

By Joe Maniscalco

On a summer afternoon in August, some of the most influential jazz artists of the last half century gathered for a historic group photograph in front of Minton's Playhouse — the legendary uptown nightclub on West 118th Street in Harlem.

All day long artists like Jack Jeffers and Grady Tate hobnobbed with each other and compared notes, happy to reconnect with old friends and colleagues.

For Brooklyn's own Ray Rivera being included in the shoot was proof that the kind of music he's been producing since the early 1950s is still as vibrant and vital as he is.

"I was glad to see that they had a huge crowd because it shows that there are people who still like some good music," he says.

At an age when other artists might be thinking about retiring, Ray is busy writing, performing and producing the "good music" he loves so dearly.

Whether it's at a nightclub like Adobe Blues on Staten Island or the New Utrecht Library where he'll be performing on November 18 at 1:30 p.m., Ray always brings a fresh and engaging approach to his material that instantly captivates audiences.

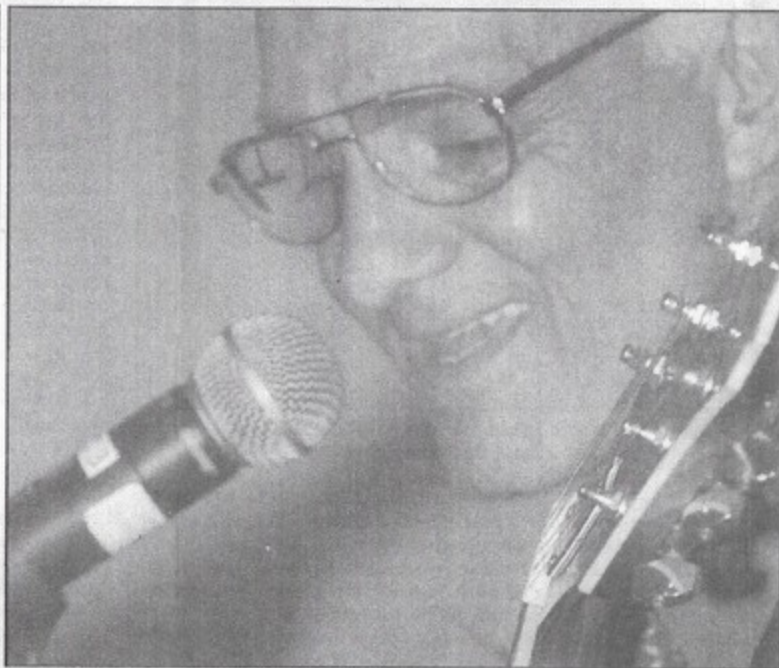
"I don't like to use a set list," the singer/songwriter and guitarist says. "I like to size up the audience and just go. I know tunes from the 1920s on up."

Just last year L.A. based Latin Jazz artist Bobby Matos performed some of Ray's songs live with a 20 piece orchestra, and the BBC used his music for a documentary on Marlon Brando.

A year earlier, Ray delivered a knock out live performance with Wynton Marsalis and his band at the House of Tribes in Alphabet City that people are still talking about.

Presently, Ray is working with Rick Russo of Meltdown Records in producing celebrated cabaret singer Bronwyn Rucker's latest CD

'Ray's Tune' falls sweetly upon the ears



Ray Rivera

scheduled for release later this fall.

Meltdown is also reissuing "The Rare Masters of Ray Rivera" — a 12 CD collection spanning Ray's entire musical career.

In addition, Ray's 1980 Grammy Award nominated "Let Me Hear Some Jazz" is also being issued on Hindsight Records.

"I get to the people with my music," Ray says. "A lot of people don't really get a chance to

hear this music unless they go to a nightclub in New York City — and then it costs you a fortune."

Abandoned to the Little Flower orphanage on Long Island as a child, Ray went on to spend a good chunk of his teen years living on the streets of Spanish Harlem before finally scraping up enough money to produce his first record called "The Record Shop Song" in the early 1950s.

In his long and varied career Ray has per-

formed with some of the greatest names in the history of jazz and shared a toast or two with the likes of Billie Holiday and Charlie Parker.

Ray's remarkable life story is chronicled in the new book now available called "Ray's Tune: Music Is My Thing."

"I hope it's an inspiration to some of these kids out there," Ray says. "Look at all of these rappers — they're killing each other."

A resident of Sheepshead Bay for over 20 years, Ray is a fixture in the neighborhood and is a familiar sight toting along his guitar and amplifier as he heads out to the next gig.

This summer he especially enjoyed jamming with a group of friends at a Knapp Street eatery where the sea food was hot, and the music even hotter.

"We call it the 'How Do You Do Club,'" Ray laughs. "I practice when I get up in the morning, in the afternoon and before I go to sleep at night."

After exploring every genre of music from folk, jazz and blues to Broadway, big band and rock n' roll, Ray says he'd still like to do a "huge concert with plenty of strings."

"I still write," he says. "That I'll never give up."

The Ray Rivera Jazz Trio featuring John Neilson on bass and Anthony Valore, Jr. on drums will be appearing at the New Utrecht Library at 1743 86th Street on November 18 at 1:30 p.m.

"The Rare Masters of Ray Rivera" is available through Meltdown Records, 328 Flatbush Avenue (Box 172), Brooklyn New York, e-mail dawnmelt@aol.com.

"Ray's Tune: Music Is My Thing" is available at Amazon.com, Barnes & Noble.com and Borders.com.