

I knew Ray for more than 40 years. Like many others, I first met him at Transat Imports in Leicester Square around 1964. In the late 60s we would meet most Monday evenings in various London pubs to discuss 50s and 60s American Music. Present at these usually heated exchanges were Bill Millar, Cliff White, Dave Hastings, Tony Cummings, John Stainze and Roger Ford. I remember Ray stating after I bought him his 3rd or 4th pint of the evening ' I don't buy drinks as I spend all my money on records.' Fair enough...

On buying trips to America in the 70s and 80s I often encountered dust laden boxes of 45s bearing the legend 'Reserved for Ray Topping'. On enquiring the purchase availability of the records I was usually told 'We can't sell you those, they are reserved for Mr Topping'. God knows how long they had been there. At Moondogs Record Store I would unearth bags of 45s reserved by Ray 5 or 6 years previously. I am told this was repeated at record shops all over the country.

Ray was an expert in the 'art of the vinyl deal'. At a record fair in the US 20 years ago I saw him spend over an hour 'negotiating' the price of an album. Needless to say Ray got the deal he wanted. He really was the man who could sell fridges to eskimos. His passion for, and knowledge of, the music was formidable. If only we all had a fraction of it. Sadly, most of the knowledge and information he gathered over 50 years has not been documented and that is a real shame. Rest in peace Ray.

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