

RAY STEVENS

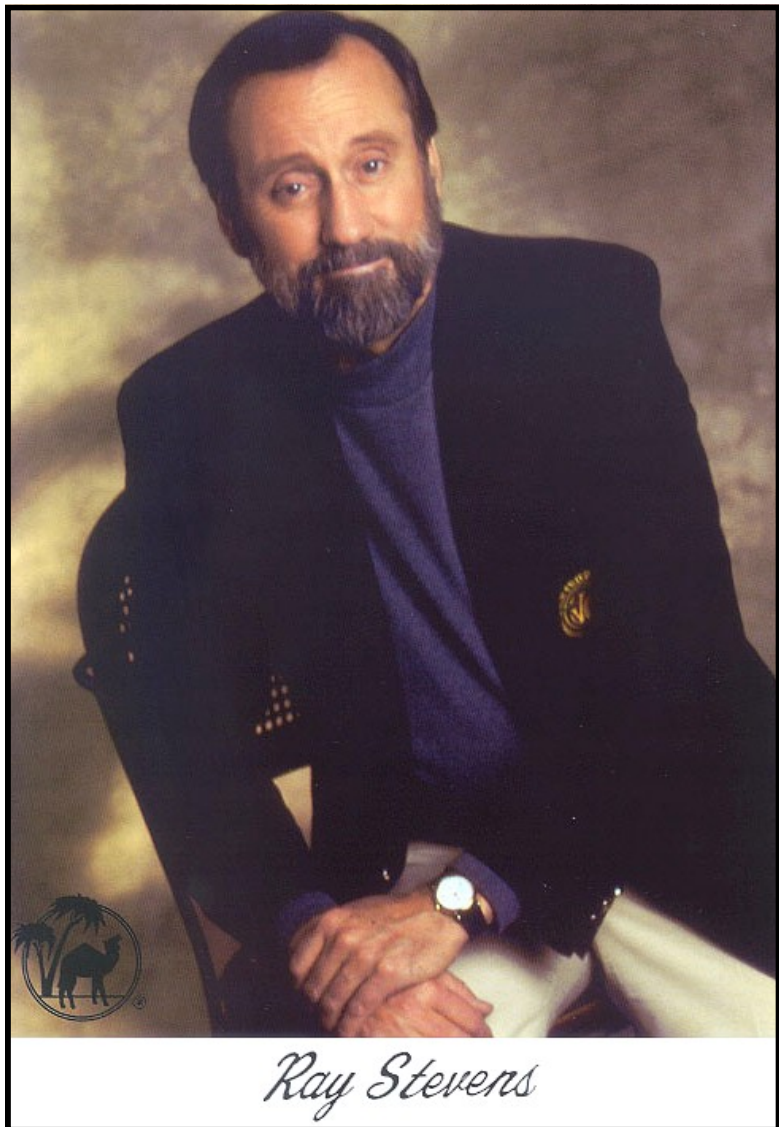
by Tamela Meredith Partridge
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No one appreciates a great laugh more than comedic musician, Ray Stevens.

"I can find humor in most everyone and everything," Stevens says. "I'm the greatest audience in the world. I'm a big fan of not only comedians, but also of musicians and other artists and what they do."

Stevens looks forward to returning to The Little Nashville Opry for two shows on Saturday, April 24th.

"The Little Nashville Opry audiences are really nice, warm, and friendly," Stevens says. "They always seem to have a big time, and that's very important."



The nine-time TNN-Music City News Comedian Of The Year has been entertaining enthusiastic sold-out crowds for more than four decades with his unique mix of serious talent and zany comedic creations.

"I enjoy what I'm doing," Stevens says. "A lot of the things that I'm saying are not meant to be very deep at all, they're just entertainment. I think that somebody who can make somebody else laugh with a song or record has done a good job."

Since Stevens debut in '57, he's best known for such comedic singles and videos as, "*Osama-Yo' Mama*," "*Ahab The Arab*," "*The Streak*," "*Gitarzan*," "*Mississippi Squirrel Revival*," "*Shriners Convention*," "*It's Me Again Margaret*," and the chart topping serious songs, "*Everything is Beautiful*" and "*Misty*."

Stevens, a Clarksdale, Georgia native, received a classical education in piano and music theory from Georgia State University.

"Sometimes I was thought of as serious in school," Stevens says. "Other times I was thought of as the class clown. But the usual academic label I was given was that of being musical."

Stevens moved to Nashville in '62 and landed a job at Mercury Records as a pianist, songwriter, and arranger.

"I never really had a master plan or thought about having an epiphany in regards to making it in the music industry," Stevens says. "I've been doing this since I was 15 years old, so I kind of slid into it. As my dad used to say, 'You've never had a real job.'"

Stevens has a natural flair for comedic music, but finds it difficult to determine the exact origin of his material.

"Some of the best ideas seem to come from out of the blue," Stevens says. "You don't know where they come from. I try to keep my eyes and ears open, because anything can trigger an idea for a song or a way to stage something. I'm just in the habit of thinking that way."

The one song creation Stevens recalls is his Top 5 Billboard country and pop single, "*The Streak*."

"I read an article in a magazine about a guy who took off his clothes and ran through a crowd," Stevens says. "They called it streaking. That whole concept was new at the time, and that connotation to the word 'streaking' or 'streak' was new to me, and I thought, 'Ahhhh.....good idea for a song.'"

Always full of creative energy, Stevens has a full schedule planned for 2004.

"I'll be doing a lot of touring for the first part of the year," Stevens says. "Then I'll be doing a June 11 through December 9 season at my theater in Branson, Mo. And I just finished my current project, "Ray Stevens Complete Comedy Video Collection," which is now available on VHS or DVD."

Stevens, an architectural enthusiast, creates his stage shows upon a solid foundation of comedic standards.

"We have a structure, a framework that we follow in the show, a skeleton, so to speak," Stevens says. "And we fresh it up each year. It's pretty easy to embellish that as you go, and to make corrections and changes, or add and take things away. But, you always try to stick to your frame, because it gives you an anchor."

With two Grammy awards to his credit, Stevens still believes he's a work in progress, and never takes his musical or comedic abilities for granted.

"I've been very lucky," Stevens says. "I've been able to make a living and make a career out of something that I really enjoy doing. And not everybody can say that. I wish they could. I think the world would be a happier place."