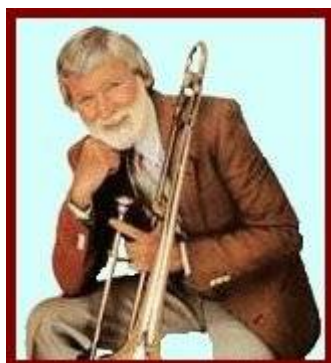


## Side Effects (of living and being me)

<http://bellatrix.blogs.ie/a-ultima-entrevista-dada-por-ray-conniff/>



*Text translated by means of Google Translation Tool:*

Ray Conniff, American musician, who died in 2002 (interview in Sep/2001)

The conductor and arranger talks about his career, music and the attacks in New York that took place one week before the interview with Gustavo Klein.

He is conductor of the last major orchestra in the world. And certainly the best known of today. Ray is one of the leading arrangers of music history. In the following interview, he recounts details of his life and career, speaks of contemporary music, the Brazilian public and denies he would retire.

What are the plans for the future? A portion of the press has reported that this would be his last world tour. Is this true?

RC: They are saying, including newspapers, magazines and advertisements of my shows, I'll stop. They only forgot to consult me about it. I do not intend to stop. I am 85 years and do not know how much longer God will give me, but while I'm here, I work with music. What I know, immediately, is that the current tour ends with the show here in Santos. From Monday I'll be on vacation. My wife and I will go on vacation, traveling for at least a week in our motorhome, the United States. Let's go somewhere we love, in Pennsylvania, inhabited exclusively by the Amish, a people who came from Switzerland, that land of my wife, and who have neither electricity nor telephone nor anything modern. It's very quiet and makes a great contact with nature.

Mr. Conniff was born and lives in the United States. The attack on New York, of course, affected him as a human being. And his schedule, was impaired in any way?

RC: I live in Los Angeles, in the United States. I came to Brazil on Sunday before the attack and learned what had happened with my wife, who is there, I talk daily. She warned me that many concerts and tours of other musicians had been canceled because of terrorist attacks. I was in Brazil, but my band, no. I ran the risk of not being able to do the shows because all flights were canceled. They had to take a bus from Los Angeles to Tijuana, Mexico, and from there took a flight to Mexico City. Only then we could leave for Sao Paulo.

Was the repertoire of the concerts changed because of the attacks?

I talked with my wife, Vera, about the appropriateness of performing "New York, New York" in the show because my arrangements are very happy and maybe the time was not right for happiness. She gave me a compelling argument: it is exactly what the terrorists want to end up with our desire to be happy, take away our spirit. So I decided to just change the opening of the show. I open with Ave Maria, I ask the audience for a

moment of silence and perform "New York, New York" after that as homage to the victims. Then the show goes on as usual.

Moving on to more pleasant aspects, how did Mr. Conniff find his way to the music?

RC: I was born in 1916 in Attleboro, Mass., in a family of musicians. My father played the trombone and my mother was a pianist. The two used to sing to me when I was a child. When I was nine, my father gave me a trombone. I was not very interested in playing it, to be honest, because I thought I would learn I was wrong and immediately, I was embarrassed because I wanted to impress him. Still, when I got to college, I joined seven other friends and we set up a dance orchestra. This was in 1933, if I remember correctly. From this point, music became the most important thing in my life.

And the career of arranger, how did it develop?

RC: My father, despite playing the trombone, was not a professional musician. I carried on other activities and had music as a hobby, a passion. I subscribed to Billboard magazine. One day I was reading this magazine and found an advertisement of a method for writing music, to transpose arrangements from one instrument to another. And best of all, it only cost \$ 1. It was the best investment I've ever done. My first score written by this method. It was the song 'Sweet Georgia Brown', during my time at school.

And your style is considered unique, and your name became synonymous with the pace up?

RC: It is a difficult question to answer. I always felt that the rhythm is the most important thing for a song. I think people recognize immediately when a song is right because of my strong rhythm, the way the singers use their voices, the choir characteristic. And also because they always play the songs that are heavy hits all over the world, such as those that reach the top of the Billboard top ten at most. I think these elements, rhythm and the chorus acting as one instrument, my main character and they usually happen.

And after school, a career in music came naturally or attempted a career 'formal'?

When I left school, I did not intend to pursue a musical career. My goal was to go to college in Boston, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). But at the same time, I began receiving many invitations from orchestras, both in my city and in Boston. I saw it was a good opportunity, it seemed that God was telling me that this was what I should do with my life. Many musicians telephoned and invited me to play trombone with them and also to write arrangements for their orchestras. I went to New York where all the great musicians of the era played in big bands.

Earlier in his career, Mr. Conniff played with already known and respected musicians at the time, like Harry James and Artie Shaw. It was a major influence?

RC: I played with many orchestras. My first job was as a trombonist and arranger for Bunny Berrigan. After that I played with the Bob Crosby orchestra, where I spent a year. Then I was hired by Artie Shaw, Glenn Gray later in 1944 during the Second World War, called and asked me to write arrangements for the radio service of the Armed Forces, where I stayed until 1946. After I had left the army, I wrote orchestrations for Harry James. I played in all the big bands of the time, and I'm proud of that.

What is your opinion about the music of today?

RC: There are many interesting things happening, good composers have emerged, making pleasing sounds. However, I do not like rap, for example. I do not think it will last long without evolving into something else. Music is made up of three elements: harmony, rhythm and melody. Rap is rhythm and basically has some harmony, but no melody. Music is incomplete.

And what about electronic music?

RC: You can compose beautiful electronic music. But I do not think, for example, that the DJs make music. They just play and mix music created by others. They steal, whatever. A person of my fan club in Germany sent me a CD sampler of a DJ who used my version of Besame Mucho. It does not list my name anywhere, does not give me any credit for having created that arrangement and, especially, does not pay tribute to me in any way.

How to choose your repertoire? Do you only play what you like?

RC: At first, yes. I started at Columbia Records in the early 50's, asked by Mitch Miller, head of publishing. He knew me as arranger, when I worked with Harry James, and gave me the opportunity to write arrangements for other artists, especially Johnnie Ray, Guy Mitchell and the first songs of Johnny Mathis, such as "It's Not For Me To Say" and "Chances Are", songs that I liked a lot.

How did the first album emerge?

RC: All these songs I had arranged for other singers became hits and Mitch knew it was time to produce a recording under my name, with my own orchestra and choir. It was a single. I asked him about the repertoire and he gave me total freedom, which was rare for someone who was starting a career: He told me to choose what I liked and make my own arrangements for these songs. So I did. I chose songs that were blockbusters and had sold a lot at the time: 'Begin the Beguine' and 'Stardust'. Executives at Columbia asked me to go back to the studio to record another ten songs and I came up with 's Wonderful', my first album, which at first did not sell much but took off after ten months and stayed for nine months among the biggest sellers in the USA.

You have always given great value to the music of a song. What are your favorites? Your favorite composer is Tchaikovsky, right?

RC: I like big tunes. And yes, Tchaikovsky is one of my favorites. I also like Henry Mancini. I think my favorite song is the wonderful "Love Letters". But consider that the best classical composers are soö popular. This is my preference, and if I could only play what I like, is what I would.

Is it not strange that this musician who is known for his very happy arrangements is a fan of the beautiful but somewhat sad music of Tchaikovsky?

RC: You know what? This is something of a tradition in music. The most beautiful melodies have some melancholy, or sadness. I like happy songs, too, but you asked me at the beginning of the interview which I liked more. The answer is that's what I like. I think this is one of the most interesting aspects of music, the distortion of emotions. Beautiful melodies, happy or sad, remind me of nature, which is always beautiful, and God, that is the source of all this.

That considers the best moments of your career?

RC: You're probably talking about musical moments, right?

Also, or anything else that Mr. Conniff considers remarkable.

RC: Let me return to the beginning of my career. I'll never forget the times when I was a kid, my parents sang and played for me. That is the most remarkable, is, above all, a very strong emotional charge, my relationship with my parents was extraordinary. Another great moment was when, years later, I played for the first time with that school orchestra. My first job in the orchestra of Bunny Berrigan was wonderful. And of course when it came out the first disc of Ray Conniff Orchestra and Chorus.

Has there been any frustration?

RC: I will not talk about negative things. I do not care for critics who do not like my music. I read a lot and I know what they say, the jokes they make, the fun they take from me. I do not make elevator music and I spend a lot to my career. I know the talent that God gave me, that is not mine, it was lent by him. I do not care, what they say. I think my fans around the world can respond to criticism better than I do.

Mr. Conniff, you have a close relationship with Brazil and perhaps are more successful here than in the United States. Is your most loyal audience here?

RC: I had been a musician for some time when the record executives told me: "Ray, your discs are a real phenomenon in the Latin countries, especially in Mexico, Europe and Brazil." They suggested I record an album exclusively with Latin themes. It was one of my first works, the album 'Say It With Music'. It was the album that had Besame Mucho, Night and Day, Brazil and Tico Tico. This marked the beginning of a very close contact, where they'll send me that success in Brazil and I record with my arrangements. Brazil is one of the places that sell most records worldwide. About 2 million albums a year. One million in the United States and one million elsewhere in the world. A million of this, half is in Brazil. In my concerts - and it always amazes me - the music is emotions most applauded by Roberto Carlos. So when I go to Germany or England, or Italy, I tell them they are big fans, but never are the greatest. Because to be honest: my most passionate fans are in Brazil. But do not play music just because they are Brazilian or Brazilian to average. I play because I find amazing, really.