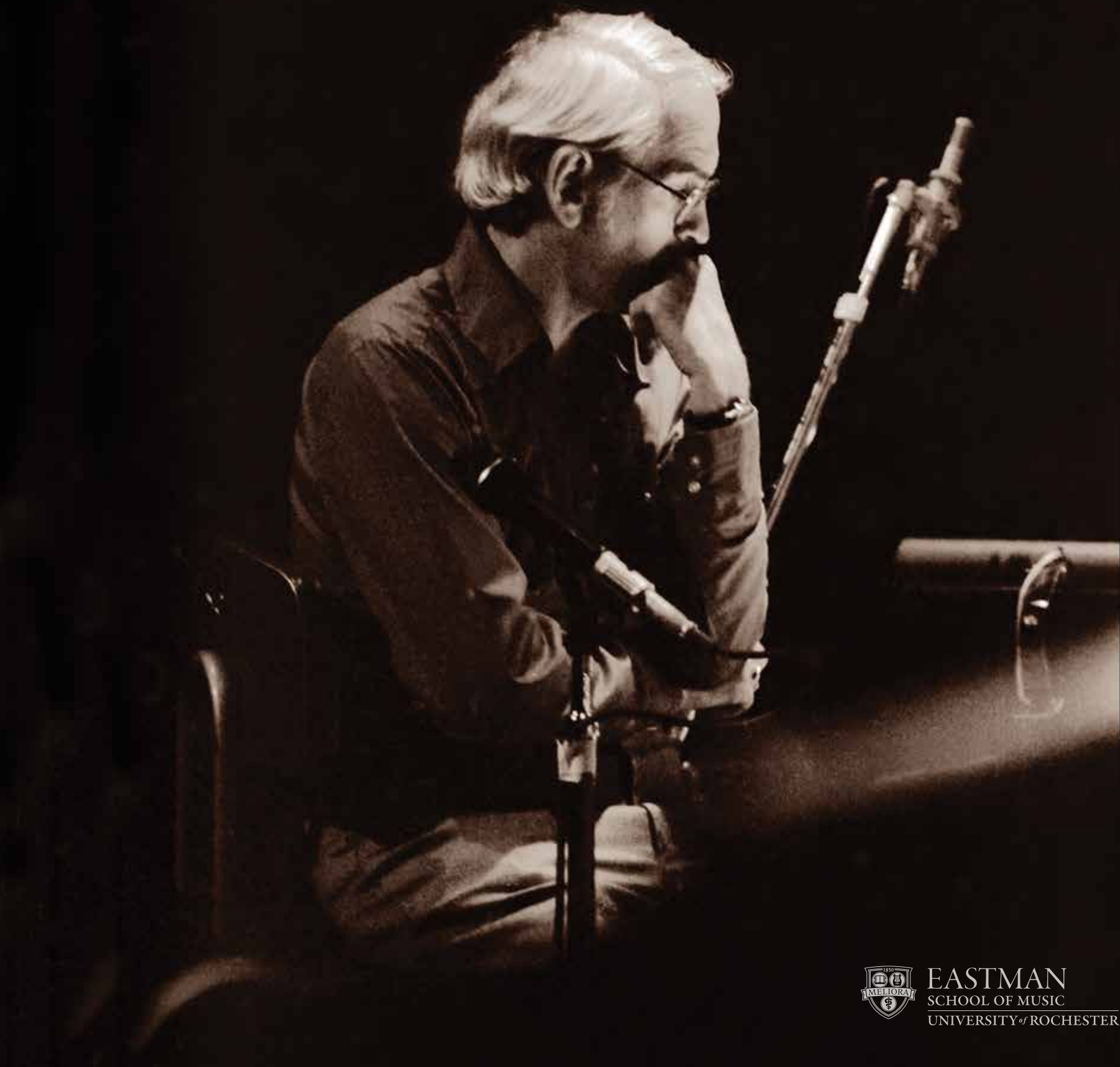


# Ray Wright: Life and Time

DONALD HUNSBERGER



EASTMAN  
SCHOOL OF MUSIC  
UNIVERSITY of ROCHESTER



Wackay

# Ray Wright: Life and Time

DONALD HUNSBERGER

I can't tell you the number of times my fondest dream has come true: that students have learned not only what I've taught them, but also *how* to learn — by analyzing the continually evolving musical models in the world and extending their craft by imaginative efforts.

The most wonderful thing is to see students going beyond what I can take credit for — to see them turn their amateur efforts into professional work in terms of technical skill, consistency, and expressiveness.

– Ray Wright, 1989

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Illustration credit (inside cover):

‘Stringendo’, by Donald Mackay: pencil sketch of Ray Wright conducting the recording session of *The Pilgrim’s Saga* for ABC-TV, April 1965.

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Ray Wright musical scores:

Page 45 — “When The Saints...”, arranged for J.J. Johnson and studio orchestra, 1988.

Page 48 — “Tuning By Chords”, written for extended jazz ensemble and learned by practically everyone who studied with Ray.

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# Preface

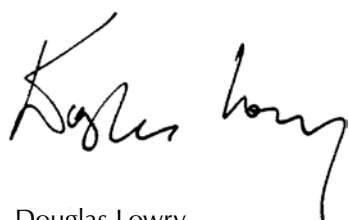
THIS BOOK TELLS THE LIFE STORY of a remarkable man and musician. Rayburn Wright, universally known as 'Ray', was Professor of Jazz Studies and Contemporary Media at the Eastman School of Music from 1970 to 1990, and also served as co-chair of the Conducting and Ensembles Department.

His professional resume is impressive. He received his bachelor's degree from Eastman in 1943 and his master's degree from Columbia University in 1950. Originally a trombonist in the U.S. Army Band, the Glenn Miller Orchestra and the Tony Pastor Band, Ray Wright was a composer, arranger and conductor, and became Co-Musical Director at Radio City Music Hall from 1950 to 1969. He was also one of the most sought-after composers and arrangers in the music industry: his arrangements and compositions were recorded on many major labels and performed by major orchestras and ensembles. His scores for ABC-TV's *Saga of Western Man* received two Emmy Award nominations, and he was the author of the analytical book, *Inside The Score* and co-author (with Fred Karlin) of *On The Track, A Guide To Contemporary Film Scoring*.

But Ray Wright's richest legacy may be as a pioneering jazz educator. At Eastman — where he had been a summer faculty member since the late '50s, bringing many of the great names in jazz to his famous Arrangers' Holidays: Dave Brubeck, Duke Ellington, Mel Tormé, Marian McPartland, Billy Taylor, Clark Terry and Bob Brookmeyer — Ray Wright developed Eastman's Jazz Studies and Contemporary Media Department and its curriculum, including classes in jazz writing, film scoring, recording production, and jazz rehearsal techniques. During the 1980s, his Eastman Jazz Ensemble won annual *Downbeat* awards for writing and performance, and performed at the Montreux Jazz Festival. The long list of Ray Wright students from the '70s and '80s includes many of the most respected composers, performers, and arrangers in the business.

Ray Wright was particularly known for his patience, his attention to detail in all aspects of music and of life, his caring approach to his students, and his good humor. His awards include Eastman's Eisenhart Award for Excellence in Teaching, a CASE Professor of the Year Award, and two posthumous awards from the International Association of Jazz Educators: their Humanitarian Award and an induction into the IAJE Hall of Fame. This fall, Eastman's Rehearsal Hall 120 will be re-dedicated as 'The Ray Wright Room'.

2012 marks the 22th anniversary of Rayburn Wright's death, and would have been the year of his 90th birthday. To observe these milestones, Ray's longtime colleague and friend Donald Hunsberger, for many years conductor of the Eastman Wind Ensemble, has told the story of this great musician's life in detail and with many fascinating facts and memories. Read it and get to know Ray.



Douglas Lowry  
Joan and Martin Messinger Dean, Eastman School of Music





## Foreword

THIS YEAR MARKS THE 90TH ANNIVERSARY of Ray Wright's birth, providing a perfect opportunity to gather his students from across the years, from the earliest Arrangers' Workshop (1959) through the many Jazz Studies and Contemporary Media programs of the 1970s and '80s. On October 11–13, 2012, the Eastman School of Music will host a series of celebratory performances and discussion panels in tribute to Ray, and will bring together many of his alumni and colleagues to honor him for his contributions to the development of jazz writing and performance education.

Earlier this year, Suzanne Stover, Eastman's Executive Director of Development and Special Projects, and Lisa Ann Seischab, Executive Director of Advancement, asked if I would chair an Alumni Reminiscence Panel at the tribute to Ray. I was delighted to be part of the celebration, as I have known Ray and his wife, Doris, since 1955, when we met at a similar occasion, a surprise alumni party for Emory Remington, with whom both Ray and I had studied trombone in our Eastman undergraduate years.

While discussing the makeup and function of the Reminiscence Panel with Suzanne and Lisa, I offered to assemble a brief, annotated timeline of Ray's life and compositions to distribute during the Tribute Weekend. What better way to remind everyone of Ray's various activities and the wide breadth of his musical knowledge and writing? Well, six months later, that 'brief timeline' has grown into this book that documents and salutes his many achievements between 1922 and 1990!

Fortunately, Ray was a meticulous collector of everything he experienced and his files and binders contain programs, worksheets, drafts and letters that he saved for reference and for use in other projects. What struck me at first as an overwhelming, even staggering, amount of information detailing practically everything Ray did in his professional life became an invaluable resource to me. I remain amazed by how many things one man accomplished.

One binder of particular interest, available in the Rayburn Wright Archives in the Ruth Watanabe Special Collections of the Sibley Music Library, contains almost all the programs and library cue sheets from Radio City Music Hall between 1959 and 1969, from which it is possible to trace Ray's assignments for every show presented, including overtures, ballet music, Rockettes routines, specialty acts, entrance or exit music — whatever came his way. The Conducting and Ensemble Department's Library at Eastman also houses many of Ray's scores and performance parts.

Another precious source of information was scrapbooks and photo albums assembled by Doris following Ray's death in 1990. These scrapbooks hold many newspaper reviews and interviews Ray did during his career, enabling me to present his professional and educational thoughts *in his own words*.

When assembling all this information into a timeline, it became obvious that Ray's life could be portrayed in three major periods. The first, 1922–1950, was his formative foundation years, including his early years in Alma, Michigan, his undergraduate years at Eastman and his military service in the U.S. Army Band, which led to life on the road with the Glenn Miller and Tony Pastor big bands for several years. Settling in New York City, he completed graduate studies at Columbia University and Juilliard School while continuing to perform and record.

The second period, 1950–1970, was Ray's New York professional years, which began when he secured a position as Instrumental Arranger (later Chief Arranger and Co-Musical Director) at Radio City Music Hall. During this time, he also wrote various outside ballet scores, ABC Television scores for the *Saga of Western Man* series and numerous recording projects. All of these experiences led him to the creation of the Arrangers' Workshop at the Eastman Summer Session in 1959, the Arrangers' Lab-Institute and the ever-popular annual Arrangers' Holiday concerts, the culminating events of the summer arranging programs. In 1965 he was appointed Co-Musical Director at Radio City, a position he held for the next four years. Ray's time at Radio City was a living example of what it meant to be working and writing for a year-round show presentation institution. He was one of the last people in this country to hold such a position. This second period was the time in which he honed the teaching skills that enabled him to later create one of the finest jazz education programs in the world.

The third period, 1970–1990, became Ray’s professional educator years, which began when Ray moved to Rochester in 1970 to head the Jazz Studies and Contemporary Media program at Eastman, including its new Film Writing curriculum. He founded graduate and undergraduate degree programs, created the Studio Orchestra and developed existing performance and recording programs for the Eastman Jazz Ensemble, which undertook tours and appearances at NAJE, MENC, CBDNA, and the Montreux Jazz Festival, among many other events. During this period, Ray and his students were recognized with numerous awards and honors.

Throughout all of these activities, Ray was a consummate professional and an honest, sincere friend and teacher to all, and at the same time he was the epitome of a successful multi-tasker. Accustomed to writing several show productions simultaneously at Radio City, while also working on outside recording and arranging projects, he now juggled a full teaching load — including administrative duties — with scholarly publications, including two of the most successful books on jazz writing and film scoring, *Inside the Score* and *On The Track, A Guide To Contemporary Film Scoring*.

One of Ray’s endearing personal attributes was his wry sense of humor, which he used to enlighten people, defuse situations, and frequently just to have fun. The combination of Ray and Manny Albam guiding the Arrangers’ Holiday writing class was something to witness. Each had his own brand of humor, especially when approaching the creation of the annual skit that appeared in each Arrangers’ Holiday.

A personal example of his humor is the story of the two of us and our sailboats at the Canandaigua Yacht Club, where regattas were held each Sunday. Initially, we both owned 16' 8" O’Day Daysailer boats and then Ray moved up to a 23' Pearson Ensign keel sailboat named *Tangent*. I soon secured one also and we entered the weekly races together, usually finishing near the back of the fleet, and occasionally moving up a slot or two at the finish line (he usually beat me!). When I got my boat, Ray asked what I was going to name it. Well aware of my standing within the Ensign fleet, I jokingly replied that I was contemplating calling it *Follow Me*, to which Ray immediately responded *Yeah, right!*

Ray was a friend — of whom you could ask anything and he would be by your side constantly. He never shirked in his own responsibilities and helped many, many students with theirs. One of the most enjoyable tours I ever took with the Eastman Wind Ensemble was in 1978 to Japan and South East Asia for six weeks, and I asked Ray to serve as Associate Conductor; Doris and my wife, Polly, accompanied us on the trip.

Ray’s influence, personal and musical, has been witnessed for many years by each individual with whom he came in contact. A reading of thoughts from some of his students clearly displays this affection for him. His was a true, humble approach to life combined with superlative skills in writing, teaching and achieving his goals.

## Acknowledgments

WHILE I ASSEMBLED the factual information and wrote the text for the book, I received tremendous ongoing support from Ray’s family: Doris and sons Drew and, especially, David, who masterfully edited the copy, curated the photographs, and designed this handsome book. I can’t thank them enough.

David Peter Coppen, Sibley Music Library archivist, and his assistant, Mathew Colbert, were invaluable in providing all types of scores, files and photographs. Katherine Zager, Librarian and Ensemble Coordinator of the Conducting and Ensemble Department’s Library, and Donna Iannapollo, her Library Assistant, provided constant support.

A special person at Eastman — who provided constant guidance and encouragement as well as program and departmental information — is Sheryle Charles, Conducting and Ensembles Department secretary. During her many years at Eastman, she worked directly with Ray and me when we were co-chairs of the Conducting and Ensembles Department and while he guided the JCM Department as well.

I would also like to thank the following for their literary assistance and guidance: Mark Davis Scatterday, Rick Lawn, Bill Reichenbach and Dave Rivello, who proofread the text; Dick Lieb, an old friend, former trombone classmate at Eastman and collaborator of Ray’s, who provided wonderful insight and information about the earlier New York years; and Bill Dobbins and Ray Ricker, who added valuable information about the early Eastman JCM years. David Raymond, Editorial Director, and Karen Ver Steeg, Creative Director, in the Eastman Communications Office added the final touches on the publication.

Finally, I wish to thank my wife Polly for her support and patience during my many long hours of research, organization and writing to bring this project to fruition.



Donald Hunsberger  
September 1, 2012

# Ray Wright: Life and Time

*“Clark Terry is sitting in  
with us tomorrow night.  
We need one of your big  
band charts expanded for  
studio orchestra.”*

*– Ray Wright to  
Fred Sturm, 1984*

*“I would encourage people  
to take chances.”*

*– Bob Brookmeyer to  
Ray Wright, 1982*



# Chapter I: Alma to Radio City (1922–1950)

*"I have always loved working with music. I find all music, especially jazz, an incredibly beautiful and wonderful outlet for human expression."*

– Ray Wright, 1986



*He swung at an early age: baby Ray with his father Vernon.*

## 'CON ALMA' (1922–39)

THOUGH THE PLACE of one's birth may have an effect on his outlook in life, early family influences have a major impact on a person's life achievements and contributions to society. In the case of Rayburn Wright, the very small town of Alma, Michigan and a very strong family led him into a love of music. His father was involved in choirs as a soloist and played baritone horn. His brothers sang and played instruments. So Ray, quite naturally, came to music.

Born to Vernon and Jessie Wright on August 27, 1922, Rayburn Benjamin Wright was the youngest of five children: Lillian, Rolla, Norman, Vincent and Rayburn. His father was a local funeral director and the family attended the Christian Science Church.



*Vincent, Rayburn, Rolla, Lillian and Norman.*

Ray began studying baritone horn and piano at an early age, switching to trombone in high school. He was 15 when he first went to the National Music Camp at Interlochen, Michigan, where he studied trombone with Emory Remington of the Eastman School of Music. This early teacher-student relationship with Remington, 'The Chief' as he was known by his students, was the beginning of a long friendship.

Ray graduated from Alma High School in 1939 and was awarded a Rochester Prize Scholarship to the Eastman School of Music. A newspaper article describing this honor, along with his photo, appeared on the first page of the *Alma Journal*, June 22, 1939:

### Rayburn Wright Wins Eastman School Award

Rayburn Wright has been awarded a four year scholarship, one of five Rochester Prize Scholarships (\$400 per year). A graduate of Alma High School, he is an Honor Student, in 2nd Place for Scholarship; a member of the National Honor Society. He does much extra curricular activities, and, with a friend, he finished the photography for the yearbook.

*A portrait of the musician as a young man: 'big ears' already very much in evidence.*



## LIFE AT EASTMAN (1939–43)

The Eastman School of Music's academic curriculum in those years was strictly classical and Ray absorbed it voraciously. He immersed himself in a variety of performance opportunities. His accomplishments in trombone performance were recognized with

the award of the Eastman Performer's Certificate in Trombone and a tuition scholarship from the Tanglewood Music Center to participate in their Advanced Orchestra.

He also continued his lifelong side-interest in photography, making good use of his yearbook experience from Alma High School as editor of the 1941–42 Eastman School yearbook *The Score*.

Ray wrote a wind band orchestration of the J. S. Bach chorale and chorale prelude 'Herzlich thut mich verlangen' ('Fervent is my Longing'), which was performed by the Eastman Symphony Band, Frederick Fennell conducting, on November 3, 1941, offering an early glimpse of his future career as an arranger.

Despite Eastman's classical focus, Ray also found opportunities to express his early interest in jazz through a range of informal and extracurricular activities. For example, on December 17, 1941, the Eastman Little Symphony, augmented by jazz players, presented an 'Eastman Symposium of Modern Arrangements' in Kilbourn Hall. The trombone section consisted of F. Pranzatelli, Ben Pressler, Ted Petersen, Van Haney and Ray Wright.

Ray was hired to fill the vacant position of Instrumental Music Supervisor for the Pittsford High School (a suburb of Rochester), from September 1 through December 30, 1942, before completing his Bachelor of Music degree. An article in the *Pittsford High Banner* on May 11, 1942 announced his imminent arrival:

Our New Band and Orchestra Leader

Mr. Ray Wright, 'Ray' to his friends; his specialty is playing the trombone. He plays in Freddie Woolston's Band, a band familiar to Pittsford High School.

Woolston and fellow student performer/writer Jack End were major figures around Eastman in the 1940s, developing jazz and dance band ensembles. Later, for a time in the 1960s, End was also the director of the Eastman Jazz Ensemble, preceding Chuck Mangione and, later,

Ray, who assumed the directorship in the 1972–73 academic year.

In addition to his private studio studies with Emory Remington, Ray's primary teachers at Eastman included Burrill Phillips and Bernard Rogers (orchestration), Paul White and Herman Genhart (conducting), Donald White (theory) and Gladys Rossdeutscher (piano). He graduated from Eastman in 1943 with a Bachelor of Music degree, majoring in Music Education (Instrumental Supervisor).



Top photo: Ray with Van Haney.  
Bottom photo: Emory Remington with students at Eastman, early 1940s (Emory third from left in the top row; Ray second from left).

## U.S. ARMY BAND (1943–45)

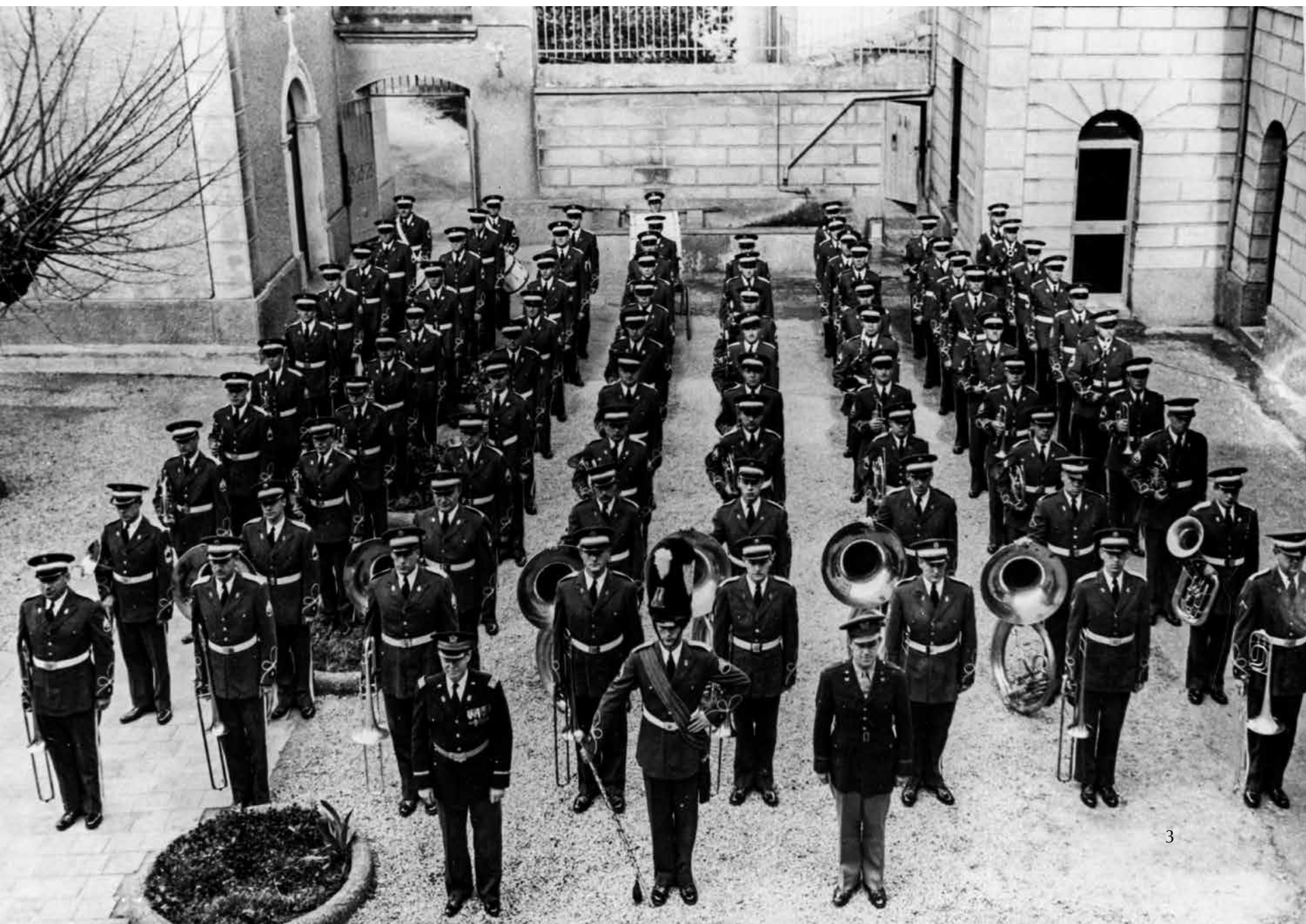
For the United States, World War II began on December 7, 1941, while Ray was in his third year at Eastman. He remained in school until his graduation in January 1943 through a student deferment from his local Draft Board in Alma. The next phase of his developing professional life was a clear example of his initiative and entrepreneurial spirit.

On September 9, 1942, his friend Van Haney, a fellow Eastman trombonist and at that time a member of the U.S. Army Band, wrote Ray telling him that there would be an opening in the Army Band in December due to a pending retirement. An exchange of letters between Ray and Captain Thomas Darcy, Conductor and Commander of the U.S. Army Band, illustrates how quickly Ray moved to join this prestigious military band.

Ray wrote to Captain Darcy on September 14 expressing an interest in auditioning for the position. Darcy replied, suggesting that he come to Washington, DC as soon as possible for an audition. Ray traveled to Washington, won the audition, and returned to Rochester to complete his final semester. Darcy told him to request a deferment from his Draft Board through December, as the position would not be available until then.

Unexpectedly, on December 2, President Roosevelt placed a ban on all enlistments. Ray wrote Darcy to ask if he could still enlist, or if he should request immediate induction into the Army along with a transfer to Washington. Darcy instructed him to go to his Draft Board and voluntarily request immediate induction, and to send Darcy the date of induction and his military serial number. Ray then wrote to his local Board informing them of Darcy's instructions and that he would return to Alma for immediate induction. Ray passed his physical examination and was inducted on January 20, 1943. He was sent first to Fort Custer, Michigan, and then on to Washington, DC to join the U.S. Army Band.

*U.S. Army Band at El Biar, Algeria, 1944 (Ray at the head of the second column from the right). According to Ray's Army bandmates, "he was so sharp they nicknamed him Razor".*



*U.S. Army Dance Band during a radio broadcast on the French Broadcasting System, 1945 (Ray playing a trombone solo).*



*"We played for President Roosevelt, de Gaulle and Generals Clark and Patton — we were Eisenhower's band. We accompanied a whole batch of celebrities, recording, doing films and shows; Noel Coward, Fredric March, Humphrey Bogart, and Marlene Dietrich provided some of my treasurable memories from that era, because we rehearsed with them, and then talked back and forth — it was a lovely experience."*

*— Ray Wright, recounting his experiences in the Army Band*

Ray's efforts to graduate from Eastman before entering military service were further complicated by his teaching stint at Pittsford High School. In an effort to complete all of his undergraduate music education degree requirements prior to entrance into the Army, Ray wrote to the New York State Education Department with a request to have his Eastman Music Education Practice Teaching requirements waived due to the fact he was entering the Service and had been employed as Instrumental Music Supervisor at Pittsford High School for four months. The Education Department replied, initially granting his request, but then sent a second letter saying that they had made an error in their first message. Since Ray was not state-certified to be an instrumental music supervisor, his employment by Pittsford was highly irregular. However, the Department admitted they had erred in originally stating that all was in order, and gave him credit for his missing Practice Teaching experience.

The U.S. Army Band (along with the Marine Band, the Navy Band and the Army Air Corps Band) was a Mecca for top level professional performers during the war years,

and Ray developed many friendships and professional relationships within the Band that he held for the rest of his life. Although the Band was stationed in Washington, DC, it also served during the war in Africa, Sicily, Great Britain and France.

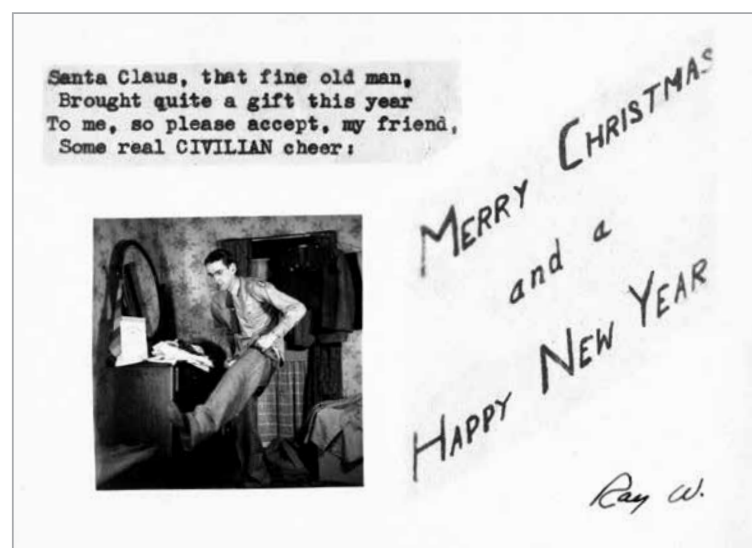
Ray's time in the U.S. Army Band offered him opportunities to continue developing instrumentally through high-level performances with the Army Band Concert Band and Dance Band. He gained concentrated playing experience, and was also given the opportunity to write for the Dance Band. A very interesting recording has been discovered of a live radio broadcast by the Dance Band in France during their assignment there, featuring Ray playing a solo on one of his own arrangements.

Ray received an honorable discharge from the U.S. Army Band in 1945 and, during the next year, began playing and

arranging with the big bands of Tony Pastor and Glenn Miller, whose orchestra was then led by Tex Beneke. This transition period from military life into the commercial world presented him with many opportunities to write and play on a very high level.

In the year following Ray's military service, a work of his was included in the Eastman School's 16th annual Festival of American Music. This unique concert was entitled

'Program of Concert Music in the Jazz Idiom' with the performing ensemble listed as the Eastman Student Dance Orchestra, Jack End, Director. Ray's work was entitled 'Two American Stereotypes: 1. Mom, 2. The Businessman'. The score to this early work is filed in the Ray Wright Collection in the ESM Ensemble Library.



## LIFE ON THE ROAD (1945–48)

Ray traveled for a year-and-a-half with the Tony Pastor Band, and then another year-and-a-half with the Glenn Miller Orchestra, enjoying both equally. In an interview in the *Rochester Times-Union*, February 27, 1971, Ray and staff writer Cliff Smith discussed life on the road with these big bands:

RW: [The Tony Pastor Band was] a good jazz band, a swinging band full of young, spirited personnel. We did the one-nighter circuit by bus and car, and I got a chance to see the country. [In the Miller band] we were treated with such deference. It was wonderfully organized and consisted of high-quality musicians. Everything about it was class. And it was one of the healthiest groups I ever worked with. Everyone was either working out in gyms or playing in golf tournaments every chance he got.

CS: One of the arrangements Wright remembers writing for the Miller band was called 'Papa's Surprise', a take-off of Haydn's 'Surprise Symphony', and there's a story that goes with it ...

RW: We were traveling through the West, and one night we had to drive through a terrible blizzard. We came to a little town in the Rockies and stumbled into a diner. As soon as I got through the door I heard one of my charts, 'Papa's Surprise', playing on the jukebox!

CS: Also writing arrangements along with Wright was the band's pianist, Henry Mancini, and Wright recalls the two of them chasing each other around looking for a piano on which to write arrangements every time they'd come to a ballroom.

*"One point that I consider important is that you never consider measuring the importance of your playing by the number of people in the audience. For musicians, an important person for future work or contacts can be just one person in the room ... Always play as if there were definitely such a person eavesdropping on you."*

– Ray Wright, 1983

*Ray (on left) performing with Tex Beneke and the Glenn Miller Orchestra, 1948.*





*Top photo: Ray with Rosemary and Betty Clooney while with the Tony Pastor Band, 1946. Ray later said that he felt like the sisters' protector, since they were only in their teens at the time.*

*Above: Ray with Tex Beneke and the Glenn Miller Orchestra, 1948 (Ray seated to the right of the bass drum).*

*Below: Ray at the wheel of his blue Oldsmobile convertible in New York.*



But Ray didn't want to continue life on the road indefinitely, so he set a time limit of two to three years of big band work. After the year-and-a-half with the Glenn Miller Orchestra and Tex Beneke, he stuck to his goal. In 1948, Ray settled in New York City and entered the Juilliard School of Music and Columbia University Teacher's College to attain a master of music degree. His primary teachers at Juilliard and Columbia were Henry Brant (arranging and composition), Otto Luening (composition), Vladimir Bakaleinakoff, Fritz Mahler and Emmanuel Balaban (conducting).

Ray worked around town while getting his advanced degree, and kept in contact with his network of professional friends for writing and playing opportunities. As recounted in the 1971 interview with Cliff Smith:

CS: Ray's last big band job was as a substitute trombonist with the Gordon Jenkins Orchestra at the Capitol Theater in New York. He had just finished graduate studies at Juilliard School of Music and Columbia University Teacher's College when some free-lance arranging work led to a steady job at Radio City Music Hall.

RW: I was still playing and writing while I was earning my degree. I did a lot of free-lance recordings with various bands and solo artists. At that time television was very New York-oriented, so I also played for television pilots and shows. I had my next few years plotted to be closely associated with television — I was just young enough to believe that you plotted your life, rather than having it happen to you.

An old friend told me that there was a 'changing of the guard' in the Radio City Music Hall Orchestra, and he recommended strongly that I go to audition for Raymond Paige, the new director. I actually had my eye set on something else and felt that the orchestra wouldn't be doing what I wanted to do. But my friend kept shooting down my excuses, so I made an appointment and was interviewed. They immediately asked me to play trombone in the orchestra and handle any writing that might come up. I said "No, I appreciate your interest, but I'm really not interested in that type of thing — if you need some writing, just give me a call."

Within a couple of weeks they did call, asking me to do the overture for the Fall show. I dug in and worked there for a couple of weeks. It was a success and they kept calling me back all the time, until they made it a staff position. Later, they made me the chief arranger.

*"I had my next few years plotted to be closely associated with television — I was just young enough to believe that you plotted your life, rather than having it happen to you."*

*— Ray Wright*

## Chapter 2: New York City (1950–1960)

*“In any event, remember that there is a solid future for you and you have to work through some uncomfortable times now to enjoy that future later.”*

– Ray Wright, on the importance of perseverance, 1986

### LIFE CHANGES

THE NEXT TWO DECADES, beginning with Ray’s tenure at Radio City Music Hall, introduced a wide variety of new writing and compositional challenges, as well as dramatic changes in his lifestyle.

During the years following the big band road experiences, and while at Juilliard and Columbia University, Ray frequently shared an apartment with his old friend, Van Haney, who was then playing second trombone with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra. In 1950, Ray met and married Elizabeth (Libbie) Johnston, a pianist. Their time together was short-lived, as she died three years later of Hodgkin’s disease, a form of lymph cancer.

In 1946, Doris Benoit, an artist, and her sister Patricia, an actress, moved to New York City from Fort Worth, Texas. They met Libbie when they were all living in a girl’s club for young ‘artistic hopefuls’. Doris and her sister remained close friends with Libbie and her new husband, Ray Wright, after their marriage. After Libbie’s death, Doris and Ray’s friendship eventually developed into a romance, and they were married on October 2, 1954. Their first home was in Manhattan on West 106th Street, where their two sons were born: Andrew Lyon (Drew) in 1955, and David Rolla in 1959.

During the latter years of the 1950s, Ray and Doris began the construction of a house in Westchester County, north of Manhattan. Their new home, located in a rural, wooded area outside of Croton-on-Hudson, provided a relaxing contrast to the hustle and bustle of Manhattan, which Ray recognized as the center of theatrical, concert, jazz and pop culture. Their move to Croton in 1960 created a daily rail commute for Ray of 45–50 minutes, compared to fifty blocks on the subway when he lived in Manhattan.

During their early years in Croton, Ray and Doris joined the Unitarian Fellowship. They later moved their active participation to the First Unitarian Church in Rochester, where Ray established a recurring jazz worship service.

In the mid-1960s, Ray got the sailing bug. He had crewed on his brother Vincent’s Flying Dutchman on Crystal Lake, Michigan over the years and loved it. So he and Doris finally bought a 16' 8" O’Day Daysailer and started sailing on the Hudson River. Sailing became a passion for Ray that lasted until the end of his life.



Ray in his office at Radio City Music Hall.



Above: Ray and Drew.

Right: David and Doris.





Ray on the podium at Radio City Music Hall.

## RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL

Once established as a writer at Radio City Music Hall (RCMH) in the early 1950s, Ray left his trombone in its case and focused on developing his writing and show production skills.

His educational background and experiences had prepared him well for an RCMH position that required a wide range of knowledge, from classical repertoire to the latest jazz writing of the day. His earlier work at Eastman with Burrill Phillips and Bernard Rogers, plus the experiences with his New York mentors, Henry Brant and Otto Luening, energized his insatiable quest for more knowledge, and provided him with a broad background and musical knowledge in all types of writing challenges.

He therefore fit perfectly into the Radio City staff, where the daily repertoire for the orchestra, dancers, singers and specialty acts could require any number of compositional or orchestration techniques or styles. An arranger has a vast array of responsibilities and needs a correspondingly broad range of skills — including orchestration, editing, transcribing and/or creating new and different versions of existing pieces of music, while also expressing original musical thoughts in the mix. These were all Ray's tools, and he knew how to use them well.

During the late 1940s and early 1950s, arrangers and orchestrators held highly desirable positions in the commercial music world. Consider all of the dance and jazz bands performing, touring and entering the newly-developed recording industry, each with several people — often members of the band — writing for them. It was the arrangers who provided the highly individualistic stamps of identity to these bands and who defined each ensemble's sound.

Ray's career developed in this manner and, as his reputation as an arranger, orchestrator and transcriber grew, he became a leading figure in the music world. In a 1953 interview in *Etude Magazine* with Rose Heylbut titled 'Radio City's Unseen Experts', Ray outlined his philosophy about the duties and responsibilities of his new job at Radio City Music Hall:

*"A successful orchestrator-arranger needs imagination, solid technical musicianship, and the ability to assume responsibility under the pressure of show production ... Beyond these, there are no fixed requirements except, perhaps, the ability to remain flexibly unfixed, capable of turning out any kind of good musical job at any moment!"*

– Ray Wright, describing his philosophy toward work at Radio City Music Hall, 1953

RH: Here's an interesting story of the behind-the-scenes work that is necessary to produce a smooth-running stage spectacle.

The huge stage spectacles at New York's Radio City Music Hall provide entertainment for millions, and stage jobs for more than two hundred orchestral players, organists, soloists, choristers, dancers, and act-specialists. They also furnish employment to a sizable corps of trained, experienced musicians who are never seen on the great stage, about whom the public knows little, yet whose skills are a vital factor in keeping the production mechanism in motion.

Music Hall musical material is seldom acquired over the counters of the music store. Its highly special orchestrations and arrangements are in charge of Rayburn Wright and Kenyon Hopkins for the orchestra, and Ralph Hunter for the Glee Club. Mr. Wright, previously a trombonist, whose orchestrations have been played by the New York Philharmonic-Symphony, and such popular bands as Glenn Miller's Orchestra, begins by explaining the difference between orchestrating and arranging.

RW: The orchestrator is the skilled craftsman with a thorough knowledge of all possible means of practice making the orchestra sound, and of utilizing instrumental colors; the arranger is more creative, developing the music he works on, adding effects, composing transitions, etc. In practice, however, the two jobs overlap.

The orchestrator might be called the 'speech writer' of music, and, like the speech writer in words, he must have versatility, and a facile imagination. The orchestrator's task is to take the general, over-all ideas of his music director and producer and translate the desired effects into music. At the Music Hall we have four main ensembles, each with its own directorial head: The Corps de Ballet may be doing a Chopin number; the Rockettes, a lively swing routine; the stage spectacle may center around Latin-American strains; while the overture may come from opera or the symphonic literature. After discussion with the other group directors, Raymond Paige, our Music Director, indicates the music he wants and the effects he has in mind: something warm, brilliant, romantic, 'cute'. The orchestrator then works these effects into the score through his use of rhythm and instrumental color, often bringing a different feeling out of the same theme by varied orchestrations.

Standard classics are generally used in their original form; yet we sometimes have to adapt them to the requirements of the orchestra or to the acoustical properties of the vast Music Hall. Whenever we do this (through extending, warming up, accenting, coloring), we try not to intrude upon the composer's own style. After working hard on an orchestration of this sort, we find our best reward when the adaptation passes unnoticed. In mounting popular numbers, however, we cut loose, developing moods and styles of our own to fit the requirements of the shows.

A successful orchestrator-arranger needs imagination, solid technical musicianship, and the ability to assume responsibility under the pressure of show production. We sometimes find ourselves working on two shows at the same time. Mr. Paige may send in his arranging assignments for a future production while I am still polishing details on the one coming up, and all demands must be quickly and accurately met. Further, the orchestrator-arranger should have compositional talents and training, together with a thorough knowledge of musical periods and style. And, whatever his own instrument, he should be able to work at the piano. Beyond these, there are no fixed requirements except, perhaps, the ability to remain flexibly unfixed, capable of turning out any kind of good musical job at any moment!

*"After working hard on an orchestration of this sort, we find our best reward when the adaptation passes unnoticed. In mounting popular numbers, however, we cut loose, developing moods and styles of our own to fit the requirements of the shows."*

*— Ray Wright, discussing the orchestrator-arranger's role, 1953*

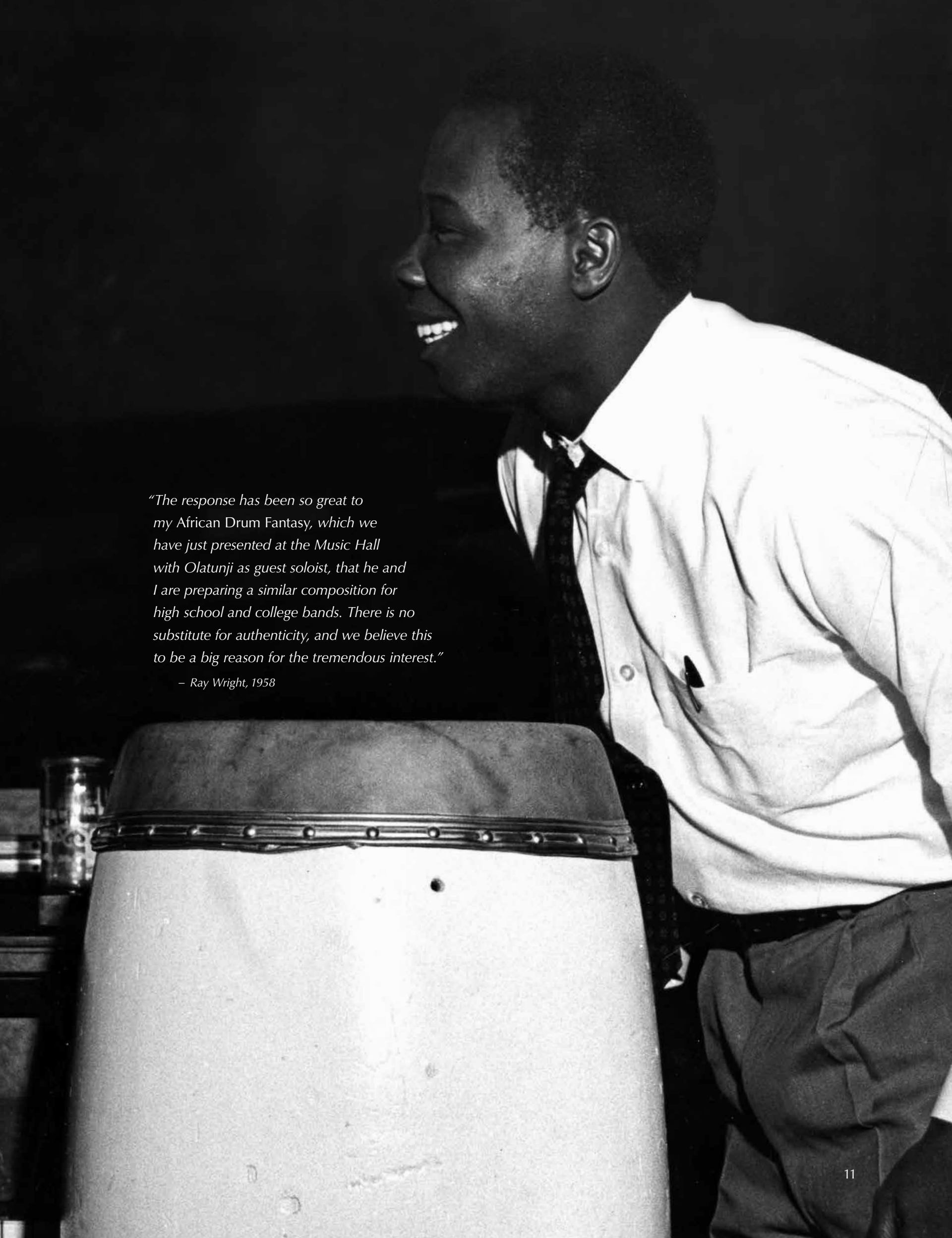
*Below: Ray conducting the Radio City Music Hall Orchestra.  
Overleaf: Ray and Olatunji preparing for the African Drum Fantasy at Radio City Music Hall, 1958.*





*"The folk songs seemed strange to our ears on first hearing, and the drum rhythms were so complex that it seemed hopeless to try to synchronize them with our 60-piece symphony orchestra. Was it even possible at all? Two days of intensive listening and tape recording of Olatunji led me to the answer: it would be difficult but it could be done ..."*



A black and white photograph of a man, Ray Wright, smiling and looking to his left. He is wearing a light-colored, long-sleeved button-down shirt and a dark tie. In the foreground, a large, light-colored African drum with a dark head and a metal band is visible. The background is dark and out of focus.

*"The response has been so great to my African Drum Fantasy, which we have just presented at the Music Hall with Olatunji as guest soloist, that he and I are preparing a similar composition for high school and college bands. There is no substitute for authenticity, and we believe this to be a big reason for the tremendous interest."*

*– Ray Wright, 1958*



Top photo: Doris and Ray talking at the Emory Remington Reunion (Emory Remington second from right).

Above: Ray and the group rehearsing Stardust for The Chief.

Below: Ray conducting 40 trombones during the performance of Stardust for The Chief at Kilbourn Hall, 1955.

## STARDUST FOR THE CHIEF

In May 1955, over 70 current and former students of famed Eastman trombone pedagogue Emory Remington — with whom Ray had studied at Interlochen Music Camp and later at the Eastman School of Music — held a reunion in tribute to the Chief's 32 years of teaching at Eastman. This occasion was highlighted by the performance of a work arranged by Ray for multiple trombone choir: *Stardust for The Chief*.

This work, scored for three separate groups within the ensemble (Symphonic Group, Jazz Group, and a legitimate Group A, plus tuba, string bass and drums), is a masterpiece of arranging that features prominent trombone solos from a wide variety of styles, including jazz and pop classics such as 'Stardust' (The Chief's favorite pop trombone piece), 'Smoke Rings' and 'I'm Getting Sentimental over You'; classical orchestral excerpts from 'Russian Easter Overture', 'Scheherezade', Brahms's 'Symphony No. 1 (movement 4)' and 'Symphony No. 2 (Finale)', Ravel's 'Bolero', and 'The Russian Sailors Dance'; plus 'Lassus Trombone' and excerpts from The Chief's daily warm-up studies including the famed and highly difficult harmonic series flexibility study.

This event also holds special personal significance in my memory, as it was at this gathering that I first met Ray and Doris, establishing relationships that would last over many decades.

## NEW YORK RECORDING PROJECTS

During the late 1950s, Ray participated in several recordings that ranged from RCMH work through recordings featuring his own writings. These projects included:

- *1958 Music Hall Bon-Bons* — Raymond Paige, RCMH Orchestra (Everest SDBR 1024, LPBR 5024, STBR 1024; re-released in CD format by Essential Media Group); Ray's work was in re-orchestrations and arrangements for the orchestra.
- *La Guitarra: The Genius of Rolando Valdes-Blain* — Rolando Valdes-Blain (Roulette R-25055); Ray wrote orchestral arrangements to accompany the solo Spanish classical guitar and conducted the orchestra.
- *Showplace of the Nation* — Raymond Paige, RCMH Orchestra (Roulette Records R-25008); Ray wrote the Overture: 'Lecuona Fantasy' and the Finale: 'Nights in Vienna' (seven Strauss Family compositions).
- *Holidays for Percussion* — New York Percussion Trio (Vox Records VX 25.740); Ray conducted and wrote numerous original works and arrangements for the Trio.

## GOLD ON SILK

A noteworthy accomplishment of Ray's occurred in 1959, when he wrote and recorded *Gold on Silk* with The Ray Wright Orchestra (Everest Records LPBR 5048; SDBR 1048). *Gold on Silk*, a ground-breaking exercise in early stereo recording techniques, featured four of the top brass performers in New York — Doc Severinsen on trumpet, Jimmy Chambers on French horn, Will Bradley on trombone and Don Butterfield on tuba — along with major orchestral performers in the orchestra and recording industry.

In the album liner notes, Ray described his choice of musicians: "I wanted a wide and well-blended range of musical colors, and fortunately, I was able to obtain superior soloists and supportive sidemen whom Everest's extraordinary recording techniques were able to capture fully and accurately."

This Everest Hi-Fi LP, recorded and released by the Belock Instrument Corp., was a trailblazing effort in the early days of high fidelity recording in the 1950s, during which time Everest, Command, Mercury and similar recording companies worked to outdo each other in clarity, separation of stereo sound and uniqueness of musical presentation. Multi-miking was in its infancy and Ray's subsequent two LPs with Frederick Fennell on Mercury Records (recorded by Fine Studios in 1960 and 1961), were a continuation of this exploration of new audio techniques.



On the Everest recordings, the techniques included the use of 35mm film (rather than 1/2" magnetic tape), specially-designed Westrex 35mm studio recording and disc-cutting equipment, along with Telefunken and AKG microphones — all intended to reproduce a frequency response between 20 and 20,000 cycles with no audible distortion. The album was released on LP and stereo master 2-track tape, and it is interesting to note that the retail price of the 2-track tape was \$10.95, which, adjusted for inflation, is equivalent to over \$80 in 2012. This was a cutting-edge package for high-end audiophiles!

In his liner notes, Nat Hentoff wrote:

This is a different kind of mood music album, featuring the best brass soloists (the gold) against a large group of strings (the silk) with the support of a mood-setting rhythm section. Ray has been 'the man behind the scenes.' He is a consistently skillful arranger who has the ability to catch the quality that best complements the particular style and feeling of each artist. On this set, *Gold on Silk*, he did the arrangements along with Dick Lieb and Larry Crosley. He also wrote 'Small Town Blues' and 'Lonesome Horn' especially for this album.

Industry reviews included:

*High Fidelity*, December 1959

This is a difficult record to classify, but simple to describe. Fabulous is the word for it. Although it's been placed on my turntable at least half a dozen times, and undoubtedly will be played many times more, each playing has revealed further enchantment. Over the skillful arrangements for the string section, some of the finest brass instrumentalists play solos that are little short of magical. From the soaring line of Doc Severinsen's trumpet in 'Lonesome Horn' and the glowing warmth of the French horn in Jim Chambers' version of 'My Man's Gone Now' to the purity of Will Bradley's trombone in 'Why Was I Born' and the mellowness Don Butterfield extracts from his tuba in 'Yesterdays', everything is perfect. Add the impeccable Everest sound, particularly in the stereo version, and you'll have some idea why I call this disc inspired. Mood music? Well, perhaps, but actually more than that ... a great deal more.

*Billboard*, September 28, 1959

Excellent stereo sound marks this package, which spotlights top brass soloists (gold) against a large group of strings (silk) with considerable effect. Excellent jockey wax. Selections include 'Stormy Weather', 'Why Was I Born?' and other standards. Soloists include Will Bradley, Doc Severinsen, Jimmy Chambers and Don Dutterfield (sic).

*Cash Box*, October 17, 1959

Beautiful mood session is created by superimposing a brass solo line upon a setting of lush strings. The soloists, all capable jazzmen, are Will Bradley (trombone), Doc Severinsen (trumpet), Jimmy Chambers (French horn) and Don Butterfield (tuba), who provide the sensuous melodies of 'Stormy Weather', 'September Song', 'Ghost of a Chance' and 'My One and Only Love', among others. Extremely effective mood album, aided by fine stereo depth.



Top photo: Ray leading the *Gold on Silk* recording session with Jimmy Chambers in the foreground. Above: Ray and orchestra in the recording studio. Below: The commercial 2-track tape release of *Gold on Silk*, 1959.



## BALLET AND DANCE PROJECTS

*"... genuine New Orleans jazz rhythms, the hot heady flutter of brushes on brass in a furious crap game, and the eerie harmonics that attend Blanche's mental trauma are among the high points of a powerful score which has been ably adapted to balletic needs by Rayburn Wright."*

– Los Angeles Daily News,  
March 1953

*"[Ray] is a consistently skillful arranger who has the ability to catch the quality that best complements the particular style and feeling of each artist."*

– Nat Hentoff, 1959

Among the diverse writing assignments Ray undertook at RCMH, creating works for the ballet corps and the Rockettes was very appealing and prepared him to accept outside dance projects. He stated his admiration for the Rockettes during the interview with Cliff Smith for the *Rochester Time-Union*, February 27, 1971:

RW: [The Rockettes were] remarkable. They may have been better than the audiences ever realized. The requirements were tough — it was hard to be spirited and accurate in show after show (there were four a day, seven days a week), especially with such change in order of the line as the girls had to replace one another on days off or in times of sickness in different places along the chorus line.

Through connections developed in New York City, Ray was invited to create scores for several New York ballet companies. He described these activities in a interview published in the *Brighton-Pittsford Post* in 1985:

RW: The first score I worked on was for *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Valerie Bettis choreographed it for the Slavenska-Franklin Ballet in 1952. Alex North had written the music for the film, but didn't have time to do the ballet, so I stepped in, using North's movie music, some of his clarinet pieces, and wrote some original music in his style to complete it.

American Ballet Theatre bought *Streetcar* in 1954, and it is now in the repertoire of Dance Theatre of Harlem. They performed it on their last visit here [Rochester] and in Toronto in late June this year [1984], as part of the Toronto International Festival.

I also did several things for Joffrey [Ballet] — one was a rewrite of Britten's *Gloriana Suite*. Another was *Fanfarita*, based on Spanish Zarzuela music. My name on the score came as a surprise to some of the orchestra members when the company brought that ballet when they came here [Rochester] last year [1984].

For the 1962 Arrangers' Holiday — the first one we had put on in the evening — I invoked an old friendship with [Michael Babatunde] Olatunji, the African dancer and drummer, and had him come up with his troupe.

Then, in 1967, we commissioned a score from Manny Albam, which Olive McCue choreographed for her Mercury Ballet, and 'The Blues Is Everybody's Business' turned out to be a great success. Garth Fagan brought his Bucket Dance Theatre in 1975. Fagan choreographed a piece by one of our students, Jerry Brubaker, 'Dance For Jerry's Music' along with 'Polk Street Carnival' and '4+1' with George Ross, our marvelous saxophonist.

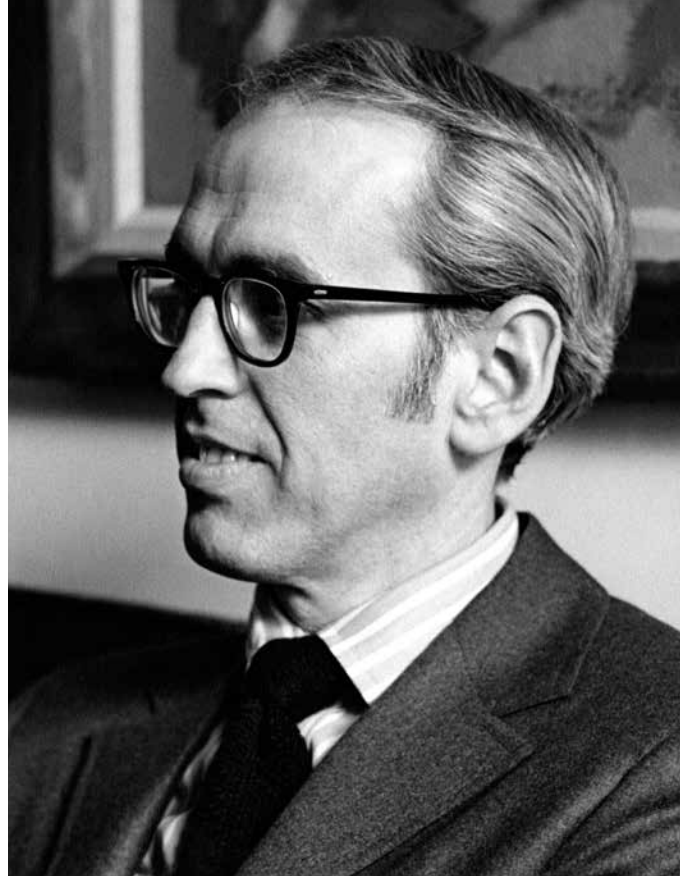


*The Mercury Ballet at the Arrangers' Holiday, 1965.*

## Chapter 3: Radio City to Eastman (1960–1970)

*“To Ray every crisis is ‘interesting’, every calamity merely ‘a fascinating problem’.”*

– Rochester Review, 1987



Ray at his new home in Croton.

### WRITING ASSIGNMENTS AT RADIO CITY

RAY'S WRITING AND SHOW FORMAT responsibilities increased as the style and design of the RCMH presentations continued to develop during the 1950s and '60s. An examination of programs from RCMH during this period illustrates the wide variety of challenging assignments Ray faced within a single show. Each of these challenges required knowledge and skill in creating instrumental settings that provided optimum effects for the audience, regardless whether it was the show's opening or closing extravaganza, an accompaniment for a dance unit, a work to support a vocal ensemble or guest specialty act, or incidental music of some type. For example:

#### **RCMH December 3, 1959 Production #497**

OVERTURE: *Xmas 1958*, arranged by RW

SCENE: *Santa's Workshop*, original by RW

COLUMBUS BOYS CHOIR: 'Soldier, Soldier', arranged by RW

SCENE: *Rocket Countdown* (last three bars), original by RW

BALLET: *Ballet Announcement*, arranged by RW

FINALE: 'Christmas Spirit' (Stillman/Allen), arranged by RW and Timmens

Each show ran for approximately a month with options available to shorten or extend the run. Major production procedures were set by Leon Leonidoff, Senior Producer, and Russell Markert, Producer and Director of Rockettes, while Raymond Paige established the musical requirements as Musical Director.

During the 18 or more years Ray was at the Music Hall, most of the Overtures were either his arrangements or works from the published standard orchestral repertoire which he might have to adapt to match the instrumentation requirements of the RCMH orchestra or the time constraints of the program. Until the mid-1960s, he was seldom credited on the printed program as having written the Overtures.

After Ray and Will Irwin (Ray's counterpart with the vocal ensembles) became Co-Musical Directors beginning on September 16, 1965, each was given credit for their individual Musical Director work. They alternated by the month with musical director responsibilities for the shows and were also listed on the program as Co-Directors of the Music Hall Symphony Orchestra.

*“The established ways of doing are all organized, set, and overworked because music schools train students to write this type. But there are so many creative offshoots possible that are not being explored. I have learned to exploit the unorthodox or unused possibilities in music.”*

– Ray Wright, 1965

## THE ANATOMY OF A RADIO CITY SPECTACULAR

Radio City's common programming style and show design offered distinct features created to please and entertain the audience. Every show was preceded by organ selections performed by Richard Liebert or one of his collaborators, which usually led into an Overture performed by the 65-piece symphony orchestra.

Following the Overture, there was frequently an opening spectacular segment. For example, Production #540's spectacular — Feature No. 3 *Musicana* — could have been followed by the ballet corps, the Rockettes or a guest specialty act. Ray's writing assignments for Production #540 (January 1964) included:

**Feature No. 2 — OVERTURE:** *Gay Nineties*. This orchestral opener featured period songs including 'The Band Played On', 'Dill Pickles', 'Glowworm', 'The Whistler and his Dog', 'She's Only a Bird in a Gilded Cage', 'Silver Threads among the Gold', 'Cakewalk', 'Ta-ra-ra Boom de Ay', and 'Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight'.

**Feature No. A — MUSIC HALL BALLET COMPANY:** *Patterns*, featuring the music of composer/arranger David Rose. Ray worked on three of these scores, filling out necessary instrumentation for the published arrangements of 'Our Waltz' and 'A Nous', and writing a finale for the dancers entitled 'California Melodies Finale'.

**Feature No. B — VOCAL ENSEMBLE:** *Les Girls*, with vocal soloist Warren Galjour and ten female backup singers. Here, Ray participated in one of his more common assignments over the years, collaborating with Will Irwin (vocal arranger at the Music Hall), for whom he wrote necessary instrumental backgrounds for Irwin's vocal settings. Frequently, Ray and Irwin would be credited on the cue sheets for co-scoring large-scale works, such as the Grand Finale, which would bring everyone in the show onto the stage to close the production, however, they could also do smaller collaborative arrangements anywhere throughout the show.

Other sample productions over the years reveal Ray's varying writing assignments:

### RCMH November 1, 1962 Production #527

OVERTURE: *Victor Youmans Overture*, arranged by RW

OPENING: 'Welcome' (Stillman-Irwin), arranged by RW

VOCAL ENSEMBLE: 'Island in the Sun' (Belafonte), arranged by RW

BALLET: *Flower Ballet* (Ray Viola), arranged by RW

SOLO DANCERS: 'La Mona' (Ross), arranged by RW

FINALE: 'Island in the Sun' (Belafonte), arranged by RW, Irwin

In the years prior to 1965, Ray was frequently recognized in the overall house program credit listings with 'Orchestrations by Rayburn Wright.'

### RCMH October 26, 1967 Production #574

Musical direction by Rayburn Wright

OVERTURE: *Melodies of Mancini*, arranged by RW

SPECIALTY DOG ACT: 'Putting on the Dog Intro', original by RW

ROCKETTES: *UFO — Outer Space*, including 'Masque Nada' and 'You Came Along Out of Nowhere', arranged by RW

FINALE: *The Gospel Truth*, including 'Motherless Child' and 'Chariots and Saints', arranged by RW

Examples of shows after 1965 when Ray and Irwin assumed the Musical Director duties contain slightly fewer programmings of Ray's then-current writing, as the added pressures of co-conducting daily shows reduced his available time for writing. Beginning in 1967, credits listed on the cue sheets began to include arrangements by Ray's private students and collaborators Dick Lieb and Fred Karlin, who were also involved in the writing on the LPs *Gold on Silk*, *Fennell Conducts Porter* and *Fennell Conducts Gershwin*.

*"I find that there are several ingredients necessary to success in breaking in to music and to continuing successfully there:*

*1) Personal improvement as a musician. Practice, listen to others, think about what you need to do to be better, to appeal to audiences and other musicians more.*

*2) You must be heard by other musicians and non-musicians. They must continually be reminded that you're around and that you're capable and unique at what you do.*

*3) Keep making contacts and keep following up opportunities even if you can't foresee what relevance they hold for you."*

*– Ray Wright, on succeeding in the music business, 1986*

Once Ray assumed the additional managerial tasks associated with the Co-Musical Director conducting and production duties, his personal copies of the Music Library cue sheets began to contain his personal analyses of each of the musical segments on every show.

Earlier, when studying privately with Ray between 1956 and 1958, I frequently had my lessons in his office at RCMH, where he would occasionally interrupt a lesson and we would go into the theater so he could watch a segment of the ongoing show and communicate his observations by internal telephone to the production staff.



The author and Ray, 1964.



Ray in the mid-1960s.

*"Jazz is music as high art and entertainment all at once, music with wit, charm, satire and all those things. It's that joyous bubbling-up quality of a Louis Armstrong, a Clark Terry or a Duke Ellington. It never occurs to you to measure it with a yardstick to determine whether it's deep or conveying a message. It's a very important part of your mental health that you can accept this part of life to balance out the real problems of life."*

– Ray Wright, 1971

*Below: Ray conducting six solo pianists at Radio City Music Hall in Tschaikovsky's First Piano Concerto, 1966.*

*Overleaf: Ray conducting 'Elementals' with the Dave Brubeck Quartet and Philadelphia Orchestra, 1964.*







## RECORDING PROJECTS (1961–70)

*“On August 1, 1963, a sold-out audience of 3,500 people gave Dave [Brubeck] a standing ovation at the end of ‘Elementals’. He finally realized that he’d done what many have tried to do: to combine the best of symphonic values with those of jazz. When Columbia Records’ Teo Macero suggested my assembling and conducting a similar orchestra in New York of the country’s finest players, I knew we had all the ingredients of a memorable LP.”*

– Ray Wright, from the liner notes of the Dave Brubeck album *Time Changes*, 1964

*“I had only one long night to study and mark those first sessions’ scores ... I really didn’t need more time; Ray had thought of everything. And he knew the ‘famous fifty’ players so well that he wrote for them — and in the case of the multiple-reed doublers, for their incredible skills on four or five instruments.”*

– Frederick Fennell, on the CD re-issue of the Mercury Gershwin and Porter LPs, 1992

In addition to becoming more involved in show preparation and production work at Radio City, Ray also began writing and conducting for outside LP recordings. Among his projects during the decade are these diverse recordings:

- *Fennell Conducts Gershwin* — Frederick Fennell Orchestra, 1961 (Mercury Records: PPS 6006; 434 327-2); Ray wrote the arrangements with Dick Lieb and Fred Karlin.
- *Fennell Conducts Porter* — Frederick Fennell Orchestra, 1962 (Mercury Records: 434 327-2). Ray wrote the arrangements with Dick Lieb and Fred Karlin.

These two recordings bear close examination as it was during the writing and recording process that the genesis of the Eastman Studio Orchestra of the 1970s and ‘80s began to become apparent. Ray’s earlier *Gold on Silk* LP demonstrated a cutting-edge approach for the developing world of multi-microphone stereo recording. In these Mercury recordings, engineer Robert Fine demonstrated his skills with separated multi-miking, which was in direct contrast to his famed ‘single (or stereo) Telefunken microphone(s) suspended above the podium’ approach of the earlier 1950s with the Chicago Orchestra, Detroit Symphony, Minneapolis Symphony, Howard Hanson with the Eastman Rochester Orchestra, and Fennell with the Eastman Wind Ensemble. Ray sketched out the division of instrumental voices into stereo groupings on the cover of several of his scores.

- *New Sounds for the Stage Band* — Rayburn Wright, editor and writer, 1963 (Sam Fox Music Sales Corp. SF 1005); Fred Karlin, conductor.

Ray’s arrangement of ‘You Turned the Tables on Me’ is included on this recording. This publication program with Sam Fox Publishing Co. was a forerunner to the Studio Orchestra publication series that Ray produced and edited for Kendor Music Publishers later when he was at Eastman.

- *High Life!* — Olatunji and troupe, 1963 (Columbia Records: mono CL 1996; stereo CL 8796); Rayburn Wright, arranger and conductor.

Ray first worked with Michael Babatunde Olatunji, a Nigerian musician, in September 1958 when Olatunji and his African drummers, singers and dancers were featured at the Music Hall. Olatunji was the guest artist for the first Arrangers’ Holiday evening show in 1962. The recording contains 10 African songs featuring Olatunji on shekere (African maracas), agidigbo (thumb piano), bata, omele and dundun, with vocal and instrumental accompaniment arranged by Ray. The band Ray assembled for this album featured a number of prominent jazz players, including Clark Terry, Snooky Young, Bob Brookmeyer, Hosea Taylor and Ray Barretto.

- *Time Changes* — Dave Brubeck and Quartet, ‘Elementals’, Rayburn Wright, conductor, 1964 (Columbia Records: CK 85992 Columbia Legacy).

Dave Brubeck and his Quartet were featured on the 1964 Arrangers’ Holiday show featuring a work for Quartet and orchestra entitled ‘Elementals’. Brubeck wrote the piece but insisted that Ray edit it for any possible orchestration or other errors. In addition to conducting on this recording, Ray performed the work with the Quartet in concerts with the Philadelphia Orchestra and the Lansing, Michigan Symphony Orchestra in 1964, the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra in Lewisohn Stadium, New York City in 1965, and the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra in 1972.

- *Max Morath at the Turn of the Century* — Max Morath, 1969 (RCA Victor Records: LSO-1159); Rayburn Wright, arranger.

This was a project by Fred Karlin, who returned favors from earlier years by involving Ray in writing arrangements for the recording. They would eventually do their greatest collaboration two decades later in the now-legendary film scoring textbook *On The Track*.

- *History of Guitars in Sound and Song*, 1970 (Golden Records LP 254). Ray wrote the book, the music, some of the lyrics, and conducted.

Ray's fascination with everything musical led him to a love of the guitar. This collection included discussion and performance of music for the lyre, lute, 12-string guitar, Spanish guitar, mandolin, balalaika, Hawaiian guitar, steel guitar and electric guitar, as well as several of Ray's original songs.

During these years, Ray also served as a member of the board of governors of the New York Chapter of the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences (NARAS) and also became a member of the Blue Ribbon Jury for NARAS in 1969.



*Fred Karlin and Ray, 1962.*

#### TELEVISION WORK (1963–70)

Ray was very aware of the huge impact television would have on the entertainment world, and he joined this growth and development in a very positive fashion, becoming orchestrator, composer and conductor of the ABC-TV News series *The Saga of Western Man*. His film scores won him two Emmy nominations for best score in 1964 and 1965, plus the Overseas Press Club Award in 1965. Working with writer/producers John Secondari and his wife, Helen Jean Rogers, Ray composed scores in a wide variety of styles and nationalistic venues:

- *The World's Girls*, October 25, 1963
- *The Soviet Woman*, December 10, 1963 (Awarded Overseas Press Club Award)
- *Saga: 1492*, October 16, December 29, 1963 (Nominated for Emmy award)
- *Saga: 1898*, February 29, April 8, 1964
- *Saga: 1964*, March 1964
- *Saga: 1776*, 1964
- *I, Leonardo Da Vinci*, February 23, 1965 (Nominated for Emmy Award)
- *Custer to the Big Horn*, April 9, May 23, 1965
- *The Pilgrim's Saga*, May 10, 1965
- *A Visit to Washington with Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson*, November 25, 1965, April 10, 1966
- *Christ Is Born*, December 7, December 25, 1966
- *The Blue and Red Danube*, March 30, May 5, 1967
- *Kitty Hawk to Paris*, March 1969

In an interview with Linda Peerson of the Ossining *Citizen Register*, June 12, 1965, Ray spoke about writing music for television documentaries and the need to evoke a mood appropriate to the action shown on the screen.

RW: I have to write music for all kinds of situations and all kinds of settings, and it has to sound authentic. When Indians attack, you should feel endangered, and when the setting is Renaissance Italy, the music must make the viewers feel as if they are actually in that period and in that country, rather than sitting in their own living room.

LP: He observed that authenticity is as much a by-word for music in a documentary as it is for dialogue, costume and scenery. Precise research in the field — although it is time-consuming — is absolutely essential.

It was during this period that Raymond Paige, Music Director of the RCMH, died in 1965. Ray and Will Irwin were appointed Co-Musical Directors of RCMH in September of that year. In early 1969, Ray left the Music Hall and joined the production staff of ABC-TV. Within a decade, the Music Hall would cease showing major Hollywood films and would briefly close its doors.

*"Ray Wright brought out the best in every individual, encouraging each to discover the strength of his own voice."*

– Fred Karlin, 1990

*This 14" x 17" framed photo was a gift to Ray from the First Lady, inscribed "To Ray Wright, with appreciation and best wishes, Lady Bird Johnson".*



## ARRANGERS' WORKSHOP AT EASTMAN

*"The Arrangers' Workshop and Laboratory-Institute, a unique educational program attracting more and more attention each year, is a unique example of the Eastman School philosophy of 'learning by doing' ... There are four courses in the overall program, and the educational process employed in each of them calls for the student to write constantly, to hear his composition or arrangement played by the professional dance band, combo or orchestra provided by the School, and then to have the work analyzed in class the day after the performance."*

– Ray Wright, 1965



Top photo: Mel Tormé and Ray, 1965.  
Above: Don Hunsberger and Ray at a reading session.

By far the most significant and influential program Ray established during this period was the Arrangers' Workshop in 1959 at Eastman. This intensive two-week program grew over the next thirty years to include an additional three-week long summer Arrangers' Laboratory-Institute and eventually led to Ray's appointment as Chair and Professor of Jazz Studies and Contemporary Media in 1970 and the creation of the leading educational program in jazz performance and writing studies in the country.

For the first three years, the public's view of the Arrangers' Workshop was limited to noontime concerts featuring works written during the previous two weeks and presented on the final day of the session. Interest in this small beginning became so widespread that, in 1962, Ray developed an annual culminating evening public performance for the Arrangers' summer courses: the Arrangers' Holiday concerts. Designed to present works by the resident students and to feature nationally known jazz artists, these concerts brought to Rochester such luminaries as Duke Ellington, Dave Brubeck, Thad Jones, Marian McPartland, Joe Williams and Dizzy Gillespie, among many others.

This program note was included in the 1966 program booklet:

The program was established seven years ago at the Eastman School Summer Session by Rayburn Wright, in co-operation with Dr. A.I. McHose, Director of the Summer Session, and has grown from a mere five students in 1959 to this year's enrollment of 38.

The faculty for the four courses includes Larry Crosley of Crawly Films Ottawa, Ontario, who teaches the Elementary Arranging Course; Donald Hunsberger, Conductor of the Eastman Wind Ensemble and Chairman of the Conducting and Ensembles Department of the Eastman School, who teaches Contemporary Scoring Techniques for Winds; Manny Albam, highly respected professional composer, arranger and conductor, who is the program's Dance Band specialist; and Rayburn Wright, Co-Musical Director of Radio City Music Hall in New York, who is Director of the Arrangers' Workshop and Laboratory-Institute.

By comparison, similar notes in the 1975 program illustrate growth and expansion within the curriculum and teaching staff plus an ever-growing list of star guest artists since 1962:

The teaching staff for the Arrangers' Laboratory-Institute and Summer Jazz Workshop consists of Rayburn Wright, Professor of Jazz Studies and Contemporary Media at the Eastman School of Music, and Manny Albam who comes from New York City to join the summer faculty ... Bill Dobbins, from Eastman School, teaching improvisation, jazz theory and arranging; Ramon Ricker, from Eastman School, teaching improvisation and woodwind doubling; and Gene Bertoncini, guest guitar instructor.

Each Arrangers' Holiday has included a guest star whose high musical quality matches the concept of the Eastman Summer Jazz Workshop. Previous guests were Olatunji, Dave Brubeck, Mel Tormé, Carmen McRae, Thad Jones and Mel Lewis, Billy Taylor, Clark Terry, Dick Hyman, Chuck Mangione, Dizzy Gillespie, and Stan Getz.



Right: Carmen McRae and (as she would invariably say) 'Ray Baby', 1966.



*"To be a good jazz musician you have to be wide awake and at one with your instrument, almost like it is another arm, and you have to be thinking a composition, writing one as you go along."*

– Ray Wright, 1971

*Left: Duke Ellington and Ray, 1964.*

*Below: Manny Albam and Thad Jones, Chick Corea, Richard Davis, 1967.*

## WRITING THE ARRANGERS' HOLIDAY SHOW

By 1962 the Arrangers' Holiday format was established, producing a consistent style that was maintained in the next decades: the first half of the program would feature new original or arranged works by members of the advanced class with a closing musical skit based on familiar tunes arranged in a series of different performance styles, ranging from big band jazz through Lawrence Welk.

The process used in creating the first half, and especially the musical skit, was fascinating and exciting due to the very short time period in which most of the works would be written. The Lab-Institute was three weeks in length and the Holiday was usually presented on Thursday evening of the third week. On Friday of the first week, Ray and Manny would hold a planning session with the advanced writers, a session open and free for ideas from any source or direction. The student writers could volunteer or be assigned individual works; Ray would note each idea on the blackboard to provide an overview of the flow and balance of the first half at large.

The skit would then be discussed and specific arrangements assigned. There was always a written script for this, and members of both Arranging 231 (Intermediate) and Arranging 232 (Advanced) took part in the production as actors, stage or audio assistants, with everything designed to be a hands-on learning experience for each of the students. Local radio personalities were frequently brought in to perform and highlight individual roles.

Time-wise, there were about one and one-half weeks before the concert rehearsals would begin, and students would continue to write (and hand copy) other new works for the regular daily reading sessions. Each student had the opportunity to learn from the experiences of other class members and students often provided help copying out parts for each other's scores, especially for the large studio orchestra sessions.

The second half of the concert would feature the guest artists in their own works, in new arrangements from the advanced class, or in new works written especially for the soloist by Ray or Manny Albam. Ray, who conducted the first half of the concert, wrote works for Stan Getz, J.J. Johnson, Marian McPartland, and Susannah McCorkle, while Manny conducted first performances of new works written for Thad Jones and his Quartet, Billy Taylor, Dick Hyman, Chuck Mangione, Dizzy Gillespie, Gerry Mulligan, Phil Woods, Bob Brookmeyer, Hank Jones, Billy Taylor, Monty Alexander and McCoy Tyner.

In addition to writer-performer guest solo artists, Ray, who had an interest and writing experience in various dance companies in New York City, also invited local dance troupes to join as soloists: Bottom of the Bucket, But... Dance Theater (which became the Garth Fagan Dance Company), Olive McCue and her Mercury Ballet, and the Enid Knapp Botsford School of Dance. In a similar vein, drawing on Ray's deep experience with vocal ensembles, the Eastman Summer High School Jazz Choir, directed by Diane Abrahamian, performed on four Arrangers' Holidays.



*"The guiding line between daring  
and wrong is very thin. You  
should always walk that line."*

*– Ray Wright, as retold  
by Dave Rivello, 2012*



*Ray and J.J. Johnson rehearsing the  
Arrangers' Holiday orchestra, July 1988.*





*Above: Billy Taylor, 1968.*

The orchestra and big band were drawn from local jazz performers, class members, Eastman summer faculty and members of the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra, especially string section performers. All sessions followed AFM union regulations and were recorded by the Eastman Recording Department, which later developed into several levels of recording engineering programs with guest faculty, such as Phil Ramone, joining Ros Ritchie, Eastman recording director.

All Holiday concerts were presented in the Eastman Theatre with the exception of 1971, featuring Marian McPartland and Esther Satterfield, at Rochester's Highland Park Bowl, and 1984, which added a repeat performance with Oscar Peterson at the Finger Lakes Performing Arts Center the day after the evening concert in the Eastman Theatre.

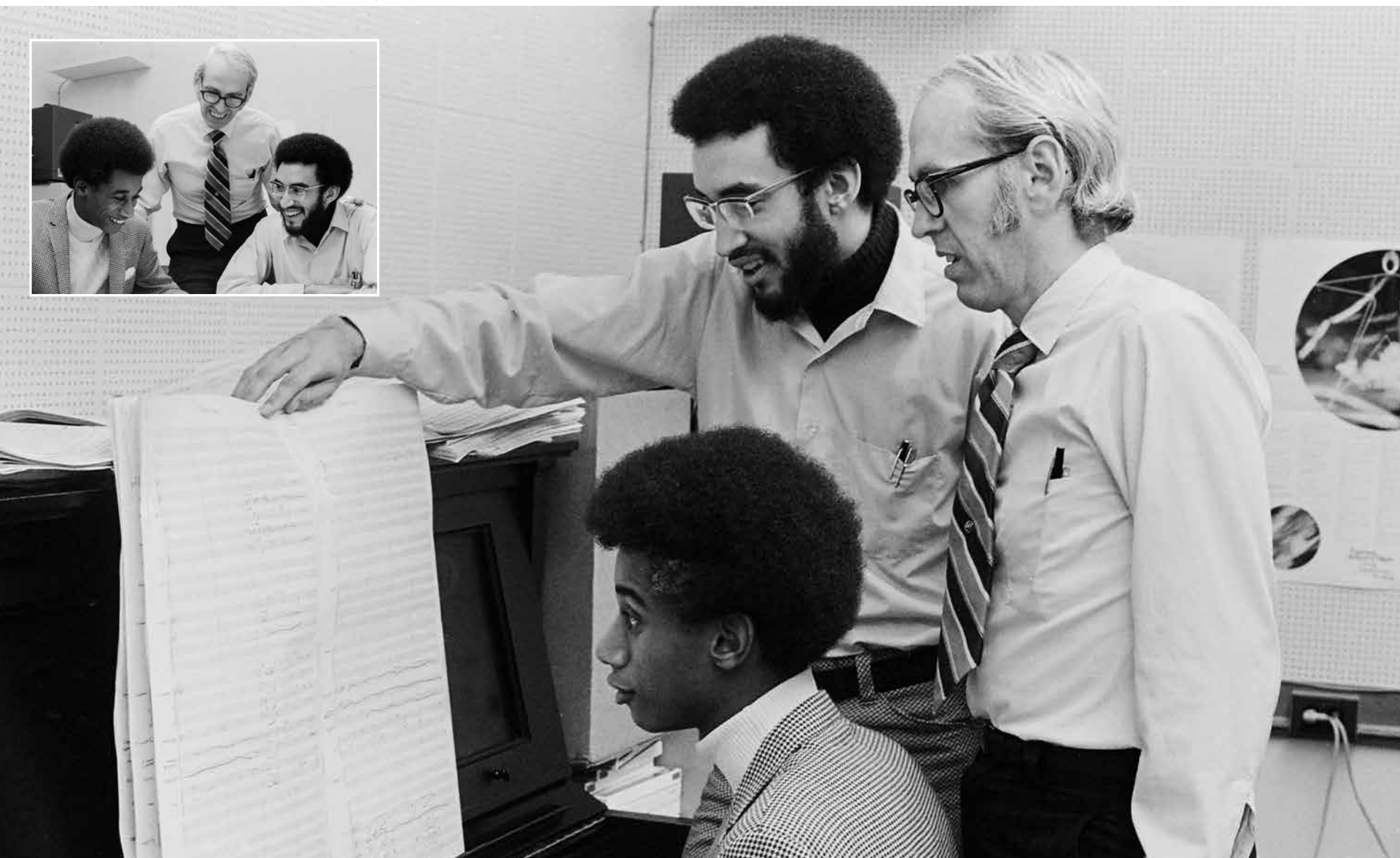
The Arrangers' Workshop continued successfully through the rest of Ray's tenure. The 1990 program, four months after Ray's untimely death and dedicated in his honor, featured Randy Brecker and was conducted by Manny Albam and Bill Holman.

Many notable performers played in the annual Arrangers' Holiday shows over the years, including Vinnie DiMartino, Jeff Tyzik, William Reichenbach, Jim Pugh, John Beck, Dave Mancini, Ned Corman, Rick Lawn, Charles LaGond, Gene Bertoncini, George Ross, Jeff Beal, Phil Markowitz, Doug Walter, Dave Slonaker, Janet Robinson, Bob Kalwas, Rich Thompson, Ted Moore, Brian Scanlon, Joel McNeely, Jon Kreuger, Paul Ferguson, Charlie Pillow and Andy Weinzier.

*The Workshop involved constant writing and intense learning at a professional level. A long list of top professionals studied there, including Luther Henderson, III (with beard) and James Crumbly, 1971.*



*Above: Clark Terry, 1969.*





*Some incredible talent, all for the benefit of Eastman students, clockwise from above: Manny Albam, Ray and Gerry Mulligan, 1973; Bob Brookmeyer, 1979; Dizzy Gillespie, 1972; Marian McPartland, 1981; Hank Jones, 1980.*





*Guest artists at the Arrangers' Holiday, clockwise from above: Ray and Stan Getz, 1974; Sir Roland Hanna and Manny Albam, 1982; Red Rodney, 1989; Gerry Mulligan and Dave Brubeck, 1972; Phil Woods, 1977.*



## Chapter 4: Eastman Jazz Studies (1970–1990)

*“When asked what I would be expected to do when auditioning for his band, Ray said ‘Fit’.”*

– Bob Palmieri, guitarist for Eastman Jazz Ensemble, 1978–79

### MOVING UPSTATE

AFTER LEAVING RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL in January 1969, the next major phase of Ray’s life began with his appointment to head Eastman’s Jazz Studies and Contemporary Media (JCM) program. In the short interim between leaving Radio City and moving to Eastman, Ray freelanced in New York City, doing recordings, musicals (*Purlie*, with Cleavon Little), commercials, and working on the music production staff at ABC-TV.

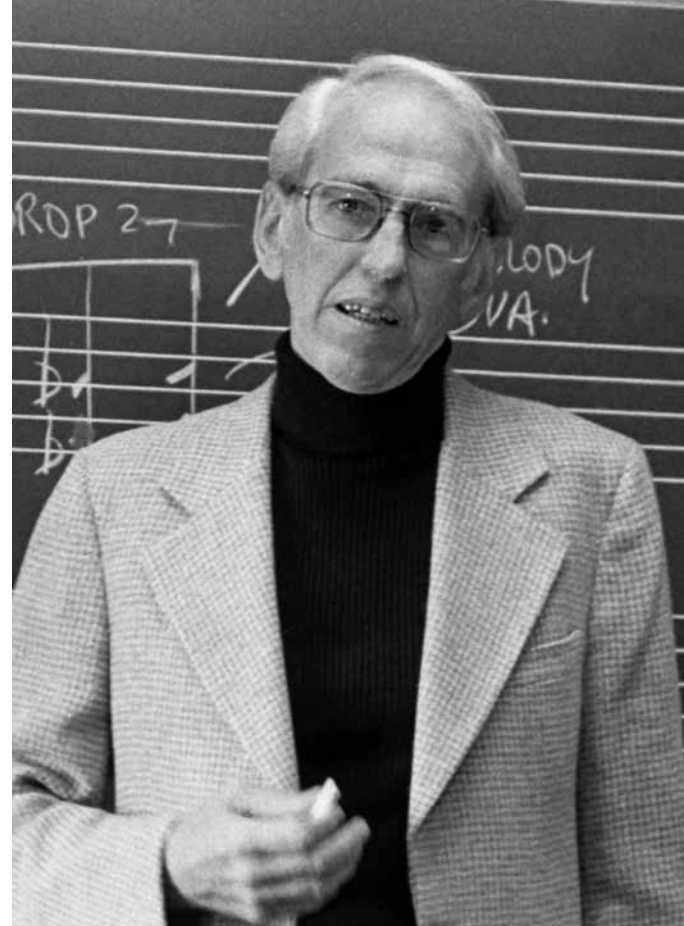
Then, in 1970, the family moved upstate to Pittsford, New York, a Rochester suburb and the town where Ray had done his ‘highly irregular’ Music Education Supervisor work. Ironically, all of Ray’s children and grandchildren later graduated from Pittsford High School, the same school where he taught in 1942. By now, his sailing interest had also grown. He sold his Daysailer and bought a 23’ Pearson Ensign that he sailed on Canandaigua Lake, frequently with JCM students as his crew.

During the next twenty years, he developed and applied his professional skills and pedagogical abilities while continuing active writing, conducting, recording and touring with his beloved Eastman Jazz Ensemble and Eastman Studio Orchestra. His new challenge was to develop year-round educational programs in jazz studies, as there were few existing examples at that time. His constant open and supportive interchange and relationship with students on all levels of development quickly made him one of the most popular and respected teachers in the school.

His contributions became widely recognized, but especially at Eastman and the University. Toward the end of his life, he participated in an interview that was published on May 9, 1989 by the *University Currents* (an in-house University of Rochester publication). His answers to the sometimes-pointed questions were most revealing in the depth of his thinking and the love and concern he had for his students:

UC: You were at the top of the music profession.  
Why did you leave it to become a teacher?

RW: I’ve been fascinated with teaching from an early age, and I started out expecting to be



*“Two aspects of Ray’s manner in the classroom are noteworthy: his ability to draw students to answer their own questions and solve their own problems, and his ability to inspire through example ... Two years under his tutelage are more like an intense workshop or laboratory than two years taking classes to satisfy curriculum requirements.”*

– Steve Bramson, 1986, in support of Ray’s nomination for the Carnegie Foundation Professor of the Year award

*A postcard of Eastman Theatre with Ray’s name on the marquee.*



*“With Ray, we did not study arranging, we arranged. We did not study conducting, we conducted. We did not learn to teach, we taught clinics. We did not learn to play, we played. As Ray’s teaching assistant one year, I assembled a band for reading every Friday morning at 9 a.m. Difficult to collect players? Not at all. We always had an eager group of players. We all knew how good it was to be there. Near Ray Wright.”*

– Manny Mendelson, 1986, in support of Ray’s nomination for the Carnegie Foundation Professor of the Year award

*Below: Sal Scarpa, Ray, Scott Healy, Steve Bramson, Joel McNeely and Bevan Manson in class.*

*Bottom: Joel McNeely, Charlie Pillow, Ray and Fred Sturm on graduation day.*



a teacher. I was a music education major at the Eastman School, and I got a master’s degree in education from Columbia University. But I had a personal requirement that I should do professionally the thing I meant to teach. I followed that thought, and one thing led to another; by the time I had become a full-time professional arranger and performer, I had forgotten my goal of becoming a full-time teacher. But I did give some private lessons, and I started doing summer-session teaching at Eastman that culminated in the Arrangers’ Holiday, the annual concert in which the students write the music. I started doing that in 1959 and loved it; in fact, I took my only vacation time to do it.

Also, times were changing for the worse at Radio City Music Hall. At one time, it had been a shrine of presentation: it offered a splendiferous, gee-whiz kind of entertainment for out-of-towners and New Yorkers alike. But, TV began to steal music talent. So when Eastman offered me a job, I viewed it as a very attractive possibility — an open invitation to do anything I wanted musically with young people of enormous enthusiasm and talent.

UC: What part of teaching do you find especially rewarding?

RW: I like seeing human potential unleashed. I like seeing students learn how to do things in music, test their achievements, and learn to work together in an ensemble. And I like seeing them grow to do things they didn’t think they could do.

UC: What classroom techniques have worked well for you?

RW: I’ve always been fascinated by how we learn; learning is not only the acquisition of facts but also of skills, such as writing and conducting. To learn, students must be in the position of wanting to know. I devise ways to arouse their curiosity or tempt them. For example, I’ll play a record or tape to help them think about their own musical preferences and stimulate their creativity.

In a sense, I throw students into the water and expect them to swim. For example, in a class on arranging, they arrange, they don’t just hear rules about arranging; once they try and encounter difficulties, they are ready and eager to learn from their teacher.

Of course, there’s a price to be paid for this style of teaching. If you just come into the classroom and lecture to students, you know just how long it will take, and you can keep the questions in your court. But, if you use the Socratic method of open-ended questions, you can lead yourself into situations you may not have dealt with before.

UC: Composing music is a creative process. Is it possible to teach creativity?

RW: Some students are inclined to believe a common myth about creativity: that all of a sudden, music just pours out of your pen. But the prerequisites of creativity are stimulation and knowledge, a priming of the pump, if you will. I want students to listen, to come to rehearsals, to absorb the sensation of music, and to internalize some models so they will be thinking about real music. I tell them to listen first to a piece of music as a member of an audience would — asking themselves, do I like it or not? Then I ask them to listen to it as a composer would — paying attention to how it was put together, so that if they like it, they can work on achieving a similar effect in their own work.

UC: Do you have a favorite memory of a student?

RW: I have favorite memories of lots of them. I can’t tell you the number of times my fondest dream has come true: that students have learned not only what I’ve taught them but also how to learn — by analyzing the continually evolving musical models in the world and by extending their craft by imaginative efforts. The most wonderful thing is to see students going beyond what I can take credit for — to see them turn their amateur efforts into professional work in terms of technical skill, consistency, and expressiveness.

## THE EASTMAN STUDIO ORCHESTRA

While Ray's career in New York City between 1950 and 1970 had focused primarily on the Radio City Music Hall Orchestra plus the exceptional writing and recording he did outside that job's responsibilities, his primary emphasis at Eastman shifted completely to developing the Jazz Studies and Contemporary Media program. One of his first undertakings was the creation of the Studio Orchestra ensemble program. This approach may be considered a direct outgrowth of his many years of varied experience at RCMH, but it also grew from his New York recording, television writing and conducting activities.

Ray articulated the nature and goals of the Studio Orchestra and JCM program in the program notes of the Studio Orchestra concert performed on December 2, 1971 for the New York State School Music Association's annual conference:

### *The Eastman Studio Orchestra*

The Studio Orchestra is a full contemporary orchestra which consists of the Jazz Ensemble with its brass, winds, and percussion, along with a complement of strings and harps to complete the vast possibilities of its orchestral sounds. It is an elective group with membership determined through audition. Its repertoire is uniquely of today and today's sounds and, for the most part, is provided by advanced students from Mr. Wright's arranging classes.

### *The Department of Jazz Studies and Contemporary Media*

The Department of Jazz Studies and Contemporary Media was created in the Fall of 1970 to bring into the regular Eastman School curriculum the arranging courses developed by Rayburn Wright for the summer session Arrangers' Workshops. Eastman students can now study, in addition to the best available training in concert and symphony music, a series of courses in arranging and film writing, jazz improvisation, stage band direction and jazz ensemble performance. Over 100 students currently participate in some part of this program.

The Eastman Studio Orchestra is, to this day, unique throughout the country, due to the widespread educational approach Ray developed to create a repertoire for the medium and especially to create opportunities for the student writers to hear their music. Just as the Arrangers' Holiday always featured student works during the first half of the concert (and frequently throughout the rest of the program as well), the Studio Orchestra — as well as the jazz ensembles — was a creative outlet for his students.

This attribution appeared frequently on Studio Orchestra programs:

\* First performances of new Eastman student compositions. All other works are new student arrangements of existing compositions.

Above all, the decade-plus years of the Arrangers' Workshop and Laboratory-Institute led him to declare that the Eastman Studio Orchestra is "the student equivalent of the Arrangers' Holiday Orchestra". In his 19 years of performances between 1970 and 1989 at Eastman, Ray only scheduled his own arrangements or compositions nine times.

When one examines the writing that he and his earlier private student arrangers in New York (Fred Karlin and Dick Lieb) produced for the album *Gold on Silk*, plus the writing they did for the two Mercury recordings recorded by Frederick Fennell featuring music of George Gershwin and Cole Porter (1960 and 1961), one sees the genesis of the instrumentation and recording processes Ray utilized for Eastman's Studio Orchestra and its associated recording-education program. Ray developed the Eastman Jazz Ensemble



*The Studio Orchestra performing at Brockport State University, 1971.*

*"Ray was the consummate musician; equally at home in front of a jazz ensemble or a symphony orchestra, he sought to erase the barriers so often established between jazz and classical music by fostering a well-rounded musical development. He encouraged his writing students to go beyond the big band medium by introducing them to the world of possibilities within an orchestra; the Eastman Studio Orchestra provided a unique opportunity to write for a magnificent array of instruments that often only a handful of composers have at their disposal."*

*— Rob Hudson, in support of Ray's nomination for the IAJE Hall of Fame and Humanitarian awards, 1990*

*Ray wrote 'Sackbut City' for this serious trombone section: Mark Lusk, Phil Talga, Sal Scarpa and Kim Scharnberg, Halloween concert at Alfred University, 1980.*





Chuck Mangione, Ray and Donald Shetler instruct their pilot and stewardesses in baton technique on the tour to Atlanta, March 1972.

*“Ray, more than any other individual, is responsible for the fact that there is a contemporary jazz program at the Eastman School of Music.”*

– Chuck Mangione, Rochester Democrat & Chronicle, March 23, 1990

and the New Jazz Ensemble (EJE and NJE) into top-notch performing groups based in part on the historical big bands of the '40s and '50s, while the Studio Orchestra (SO) was more a reflection of the New York studio recording scene of the '50s and '60s.

Performers in the Studio Orchestra were drawn from the string components of the Eastman Philharmonia and Eastman School Symphony Orchestra plus the jazz-savvy players of the EJE and the NJE. One concert was scheduled each academic year, usually when the string section of one of the orchestras could be easily divided for Studio Orchestra and other Eastman School concert requirements. The string instrumentation, as demonstrated by Ray's assignments for a 1972 Atlanta trip, included eight first violins, seven second violins, six violas, five cellos and three string basses. The sound was enhanced and reinforced, utilizing the vast possibilities of the Eastman Recording Department, offering students hands-on experience in amplified enhancement, recording techniques, microphone placement and post-performance editing.

The SO program debuted in 1970 with a concert on November 20 and was introduced to members of the New York State School Music Association in December of the following year in a concert at their annual conference presented in the Eastman Theatre. This program was repeated at nearby Brockport State University, which led to the spring semester's tour of SO and EJE to perform at the National Music Educators Association Conference on March 10, 1972 in Atlanta. Traveling by plane and bus, the ensembles also performed a concert in Cincinnati.

A joint tour in April 1975, featuring the Eastman Jazz Ensemble and the Eastman Musica Nova, directed by Sydney Hodkinson, led to the Notre Dame Collegiate Jazz Festival. This presentation of contemporary classical music and jazz was groundbreaking; the EJE's performance at Notre Dame was described on the liner notes of the Jazz Ensemble's first recording, *The Eastman Jazz Ensemble LIVE*:

The inevitable recognition of the jazz work at Eastman came on April 25, 1975 at the Notre Dame Collegiate Jazz Festival. Nineteen college jazz bands performed. After Ray Wright led the Eastman Jazz Ensemble through the first number, four thousand jazz enthusiasts let out a spontaneous roar that was echoed in the judges' awards: outstanding big band performance, outstanding composition for big band, best flute performance, best trumpet performance, outstanding soloist of the festival, outstanding small group (Auricle), and best composition for small group. When the band returned to Notre Dame in 1976, it was to give a special non-competition 'command performance'.

Ray had to fit the activities of each of the jazz ensembles and the studio orchestra into the scheduling of the Conducting and Ensembles Department (of which he was Co-Chair, along with the author), a tricky situation as the woodwind, brass and percussion performers of the EJE and NJE were assigned to the standard school ensembles as well. The beginning of the undergraduate jazz performance major changed this situation.

It was evident from the beginning that Ray, while being a staunch individualist leader

of his own causes, was also an ardent team player. An example of this occurred in 1974, when at a meeting of the Conducting & Ensembles Department, we heard of a unique concert format that Gustav Meier, Eastman orchestral conductor, had witnessed at a conference in Europe. Ray immediately took the lead in developing the Prism Concert concept, which resulted in the Department producing many years of programs performed geographically throughout the Eastman Theatre and featuring every type of performance — large ensembles, chamber, solo performance, symphonic or jazz — performing in an hour-long, continuous stream of music.



Left: The Studio Orchestra performing in Atlanta, 1972.

## MASTER OF MUSIC PROGRAMS IN JAZZ STUDIES & CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

Master of Music in Jazz Studies programs existed in a few schools around the country at the time Ray began the program in September 1975, but one key element (out of many) that distinguished his approach from others was found in the Contemporary Media facet of the JCM program — training and developing writers and performers in the production side of the business. The well-regarded text on film scoring techniques, *On the Track*, which Ray wrote with Fred Karlin, was one step in this extensive educational program.

Ray organized Eastman's new Master of Music programs in Jazz Studies and Contemporary Media to include four separate courses of study:

- Master of Music with a major in Jazz Studies and Contemporary Media, emphasis in performance
- Master of Music with a major in Jazz Studies and Contemporary Media, emphasis in writing skills
- Master of Music in Jazz Studies and Contemporary Media with a minor in Music Education, emphasis in performance
- Master of Music in Jazz Studies and Contemporary Media with a minor in Music Education, emphasis in writing skills

The requirements for the Master of Music with a major in Jazz Studies and Contemporary Media, emphasis in performance, illustrates the breadth of the department's activity:

- Presumed student goals include: professional performance in studio music, jazz, all styles including non-jazz; college jazz ensemble direction, applied teaching.
  - Requirements for degree completion:
    - Courses listed here or equivalent: Applied Music (major); Improvisation, Styles and Literature; Performance Practices, Recital Repertoire (to be taken in recital year); Advanced History and Analysis of Jazz Styles; New Concepts in Jazz Theory; Rehearsal Techniques (contemporary music emphasis); Pedagogy of Improvisation; Advanced Jazz Ensemble Direction; The Business of Music; Ensemble (Jazz Ensemble, Studio Orchestra, Musica Nova); Advanced Arranging or Composition for Non-Majors
    - Recital including performance of written or improvised music including: modal jazz, rock, rock/latin, or Afro/latin; blues; extended song forms; avant-garde jazz and non-jazz; historical jazz (including three from this list: ragtime, dixieland, swing, West Coast, bebop, hard bop); and complex meter jazz.
- Reed majors must achieve grade 5 proficiency on clarinet and flute.

The course of study for JCM with Writing Skills emphasis mirrored the above with special attention paid to the development of writing skills, including Arranging/Composition electives and Advanced Projects in Arranging/Composition. In addition, five hours of additional electives were offered, including Advanced Arranging, Film Scoring, Advanced Choral Arranging, Electronic Music, Arranging and Composing for the Theater, Contemporary Techniques in Jazz Composition, and Twentieth Century Composition Practices. The two programs with a minor in Music Education required three Music Education courses with the remainder drawn from the Performance and Writing Skills courses listed above.

In all, a total of 21 JCM courses were offered in that first year, 1974–75, taught by Ray, Bill Dobbins and Ray Ricker, in addition to the Choral Arranging course taught by Robert Decormier and Rehearsal Techniques, taught by members of the Conducting and Ensembles Department.

Later, the JCM Department developed undergraduate degree programs in jazz studies that brought in younger, experienced jazz performers who added their own skills to the already high level of current jazz practices.

After Ray's death in 1990, a search was undertaken to find his successor. In 1991, Fred Sturm, a JCM-MM graduate (and student of Ray's), was hired to continue Ray's works, a task that he continued for the next eleven years.

*"Ray had a strong sense of self and always knew who he was. Because his self-esteem was high, he was able to be selfless in the most positive sense of the word. His ego never intruded in either his personal or his professional life, and he was not threatened by the talents of others. When he taught, he gave himself completely to sharing his knowledge and insight. He didn't worry about students learning everything he knew and competing with him professionally, because life wasn't an individual competition for Ray — it was a team sport."*

– Fred Karlin, 1990



Ray's faculty colleagues Bill Dobbins and Ray Ricker, June 3, 1976.



Ray rehearsing the Jazz Ensemble, September 1976.



*Jazz Trumpet All-Stars: Vinnie DiMartino, Al Vizzutti and Jeff Tyzik (Lew Soloff also appeared but is not pictured), April 1982.*





*Guest soloists for the Eastman degree programs, from top: Toots Thielemans; Mike Moore and Gene Bertoncini; Joe Farrell and Ray; Wynton Marsalis in Room 120, re-dedicated in October 2012 as 'The Ray Wright Room'.*

## GUEST SOLOISTS AND CLINICIANS

Beginning with the formation of the Eastman Studio Orchestra in 1970–71, and his new leadership of the Jazz Ensemble in 1972–73, Ray continued his highly successful practice of bringing famed guest artists to perform with the School's ensembles and to work with his students. Highlights from the list of these outstanding musicians include:

- Oliver Nelson, March 1972 (Studio Orchestra at MENC Conference, Atlanta)
- Toots Thielemans, April 1973 (Studio Orchestra)
- Bill Dobbins, November 1974 (Studio Orchestra)
- Joe Farrell, January and February 1975
- Keith Jarrett, March 1976
- Bill Evans, April 1977
- Allen Vizzutti, February 1978 (Studio Orchestra)
- Bob Brookmeyer, March 1979
- Barry Kiner, March 1980
- Clark Terry, April 1980
- Woody Herman, October 1980
- Al Cohn and Manny Albam, March 1981
- Allen Vizzutti, Jeff Tyzik, Lew Soloff, Vincent DiMartino, April 1982
- Barry Harris, April 1982
- Marvin Stamm, March 1983
- Jim Pugh, January 1984 (NAJE Convention, Columbus, Ohio)
- Clark Terry, Bill Dobbins, January 1984 (Studio Orchestra at NAJE Convention, Columbus, Ohio)
- Wynton Marsalis, March 1984
- Gene Bertoncini, March 1984 (Studio Orchestra)
- Jim Pugh, November 1984 (Chamber Jazz)
- Sir Roland Hanna, Barbara Butler, Charles Geyer, February 1985 (Studio Orchestra)
- Ed Thigpen, March 1985
- Clare Fischer, February 1986
- Urbie Green, March 1986
- Bob Brookmeyer, February 1987
- Dave Liebman and Richie Beirach, March 1987 (Studio Orchestra)
- Bill Holman, February 1988
- Michael Brecker, March 1988 (Jazz Ensemble and Studio Orchestra)
- Kenny Wheeler, February 1989
- Clark Terry, 1989





## EASTMAN JAZZ TOURS AND ROAD TRIPS

Ray and the JCM faculty took the bands on road trips whenever possible. Some of these trips include:

- 1972 Studio Orchestra and Eastman Jazz Ensemble — National Music Educators Conference, Atlanta, with en route concert in Cincinnati, OH.
- 1973 Eastman Jazz Ensemble — Glassboro Jazz Festival, State College, Glassboro, NJ.
- 1973 Studio Orchestra and Jazz Ensemble — Williamsville, NY.
- 1975 Eastman Jazz Ensemble, Bill Dobbins, soloist — Notre Dame Collegiate Jazz Festival with en route concerts at Case-Western Reserve University, Oberlin College, North Shore Country Day School in Winnetka, IL, the University of Illinois, and Indiana University.
- 1976 Eastman Jazz Ensemble, Lew Soloff, soloist — Notre Dame Collegiate Jazz Festival.
- 1978 Eastman Jazz Ensemble, Ray Ricker and Bill Dobbins, soloists, and Eastman Musica Nova, Sydney Hodkinson, conductor — Alice Tully Hall, Lincoln Center, NY.
- 1980 Eastman Jazz Ensemble, Clare Fischer, soloist — NAJE Convention, Denver, CO.
- 1980 Eastman Jazz Ensemble — Alfred University, Alfred, NY.
- 1982 Eastman Jazz Ensemble — Montreux Jazz Festival and post-festival tour of West Germany.
- 1982 Saxology — World Saxophone Congress, Nuremberg, Germany.
- 1983 Eastman Jazz Ensemble — Notre Dame Collegiate Jazz Festival.
- 1984 Eastman Studio Orchestra and Eastman Jazz Ensemble — National Association of Jazz Educators (NAJE), Columbus, OH.
- 1986 Eastman Jazz Ensemble — Lancaster Opera House, Lancaster, NY.
- 1987 Eastman Jazz Ensemble, Terence Blanchard, soloist — Cuyahoga Tri-state Jazz Festival, OH.
- 1988 Eastman Jazz Ensemble featured on PBS broadcast, March 19.

## JAZZ AWARDS

Judged “a superior band, great ensemble sound ... inventive soloists, taste galore, professional all the way”, the Eastman Jazz Ensemble won *Downbeat* magazine awards for performance each year from 1980 through 1986. Individual awards were won by solo performers as well as by Saxology, Ray Ricker, Director. For example, in 1981, the EJE was awarded the Collegiate Big Band Award and Saxology won the Best Collegiate Jazz Group Award. Five additional awards were presented to individual students including 1st and 2nd Place in Jazz Composition, Arranging and Outstanding Performance in Jazz and Blues. That same year, Saxology was the special winner of the Quinnipiac Jazz Festival. The EJE was invited to appear at the Montreux Jazz Festival and Saxology was invited to perform at the World Saxophone Congress in Nuremberg, Germany.

*“I’ve never known an individual that exhibited such excellence, perfection, strength, organization and artistry, with such calmness, deftness, lightness, even warmth, humor and kindness, as Ray. He shows us all that excellence and balance can coexist.”*

– Maria Schneider, 2012

*“I think my students progress so fast because they are ‘self teachers’.”*

– Ray Wright

Top left: Woody Herman.

Top right: Ray and Michael Brecker.

Below: Dave Slonaker, Ray and Wendell Harrison displaying Downbeat awards.





Top photo: Ros Ritchie, Ray and Don Neuen in the recording booth, 1987.  
Above: Don Hunsberger, Wynton Marsalis and Ray during the recording of *Carnaval* with Wynton and the Eastman Wind Ensemble, 1984.

## EASTMAN JAZZ RECORDINGS

In addition to the many tours and guest artists who performed with the Jazz Ensemble and Studio Orchestra, Ray and the Jazz Ensemble also released a number of recordings:

- 1976 *Music for the Dance* — John LaMontaine, composer and piano soloist, with the Eastman Jazz Ensemble (Fredonia Discs FD 3); Ray Wright, Director.
- 1980 *Holiday!* — Eastman Jazz Ensemble (Mark Records MJS 57582); Ray Wright, Director and A&R production.
- 1982 *Montreux* — Eastman Jazz Ensemble, Allen Vizzutti, soloist (Mark Records MJS 57605); Ray Wright, Director and A&R production.
- 1983 *The Tin Flute* (Film score) — Eastman Jazz Ensemble, Cine St. Henri, Montreal, Canada; Ray Wright, Director and A&R production.
- 1985 *Hot House* — Eastman Jazz Ensemble (Mark Records MJS 57615); Ray Wright, Director and A&R production.
- 1988 *Susanna McCorkle with Friends* — Eastman Jazz Ensemble (WMHT-TV), Proctor's Theatre, Schenectady, NY; Ray Wright, arrangements and Director.
- 1988 *Spiral Galaxy* — Eastman Jazz Ensemble (Mark Records MJS 57631); Ray Wright, Director and A&R production.

The final program found in Ray's personal three-ring notebook of ESM/JCM programs is the Studio Orchestra program of March 10, 1989. This notebook contains programs from the initial Arrangers' Holiday show on August 2, 1962 featuring Olatunji and his African drumming/dancing troupe, through the March 10, 1989 program. It is interesting to note that on the Studio Orchestra's initial program, although he performed his own *Autumn Allegories*, the bulk of the program consisted of performances of his students' compositions and arrangements, a programming style to which he remained steadfast to his final concert.

Below: Keith Jarrett, Bill Dobbins and Ray, with Bill rehearsing the band, 1976.



## Chapter 5: A Busy Life (1970–1990)

*“He has left his mark on hundreds of fortunate students and, happily, many of us are in turn trying to pass his knowledge on to our students ... His influence on jazz education will be felt for many years to come.”*

– Ellen Rowe, in support of Ray’s induction into the IAJE Hall of Fame, 1990.

DURING THE TIME THAT RAY developed the JCM program, he was also busy with professional activities in education, composition, recording, conducting and writing. In these years, and soon after his death in 1990, he also received a number of prestigious awards. The breadth of his achievements, as indicated in the lists below, is very impressive.

### ORIGINAL COMPOSITIONS, ARRANGEMENTS AND TEXTS

- 1970 *Autumn Allegory*, performed at the premiere concert of the Eastman Studio Orchestra, November 20, 1970.
- 1971 *Ursa Major*.
- 1972 *Regeneration*, performed at the RPO concert ‘Two Generations of Brubeck’.
- 1973 *The Mancini Generation*, arranged for marching band for Larry Shayne Music.
- 1974 *Undercurrents*, for tuba choir, flute and two percussionists, published by Seesaw Music Corp., 1980.
- 1974 ‘A Child is Born’ (Thad Jones), arranged for winds, strings and rhythm, published by D’Accord Music Inc.
- 1978 *Japanese Folk Song Fantasy*, performed on the Eastman Wind Ensemble Tour of Japan (Kambara Agency) and South East Asia (U.S. State Department).
- 1978 *Verberations*, for solo wind instrument and symphonic wind ensemble, performed on the Eastman Wind Ensemble Tour of Japan and South East Asia. Ray served as Associate Conductor on the tour and conducted his own works.
- 1978 *Seasons and Cycles*, for symphony orchestra and multiple instrumental and vocal ensembles, performed by the RPO and Pittsford school ensembles.
- 1982 *Inside the Score*, text printed by Kendor Music Publishers.
- 1982 Arrangements for flute and orchestra, Bonnie Boyd, flute (see listing under Recordings).
- 1984 *Gershwin Variations*, for brass quintet and orchestra, performed by Eastman Brass and RPO.



Ray in his office at Eastman, 1981.

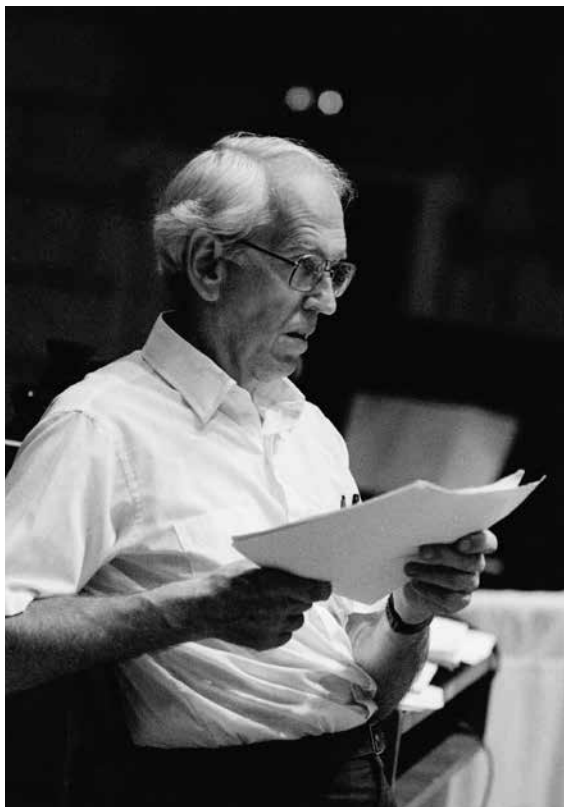
*“I know what God looks like.”*

– Ray’s four-year-old granddaughter Ashley (born five years after Ray’s death), pointing at this photo of Ray

*“When arranging something, always say something new. Never re-hash what someone else has done or what the composer has already said. If you can’t say something new, don’t do it!”*

– Ray Wright, as retold by Phil Snedecor, 2012





*"Ray's way was the 'real world' way, with the highest professional standards. He never dumbed it down for his students as players, writers, and teachers — an immeasurable gift to all of his protégés."*

– Fred Sturm, 2012

- 1988 *Reaching for the Moon*, a 'new musical' by George Gershwin, Ray Wright, arranger and conductor. This Eastman Opera Theater project focused on the creation of a musical score based on original George Gershwin material. Richard Pearlman (Opera Theater Director) and Ray created the new score and stage action with John Mueller, University of Rochester professor and specialist in dance history of the 1930s and '40s.
- 1989 *On the Track, A Guide to Contemporary Film Scoring* (with Fred Karlin), text printed by Schirmer/MacMillan Books.
- 1989 *Red, White and Brass*, performed and recorded by Canadian Brass (Philips Records), Ray wrote arrangements of 'Salute to John Philip Sousa', 'Shaker Suite', 'Voluntary on Old Hundredth', 'Westward Ho', and 'Alexander's Ragtime Band'.

#### ROCHESTER PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA (RPO) CONCERTS

Ray was unique in his deep understanding of both the jazz and classical repertoires. He was well respected in both fields for his writing and conducting abilities, and contributed regularly to Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra performances, including:

- 1971 *Both Sides Now — The Free Design*, Gerry Niewood, Ray Wright original 'Patterns of Change'; Ray Wright, conductor and production (February 28).
- 1973 *Fifty Years of the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra (RPO)* — a replication of Eastman Theatre programs of the 1920s, including short news film presentations, opera scenes, ballet, stage acts and the 1924 hit feature film *Peter Pan* starring Betty Bronson (January 13).
- 1975 *Regeneration: Two Generations of Brubeck — The Dave Brubeck Quartet*, Gerry Mulligan, New Heavenly Blue, Ray Wright originals *Regeneration* and *Two Contemporary Sketches*; Ray Wright, conductor and production (June 2).
- 1978 *Seasons and Cycles*, commissioned by the Pittsford School District and the RPO — Ray Wright original work featuring the school's instrumental and vocal ensembles, jazz soloists and the RPO (April 5).
- 1985 *RPO Pops — Susanna McCorkle, Bill Dobbins, Ray Ricker, Jim Hynes, Dave Mancini* (Rochester Convention Center, November 29 and 30).
- 1987 *Red, White and Brass — Canadian Brass*, numerous Ray Wright arrangements; Ray Wright, conductor and production.
- 1987 *RPO with The Eastman Brass — guests Gene Bertoncini and Michael Moore*, Ray's arrangement *Gershwin Variations*; Ray Wright, conductor and production.
- 1987 *RPO Citibank Pops Festival — featuring Bill Dobbins, Saxophone Summit, Ray Ricker, Dave Mancini, Vincent DiMartino, Teri Koide, Let's Dance*; Ray Wright, conductor and production (August 9).

In addition to writing the *Gershwin Variations* for the Eastman Brass (premiered in the quintet version in Kilbourn Hall on November 11, 1983), Ray also wrote several works that were recorded by the Canadian Brass and performed with the RPO:

- 1989 *RPO — Canadian Brass, Peter Bay, conductor, Eastman Theatre*; Ray Wright, world premiere of *Salute to John Philip Sousa* (March 3 and 4).
- 1989 *RPO — Canadian Brass, Robert Bernhardt, conductor, Canandaigua CMAC*; Ray Wright, *Shaker Suite* world premiere, *Salute to John Philip Sousa* (August 13).

*Below left: Ray conducting the Arrangers' Holiday Orchestra, 1969. Below right: Don Neuen, Ray and Jan DeGaetani during the recording of Lullabies and Night Songs, 1985.*



## RECORDING PROJECTS

With his experience in the New York recording industry, it was natural for Ray to assume a major role in recording projects at Eastman. Reading sessions for JCM writers and tape-editing of Jazz Ensemble and Studio Orchestra performances became the basis of the recording facet of the Contemporary Media program. Ray worked closely with music recording engineer Ros Ritchie in the Eastman facilities, which had been greatly enhanced with a grant from the Kreske Foundation.

Ray was involved in many recording projects with Eastman performers and ensembles. His work ranged from conducting, production (A&R) and editing to overseeing the recording process. Some of his recording projects included:

- 1970 *The Eastman Trombone Choir* — Emory Remington (Mark Records MEZS 50500); Ray Wright and Don Hunsberger, A&R production.
- 1976 *Homespun America* — Eastman Wind Ensemble, Don Hunsberger, conductor (VoxBox 5088, CD reissue, 1993); Ray Wright, A&R production.
- 1976 *I Loves You Porgy* (Gershwin) — Dusquesne University Studio Orchestra, John Wilson, conductor ('Kendor Studio Orchestra Stylings' Eva-Tone 33 $\frac{1}{3}$  rpm soundsheet); Ray Wright, arrangement for strings, winds and rhythm.
- 1978 *Hanson, Copland, Schwantner* — Eastman Wind Ensemble, Don Hunsberger, conductor (Mercury Records SRI 57132); Ray Wright, A&R production.
- 1978 *Japanese Folk Song Fantasy* (Wright) — Eastman Wind Ensemble on the Japan Tour (Toshiba Records TA 72043, Tokyo, Japan); Ray Wright, conductor.
- 1980 *Benson, Brant, Hanson* — Eastman Wind Ensemble, Don Hunsberger, conductor (Centaur CRC 2014); Ray Wright, A&R production with Warren Benson.
- 1982 *Sousa Spectacular* — Eastman Wind Ensemble, Don Hunsberger, conductor (Tioch Records TD 1007); Ray Wright, A&R production with John Santuccio.
- 1982 Bonnie Boyd, Flute with Orchestra — arranged and conducted by Ray Wright. The arrangements were recorded, but never released.
- 1982 *Inside the Score, 8 Jazz Classics* — recorded by the University of Minnesota Jazz Ensemble to accompany Ray Wright book text (Mark Records MJS 57598).
- 1983 *Lincoln Portrait* (Copland) — Eastman Philharmonia, William Warfield, narrator, David Effron, conductor (Mercury Records 289-411 031-1); Ray Wright, A&R production, for which he was awarded a NARAS Grammy Award.
- 1983 *Messiah* (Handel) — Eastman Rochester Chorus and Eastman Philharmonia, Donald Neuen, conductor (Word Records, Medallion Series SPCN 7-01-892950-4); Ray Wright, A&R production.
- 1984 *Souvenir* (Herbert) — Eastman Dryden Orchestra, Don Hunsberger, conductor (Arabesque Z6529); Ray Wright, A&R production with Ward Botsford.
- 1985 *Lullabies and Night Songs* (Alec Wilder) — Jan DeGaetani, mezzo-soprano (Caedmon Records TC 1777); Ray Wright, arranger and conductor.
- 1985 *When I Grow Too Old to Dream* (Romberg) — Eastman Dryden Orchestra, Don Hunsberger, conductor (Arabesque Records Z6540); Ray Wright, A&R production with Ward Botsford.
- 1985 *L'Encore* (Herbert) — Eastman Dryden Orchestra, Don Hunsberger, conductor (Arabesque Z6547); Ray Wright, A&R production with Ward Botsford.
- 1986 *The American Girl* (Herbert) — Eastman Dryden Orchestra, Don Hunsberger, conductor (Arabesque Z6561); Ray Wright, A&R production with Ward Botsford.
- 1986 *Chansonette* (Friml) — Eastman Dryden Orchestra, Don Hunsberger, conductor (Arabesque Z6562); Ray Wright, A&R production with Ward Botsford.
- 1988 *Vaughan Williams, Hindemith, Copland, Husa* — Eastman Wind Ensemble, Don Hunsberger, conductor (CBS Masterworks MK-44916); Ray Wright, assistance with A&R production.
- 1989 *Red, White and Brass* — Canadian Brass (Philips 434 276-2; 1991).



*"Just a few years after I graduated, I found myself doing my first important arranging job in New York. The veteran copyist (the supervisor at a venerable old-school copying office) is looking over my scores. 'I don't understand it,' he says, 'You've got almost no experience, and yet your scores read like someone who has been in the business for years. How is that possible?' I tell him, 'I studied with Ray Wright.' 'Oh,' he says, 'that explains it.'"*

— Doug Besterman, 2012

*Below: Ray and Eastman Jazz Ensemble during the recording of The Tin Flute, 1983.*





*New York State Professor of the Year, 1986.*

*"I came to Eastman specifically to study with him and I can safely say that he is the best educator I have ever studied under. He is a master craftsman with an unending flow of creativity."*

*– Joel McNeely, in support of Ray's nomination for the Eisenhart Award for Excellence in Teaching, 1984*

## NATIONAL EDUCATION AWARDS

*University of Rochester Alumni Citation, 1967*

In June 1967, Ray was the recipient of a University of Rochester Alumni Citation which included this tribute:

Rarely may any one man hope to excel in the manifold activities known to modern professional music. Yet such is the versatility of Rayburn Wright that success in conducting, arranging, composing, teaching and planning the performance of music, all have come within his considerable range ...

*Eisenhart Award For Excellence In Teaching, 1984*

More honors were bestowed upon him, including the Eastman School's Eisenhart Award for Excellence of Teaching in 1984. Dr. Jon Engberg, Associate Director for Academic Affairs, wrote Ray to congratulate him on receiving the award:

You are a human being of extraordinary talent, integrity, and dedication, and the Eastman School is fortunate to claim you both as an alumnus and as an outstanding member of its faculty.

*CASE Professor of the Year, 1986*

Two years later, in May 1986, Ray was nominated for the Professor of the Year by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE), supported by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Awarded since 1981, five persons are selected annually for the honor, which, in addition to its prestige, carries a \$5,000 award and a grand gold medal.

Criteria used by the national selection jury included:

- a) extraordinary effort as a scholar or teacher;
- b) service to the institution and/or the profession;
- c) balance of achievement in teaching, scholarship, and service to the institution;
- d) evidence of impact and/or involvement with students;
- e) evidence of achievement by former students, and;
- f) the quality of nominations by former students.

Ray was elected 'New York State Professor of the Year' and was one of ten gold medal national finalists, out of a selected group of 324 nominees from 36 states and Canada.

As recipient of this award, Ray received letters from many officials including New York Governor Mario Cuomo, who wrote: "... congratulations on a job well done. We can all be proud of your accomplishments." New York Senator Alphonse D'Amato echoed with: "This is quite an honor, and you should be very proud of your outstanding achievement." University of Rochester President, Dennis O'Brien, wrote: "The news of your becoming Professor of the Year for New York State and remaining a contender for the national award was by far the best I have seen this week. You richly deserve the recognition, and I congratulate you on an honor so large that it shines on the Eastman School of Music and the entire University."

## GRAMMY AWARD

In 1984, Ray won a National Association of Recording Arts Science (NARAS) Grammy Award for his work as Producer for the Eastman Philharmonia's recording of Aaron Copland's composition *Lincoln Portrait*, with William Warfield as narrator and released on Mercury Records.

*Ray Wright and the Jazz Ensemble at the annual Jazz Service at the First Unitarian Church in Rochester.*



*"Every concert, arrangement, or meeting with Ray Wright resulted in a change in how you might think about something. He was always helping each person reach their own personal best."*

*– Vinnie DiMartino, 2012*

## RAYBURN WRIGHT AWARD

In an October 1989 tribute to Ray, Eastman Director Robert Freeman praised Ray's "willingness to focus on broader musical questions, beyond his own area of expertise". The School then established the Rayburn Wright Award:

"... to recognize Eastman faculty who make significant contributions to the intellectual, artistic and curricular welfare of the School as a whole."

Freeman further saluted Ray, stating that the award honored:

"... an artist and teacher of high excellence whose dedication and wisdom has been one of the hallmarks of this school since he joined the faculty."

In addition, a Jazz Recognition Fund was established to support jazz performances including the annual Jazz Service at the Rochester First Unitarian Church presented by Ray and fellow faculty member Warren Benson.

## IAJE HALL OF FAME AND HUMANITARIAN AWARDS

Following Ray's passing, numerous students and colleagues, all members of the International Association of Jazz Educators (IAJE), nominated him for the Association's two top honors. In December 1990, Ray was selected for admission into the 1991 IAJE Hall of Fame and was also posthumously awarded the Humanitarian Award.

Requirements for election into the Hall of Fame recognize:

"... musical contributions and dedication to jazz education over the past 25 years [that] have created new directions and curricular innovations for jazz education worldwide."

Ray's co-inductees in 1990 were Duke Ellington and Charlie Parker.

When IAJE instituted its Humanitarian Award in 1982, the qualifying criteria stated that it was:

"... to be awarded to honor members whose dedication to the teaching of jazz exceeds, in very large measure, the usual teacher/student relationship at school and whose love for teaching transcends the usual academic environment. The honor can only be presented to a person, who, over the past twenty or more years, has evidenced in his or her efforts to perpetuate jazz, the four elements of humanism: *dedication, non-prejudice, altruism and love.*"

This simultaneous awarding was the first time both honors had been won by the same person.

The IAJE was well aware of Ray's commitment to jazz education: he was a long-time member of IAJE and served on the Association Executive Council (Vice-President, 1976–80) as well as in other capacities, including composition and arranging chair and advisory council member.

*"Active in schoolwide committees, always available for consultation, a seeker of advice and information from his colleagues when he needs it, he demonstrates the best in professional education: a fine teacher, a constant student, a responsible colleague."*

– Warren Benson, Professor of Composition, Eastman School of Music, 1986



Above: Jan DeGaetani, author John Gardner and Ray, 1980.

Below left: Ray and Bill Dobbins, 1990.



*"I have learned immeasurably, not only about music, but about humanity, imagination, and creative vitality, through working with Ray, and often simply through observing him in action."*

– Bill Dobbins, 1989



*Ray working at home with feline friend Ruby My Dear.*

*“He left the world a striking legacy of superb musicians and jazz educators. Matt Harris, Fred Sturm, Rick Lawn, John Mahoney, John Fedchock, Ellen Rowe ... and so many more have gone on to influence yet another generation of jazz and its learning.”*

*– Tony Garcia, in support of Ray’s nomination for the Eisenhart Award for Excellence in Teaching, 1984*

## CODA

Ray’s untimely death on March 21, 1990 came as a result of an inoperable glioblastoma, a type of tumor that affects the brain and spine. The only advanced treatments at that time were experimental and would likely have had debilitating side effects. Ray chose to proceed with conventional medical treatments and hope for the best. He took a leave of absence from Eastman, although he continued to meet with students in his home studio.

In his final weeks, Ray wrote a choral setting of the Israel Zangwill poem, ‘The Circle of Love and Justice’ for the choir at the First Unitarian Church. He completed the work on February 27, just before he was admitted to the hospital due to his increasing inability to walk, or even stand. The Unitarian Church Choir rehearsed it on February 28 and the following week for performance on March 11, by which time Ray was back home in hospice care. He played the tape of the performance several times in his remaining days before dying in his sleep on March 21, at the age of 67.

Following the scattering of his ashes in the First Unitarian Church garden, a memorial service was performed by Richard Gilbert at the First Unitarian Church on March 24, with music by David Craighead, organ; the Eastman Trombone Ensemble; a guitar solo by David Wright; Ray’s final work ‘The Circle of Love and Justice’, sung by the First Unitarian Church Choir, Edward Schell, director; and the Eastman Chamber Jazz Ensemble, Bill Dobbins, director, closing the service with ‘Laura’ (a favorite ballad of Ray’s) and ‘Seven Steps to Heaven’.

Two Eastman concerts honoring Ray were presented on April 21. The first, a public presentation in the Eastman Theatre, featured Gene Bertoncini, Bill Dobbins and Ray Ricker, with the Eastman Jazz Ensemble, New Jazz Ensemble, Eastman Trombone Choir and the Eastman Brass. The second, entitled ‘Three Decades of Eastman Jazz: A Tribute to Rayburn Wright’, was a private evening concert in Kilbourn Hall featuring many former students and colleagues, and two alumni bands.

The following school year included an Eastman Theatre Prism Concert titled ‘In Celebration of Rayburn Wright’ on February 16, 1991, a special tribute featuring eight of the School’s top soloists and ensembles.

Fourteen years later — in recognition of Ray’s lasting contributions to the Unitarian Church, the Eastman School of Music and the Rochester community — a Lacebark Pine was planted in the lower part of the First Unitarian Church Memorial Garden.

In October 2012, Rehearsal Room 120 — the same room where Ray and his students recorded, rehearsed and attended clinics — was re-dedicated as ‘The Ray Wright Room’. This re-dedication was made possible by the generous support of JCM alumni and Eastman School of Music. ■



*Ray and Doris on Tangent.*



*“Actually, my memories of Ray gravitate towards his wonderful dry sense of humor and quick wit. I can remember rehearsing a Gershwin musical Reaching for the Moon in Kilbourn Hall. Ray was conducting the pit orchestra. At one point, in the middle of rehearsal, someone accidentally turned off all of the lights in the theater so that it was pitch black. The next thing we heard was Ray’s immediate response: ‘Thanks a lot!’ There was something about the way Ray responded that had the rhythm section bursting into laughter.*

*Another time was when the Eastman Jazz Ensemble was performing at the Cuyahoga Tri-state Jazz Festival with Terence Blanchard as guest artist. We had just rehearsed a Tom Wolfe arrangement of a Terence Blanchard tune (which was nicely done, by the way). After the run through, Terence (who was very impressed), turned to the ensemble and said, ‘Yeah ... that was bad.’ Ray then turned to the band and replied, ‘He said it was bad ... that’s good!’ It was a classic Ray moment.”*

*– Tom Nazziola, 2012*

*“‘That’s not going to sound the way you think it’s going to ...’ (without me telling him how I thought it would sound).”*

*– Ray Wright, as told by Scott Healy, 2012*

# Appendices

THERE IS MUCH MORE INFORMATION available about the details of Ray's professional career than can be included in this book. In addition, the Eastman School has solicited personal reminiscences from alumni and colleagues for the Ray Wright Tribute on October 11–13, 2012. The majority of this information will be included on a permanent website to be established following the Tribute Weekend.

Once this website has been made operational, its online address will be published by the School in the monthly e-newsletter, *EastmanMAIL*, and a special mailing will be sent to Ray Wright alumni. In the meantime, interested parties may solicit information by contacting the author at [dhuns@frontiernet.net](mailto:dhuns@frontiernet.net) or David Wright at [drw@iducreative.com](mailto:drw@iducreative.com).

The website will contain information grouped into the following categories. If feasible, audio samples (where available) may also be included.

- Alumni 'Reminiscences With Ray'
- Radio City Music Hall scores written by Ray
- Radio City Music Hall Library Cue Sheets; Ray's assignments
- Olatunji
- Fennell Conducts Gershwin and Porter
- Dave Brubeck and 'Elementals'
- Arrangers' Holiday guest artists and student writers
- ABC-TV Series *Saga of Western Man*
- Ray's personal and professional philosophies
- Ray's original compositions and arrangements
- Pittsford Schools: *Season and Cycles*
- Publications and recordings
- Eisenhower Award: Letters of support

[TRANSPOSED SCORE]

TUNING BY CHORDS

RAYMOND WRIGHT

Flutes

Horns

Alto Saxes  
1  
2

Tenor Saxes  
1  
2

Baritone Sax

Trumpets  
1  
2  
3  
4

Trombones  
1  
2  
3  
4

Tuba

Percussion  
Vibes

Guitar

Piano

Bass  
Acce

L A<sup>6/4</sup> L Fm<sup>7</sup> L Bbm<sup>7</sup> C<sup>6</sup>/G Eb<sup>13</sup> Bb<sup>11</sup> Dbm<sup>7</sup> Gbm<sup>7</sup> F<sup>6/4</sup> B<sup>11</sup>

© RAYMOND WRIGHT 1981

# Colophon

THIS BOOK IS SET IN OPTIMA, designed in 1952 by pre-eminent type designer and calligrapher Hermann Zapf. As poet and designer Robert Bringhurst describes it in *The Elements of Typographic Style*:

Optima — an unserifed and apparently uncomplicated face — is constructed entirely of subtle tapers and curves that can be adequately rendered only at the highest resolutions.

After trying and rejecting a number of faces during the design of this book, I settled on Optima precisely because the spirit of the type resonates so well with the spirit of my father: unassuming but subtle, reserved but approachable, functional but with inherent style. There are childhood associations with the font as well: I remember seeing my father's letterhead many times on his desk as I grew up (his office was always a neat place to visit, smelling of freshly sharpened pencils and filled with music paper and intriguing bits of the latest technology). In my childhood memory, it seems that the 'Rayburn Wright' on his letterhead was in the same general family as Optima.

This book was designed on Macintosh computers using Adobe InDesign; photographs were retouched using Adobe Lightroom and Photoshop. My father discovered Macs long before I did. He wrote *On The Track* on his Mac and I remember he and Fred Karlin sending diskettes back and forth (before the Internet) via FedEx. Dad was always searching for and integrating the latest technology (or music, or educational approach). Matt Harris posted a revealing reminiscence about him: "I'll never forget Ray taking notes in our arranging class on what the students were talking about!" This is absolutely true, and it's a perfect example of my father's approach to the world. As Warren Benson said, he was "a constant student". He observed the world with open eyes and open ears, and had very few preconceptions about the 'right' place to find answers.

*Ray Wright: Life and Time* was designed and edited with the life skills I learned from my father (for example, commitment to quality and attention to detail), as well as the art skills I learned from my mother. My brother Drew and I are both lucky to have had such amazing parents.

The design and editing of this book has been a tremendous amount of work, but it's the best kind of work one could ever hope for. All of Ray's family — Doris, Drew and I, his grandchildren Dustin and Ashley, and his daughters-in-law Carol and Pam — are deeply indebted to Don Hunsberger for his work on this book. Don spent hundreds of hours researching and writing it, and he was the driving force behind getting it all done. Thank you, Don, for being such a true friend!

I already knew that my father was an incredible person, but in accepting our life with him as ordinary, we overlooked the details of exactly how incredible he was. Seeing his professional achievements laid out so clearly in this book has been eye-opening for all of us. In my case, this has been a wonderful period of re-acquainting myself with my father after 22 years. If I could go back and live it all over again, I would do it in a second — not to be young again, but just to spend more time with this amazing person. What an idiot I was the first time! I should have taken better notes.



David Wright  
Creative Director, IDU Creative Services  
iducreative.com

*“Music is a sustaining inspiration to mankind universally. It’s a distortion of reality to think you can remove it.”*

– Ray Wright, in response to news that the supreme leader of another nation had banned music from the radio waves, Rochester Democrat & Chronicle, 1979

*‘Stringendo’, by Donald Mackay:  
Ray conducting the recording session of The Pilgrim’s Saga for ABC-TV, April 1965.*



MacKay



*Raytheon Wright*



**EASTMAN**  
SCHOOL OF MUSIC  
UNIVERSITY of ROCHESTER