



Manfred's Speech Saturday, June 11, 2016:

Like my mom, in 2016, Ray Conniff would have celebrated his 100th birthday, which is on November 6. Time to honour one of the most successful and influential artists of the 20th century. His "Ray Conniff Sound" is remembered by many people who grew up in times when music still consisted of melodies. However, apart from being a sound wizard, he was also an arranger, composer, trombonist and even singer. He was most popular in the musical world across the globe in the 50s and 60s. He gained fame

with his own orchestra with his rendition of Gershwin's "s Wonderful", which was a recreation of an arrangement he had written for Artie Shaw, but this time voices, doubling with instruments, were added. This style became his trademark for a couple of years until The Ray Conniff Singers, singing words rather than syllables, became popular. Ray won a Grammy for their rendition of "Somewhere My Love", Lara's theme from "Dr. Zhivago" in 1967. However, his string of hits included other well-known arrangements and hits, such as "Besame Mucho", "Brazil", "Harmony", "Cabaret", "Mame", "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes", "Invisible Tears", "Happiness Is", "On the Street Where You Live" and "Memories Are Made of This".

Whenever he is remembered in the musical world, people mention *The Ray Conniff Sound* first of all, as said before. However, I think his arranging talents and the right choice of rhythm/tempo should be given at least equal attention. It's probably the mix of all these elements that made him the most popular orchestra leader in the 50s/60s. His three minute pieces of art often used to have an introduction that corresponded with the ending (just like a well-structured theatre play), had surprising elements such as counter melodies and recurring patterns, solos - and (what was especially important to him) now and then a pause right in the middle of a song during which the acoustics of the studio were captured. In short, the aural environments Ray created were as important as his arrangements and choice of instrumental voicings. And these elements were combined to create his world famous and distinctive treatments, the "Conniff Sound", which people know from his albums and various compilation records. To me, most of the elements I mentioned are in his rendition of "Say It With Music". It features recurring patterns which have nothing to do with the melody Irving Berlin put down, and it has this sequence of three notes which can be heard in many of his arrangements (e.g. G-Dis-E-G-E).

He was the first artist who introduced stereo sound and coloured lights to the concert stage in 1959. The technical equipment for his "Concert in Stereo" was groundbreaking. So he could recreate the sound people knew from his records. He toured the UK twice in the 70s, inclusive of a concert at the Royal Albert Hall. In the 80s and 90s he became something like a pop star in Latin America. He gave his last concerts in Brazil in 2001, but his very last performance was at the wedding of Liza Minnelli and David Gest in March 2002, about half a year before he passed away at the age of 86.

His musical education had a strong foundation. He was exposed to music at an early age and went through many different musical eras. The souvenir CD of this convention gives evidence of his musical background and education.

Ray Conniff also widened my musical horizon, ranging from the American Songbook, to musicals, music from movies, Jazz, and even classical music.

The 2016 Ray Conniff Fan Convention in Hamburg, June 10-12 (Celebrating 100 Years of Ray Conniff)

He influenced my life in more ways than he probably knew. First of all, he gave me incentive to learn the English language, which my teachers at school could not achieve. In the end, I turned out to be the German representative for foreign languages in vocational education and training at the European Commission in Brussels.

The original *Ray Conniff Club* was founded by a lady from England, Lois Hollands, in the early 60s. Ray's music brought us together, and she became a friend of mine. After she passed away in the 70s, I decided to take over her presidency and informed the members about Ray's recordings, new releases, concert tours, etc. with a "Ray Conniff Newsletter", which soon turned into a magazine, titled "'s Conniff". Until 2003 it was issued 3-4 times a year and mailed worldwide. Since then, it became more economical and effective to publicize news about Ray's shows on television, new releases etc. by means of a website. I owe the incentive to create one to Doug, who launched the original Ray Conniff Page, and who gives us the honour of attending this convention.

To Ray Conniff, his fans were very important. He was a down-to-earth human being that you could touch and talk to. I met him first in 1968 when he visited Germany for talks and negotiations concerning his first tour outside the States, in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. Since then, we met many times during his concerts, e.g. in the UK and Florida. Whenever I travelled the US, I spent a couple of days at his home. We discussed repertoire, he let me have access to his archives, diaries etc. – everything a fan could dream of. While we were in his office, my wife sat outside by the pool, overlooking Los Angeles and paying attention to the dogs so that they would not fall into the water. Thank you, Marianne, for being such a patient and understanding wife. Well, Ray even cooked meals for us. His hospitality was unbelievable.

When he came to Germany for a TV appearance in 1986, some die-hard fans and I met him at his hotel in Berlin. We enjoyed this get-together so much that we asked ourselves why we could not have such an occasion more often. So since the 80s we have our "family reunion" every two years. In 2013, Ray's wife and his daughter Tamara were guests of honour at the Convention in Brussels.

Looking back, I can say that I owe Ray a lot – not only the enjoyment through his music but also for enriching my life in many ways. Without him I would not have had the chance of getting to know so many lovely people from around the world – YOU!

Thank you all for sparing no expense to come here to celebrate 100 years of Ray Conniff, the man who brought us together. It is wonderful, marvellous and awful nice to see you all again, to meet old friends and to make new ones.

Unfortunately, neither Vera nor Tamara can be with us today. Both send their sincerest best wishes for happy times during the Convention. It was so good to have them as guests of honour at the 2013 Convention in Brussels.

I would also like to take this opportunity to remember fans and friends who were unable to come this time, like Sheila and Mike, all the people from Wales, Perry and Tricia, Serge, Bernd, Adelbert, and all those who are not forgotten, like Luciano, Gianni, Patrick, Mona, Don, Jürgen Klaus and many others.

Thanks go to Tamara and Perry, Jackie and John, Mike and Sheila, and Serge, who all sent messages and greetings.

Thank you very much for your attention.