappy's music publishing and record company.

Ray took some time off work to accompany me to Houston in June 1978 to help copy and collate masters for the first releases from Pappy Daily's catalogue. On this visit, we got lucky as the second Juneteenth Blues Festival was being held at the Miller outdoor arena in Hermann Park near the centre of Houston on the weekend we arrived. For over 20 years a fantastic two day blues festival was held in Houston to help celebrate Juneteenth, the annual public holiday for the anniversary of the abolition of slavery in the United States; this falls on 19 June each year. From memory I recall on that first weekend the Festival featured artists included Juke Boy Bonner, Lightnin' Hopkins, Clifton Chenier and his band, Big Walter Price, the Fabulous Thunderbirds and Stevie Ray Vaughan's Double Trouble, featuring the sublime Lou Ann Barton. Ray and I couldn't believe our luck catching such a mind-blowing show by sheer chance.

Other memories of that first trip, during which we shared a room at the budget Tideland Motor Inn on South Main, included driving out into the boondocks east of Houston to track down Sonny Fisher who was working in a timber mill at the time. We left town after a full day's work at Glad Music and were a bit worried as we did not locate Sonny's house until after ten o'clock at night. Sonny invited us in, made some coffee and Ray pitched straight in to conduct an in-depth interview that didn't finish until about 12.45am. We told Sonny that his old Starday records were sought after by collectors throughout the world and that he was a bona fide legend in Europe. We gave him \$15 to get a photo taken for the cover of the forthcoming 10CH 14 Sonny Fisher LP. As we left, Sonny told us that he had to be up at 6.30 the following morning for work at the saw mill.

While in Houston, predictably, we dug through as many used record shops and flea markets as possible in our spare time. I recall Ray beating the owner of a flea market on Westheimer down from \$20 to \$12 for a VG+ copy of the Teen Kings Jewel 78, Roy Orbison's first record, which had enjoyed pride of place on the wall of the shop, prior to our visit.

By this time, Ray had developed an amazing knack of 'negotiating' for records and would utilise several different strategies to secure the best possible deal. First he would enquire whether we could get a decent discount if we bought a considerable amount of records. Having established this as an opening ploy, Ray would then methodically work his way through the entire stock, pulling out anything that might be of interest, while the vendor's eyes gleamed in anticipation as the pile grew. Then when every disc of possible interest had been pulled out, Ray would work his way through them, identifying the ones he definitely wanted. Then he would draw attention to a couple of the rarest 45s that were in poor condition or slightly flawed and get the price on these reduced to almost nothing. Then he would pull out some individual more highly priced 45s and negotiate whatever reduction's he could manage on each, informing the seller that they were overpriced and not really worth what was being asked.

Having narrowed things down to the records he definitely wanted (probably less than half the total first selected), he would get the dealer to knock off the pre-arranged discount, then round the total down to the nearest even figure. At this stage, Ray would produce his 'wallet', which was a well worn brown paper packet from which he would produce some notes and pay for his purchases. Then he would almost as an afterthought pick up a small pile of 45's set to one side and waving his arms in the air, would say, 'I'll give you \$10 for these, I don't really want them, but if you'll take ten dollars, I'll take them off your hands.

I undertook many, many trips to the US with Ray over a period of about 18 years (we eventually graduated to individual rooms). Ray was invariably very good company, energetic, enthusiastic, never afraid of hard work, always ready to roll his sleeves up and get stuck in to whatever task was at hand.

Ray loved meeting people who had been involved in the record business, whether they were artists, producers, engineers, label owners or just employees. He applied the same rigour in interviewing them, cross-examining them on specific facts, as he did with everything else, collating details and fitting pieces of the jigsaw together as he gathered more information.

No matter how hard or how long we'd worked, it was always a given that we would visit a late night record store or a collector or dealer in search of records, before falling into bed. When it came to anything to do with records, Ray was always on duty. There's no doubt that Ray was definitely a one-off.

It's so sad that Ray's life ended as it did, such an energetic lively individual struck down by such a cruel disease. Ray had the support of many friends who visited him during his long illness ranging from people like John Broven and Margaret and Alton Warwick from Ram Records, who visited when they could when in the UK, to friends like Rob Hughes and specially Dickie Tapp who were so supportive right to the end.

Ray's sister Pauline has been a tower of strength with the support of her husband Dave throughout this sad and long-drawn out illness. Rest in Peace Ray.

Ted Carroll.