

Interview: Roy Ayers
By: Stewart Dalley

Rule one in the world of journalism is not to piss off the people you are about to interview. And it was a rule I came dangerously close to breaking when I woke up Roy Ayers for this interview. When the bleary eyed Mr Ayers ambled into the hotel lounge claiming that he was "real tired", explaining that he had been late getting to bed the previous evening because he was celebrating another sell-out three week appearance at London's Ronnie Scotts. In fact such was his hurry to get down to do the interview that he inadvertently forgot to do up his zip (where's a photographer when you need one?).

Anyway, when did Roy Ayers first feel the pull of music? "My farther played trombone but he never made anything of himself, as far as being a musician, (he worked as a car park attendant and scrap metal merchant) and my mother taught piano. I was introduced to Lionel Hampton when I was five years old, my mother and father took me to see him at the now defunct Paramount Theatre (in LA) and I've wanted to play the vibes ever since. He gave me a set of vibe mallets that night, of course I don't have them now (he sighs), but they say he laid some spiritual vibes on me because some twelve years later I started to play the vibes."

"I remember Lionel Hampton came to a performance I was doing at the Village Theatre in 1978, he sat in with me and we had a ball. He's 98 now, he's had two strokes but he's still performing, making money and making people happy. They have to come up and put their arm around him to get him to stop playing cause he's got so much energy."

Spiritual vibes or not there can be no questioning the significance of Roy Ayers. Where would Acid Jazz or if you prefer the Jazz Funk scene have been if it weren't for the velvety rasp of Roy Ayers? I mean, apart from Patrick Moore it's hard to think of another vibes player. At the age of sixty he's scored just about the same amount of releases, ranging from his debut album 'West Coast Vibes' through 'Running Away' and 'Everyone Loves the Sunshine' to his latest release 'Perfection'. At sixty and with retirement in the forefront of most people's mind Roy still manages to maintain a passion for his music, even running his own Uno Melodic label. His schedule is enough to make a man half his age wince; after finishing his three-week stint at Ronnie Scotts it's a day of interviews then off to Miami for the Winter Music Festival. Then back to the UK for a gig then its off to NYC for another gig, then back to the UK to play at the Triptych festival in Edinburgh and Glasgow.

So where does he find the passion to continue to play night after night? "I guess my inspiration comes from now being able to carry out the duties of my record label and being able to control putting my records out. The interesting thing about it now, with the advent of the Internet, is that I can put out as many as I choose to and I'm finding out how to do so at a very low cost. I really believe that the people who make the hardware or software have made it possible for musicians to record their own music. So now if a musician is smart enough and investigates the industry, he or she can do very well. Even if they are new they just have to look at other people and see what they've done."

Today it seems that the only talent the music industry is willing to pump money into is the one that they create and market like a bottle of washing up liquid, but in truth its always been the way of things. History shows that until the likes of Elvis and the Beatles came along and awoke white America to black music, with their 'acceptable face of black music', the real talent was marginalised. Jazz music has traditionally been the most under funded musical genre and Roy Ayers has seen all sides of the game, the highs as well as the lows, so when he's giving out advice for free you better pay attention. "One has to love this art - this music industry - because its one of the hardest industries to be in because you have to pay dues and the love of the music

will allow you to go through the ups and downs of life. There are so many things out here that can mess with your head so if you have a talent and a love of art it can help. That's the first part. The second part is to learn the business. You become the business; you become the entity, the product in fact. Therefore its good to have knowledge of accounting, bookkeeping and of course managerial situations because sometimes a manager can be good for you and sometimes a manager can be detrimental to you. But all the obstacles are out here for everyone. Its very seldom for a musician to work a lotit doesn't matter what area of music you're playing either."

The new album 'Perfection' is available now through www.royayersubiquity.co.uk or by sending a cheque for £17 (including P&P), made payable to R&B Productions, PO Box 1648, London N18 2EP.