



Ray Conniff was a powerful arranger and trombonist who created a subtle combination of big band jazz with the most varied genres of pop music. He became successful early in his career and his music is still played and greatly admired.

Born Joseph Raymond Conniff in Attleboro, Massachusetts, on November 6, 1916 (he died at the age of 85 on October 12, 2002), he learned to play the trombone from his father, who was the leader/trombonist of the local Jewelry City Band; his mother played the piano. Ray studied music arranging from a course book, and after serving in the U.S. Army in World War II (where he worked under Walter Schumann), he joined the Artie Shaw big band and wrote many arrangements for him.

After his stint with Shaw he was hired by Mitch Miller, then head of A&R at Columbia Records, as their stall arranger, working with such artists as Rosemary Clooney, Marty Robbins, Frankie Laine, Johnny Mathis, Guy Mitchell and Johnnie Ray. He wrote a top 10 arrangement for Don Cherry's "Band of Gold" in 1955, a single that sold more than a million copies.

He provided accompaniment with his orchestra (and eventually with a male chorus) on such hit singles as "Yes Tonight Josephine" and "Just Walkin' in the Rain" by Johnnie Ray; "Chances Are" and "It's Not for Me to Say" by Johnny Mathis; "A White Sport Coat" and "The Hanging Free" by Marty Robbins; "Moonlight Gambler" by Frankie Laine; "Up Above My Head," a duet by Frankie Laine and Johnnie Ray; and "Pet Me, Poppa" by Rosemary Clooney. He was also present on the albums 'Tony' by Tony Bennett, 'Blue Swing' by Eileen Rodgers, 'Swingin' for Two' by Don Cherry, and half the tracks of 'The Big Beat' by Johnnie Ray.

In these early years he also produced similar-sounding records for Columbia's Epic label under the name of Jay Raye (which stands for "Joseph Raymond"), including an album and singles accompanying Somethin' Smith and the Redheads (an American male vocal group).

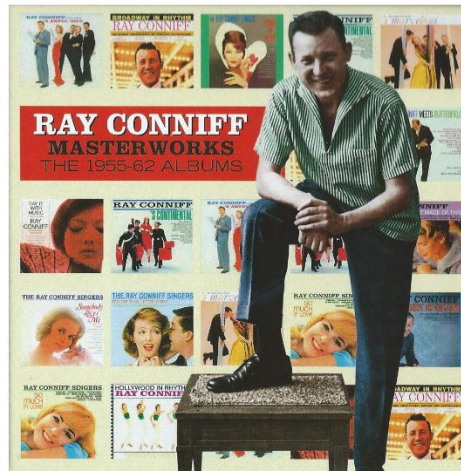
Between 1957 and 1968, Conniff had 28 albums in the American Top 40, many of which are contained in this fabulous collection. Some of them showcase his orchestra, while others feature his orchestra plus vocals by The Ray Conniff Singers (a group which varied in personnel and size).

Conniff stated that, "One time I was recording an album with Mitch Miller – we had a big band and a small choir. I decided to have the choir sing along with the big band using wordless lyrics. The women were doubled with the trumpets and the men were doubled with the trombones. In the booth Mitch was totally surprised and excited at how well it worked." The success of Conniff's creative accompaniments for Mitch Miller allowed Ray to make his own album, the popular 'S Wonderful. The LP was a collection of standards recorded with an orchestra and a wordless singing chorus (four men, four women). It marked Conniff's debut LP for Columbia Records. He released many more albums in the same vein, including 'S Marvelous (1957, gold album and his first LP recorded in stereo, though not the first released in that format), 'S Awful Nice (1958, this was his first stereo

LP to be released), Hollywood in Rhythm (1958), and Broadway in Rhythm (1959). In 1959 he started The Ray Conniff Singers (12 women and 13 men) and released the album It's the Talk of the Town. This group brought him the biggest hit of his career. Another highlight of his discography is the album he produced in cooperation with trumpeter Billy Butterfield, an old friend from his earlier swing days. Conniff Meets Butterfield (1959) featured Butterfield's solo trumpet and a small rhythm group (no vocals), and its success led to its sequel (not included here), Just Kiddin' Around, released in 1963.

Conniff recorded in New York from 1955 through 1961 and mainly in Los Angeles from 1962 through 2000. In the late 1960s he produced an average of two instrumental and one vocal album per year. A quiet, modest sympathetic artist, Conniff sold about 70 million albums worldwide, and continued recording and performing until his death in 2002. He died in Escondido, California from a fall he suffered in a bathtub. Conniff was survived by his wife, Vera; a daughter, Tamara Conniff; son, Jimmy Conniff; and three grandchildren.

Lily Gaunt (2013)



Set includes the following albums:

'S WONDERFUL!
'S MARVELOUS
'S AWFUL NICE
BROADWAY IN RHYTHM
HOLLYWOOD IN RHYTHM
IT'S THE TALK OF THE TOWN
CONNIFF MEETS BUTTERFIELD
YOUNG AT HEART
SAY IT WITH MUSIC
MEMORIES ARE MADE OF THIS
SOMEBODY LOVES ME
SO MUCH IN LOVE
'S CONTINENTAL
RHAPSODY IN RHYTHM