

Foxx delivers Oscar-worthy performance in 'Ray' biopic

By Kam Williams
Sentinel-Voice

Ray Charles Robinson was born in the tiny town of Albany, Georgia on September 23, 1930 to sharecroppers struggling to make ends meet at the height of The Great Depression. Despite developing blindness at the age of six and being orphaned while still in his teens, Ray would rise from his humble origins and overcome a host of hardships and personal failings to forge an enduring musical career which would span more than a half century. By the time that he died on June 10th of this year, he was a much-beloved national treasure, leaving behind not only a collection of classics but an inspirational rags-to-riches legacy as a man who'd achieved the American Dream

against seemingly insurmountable odds. Writer/director Taylor Hackford (An Officer and a Gentleman) recognized the cinematic potential of Ray's biography after meeting him back in 1987. As the Oscar-winner recounts, "My God, I never had any idea. I



Cosmopolitan man Jamie Foxx, a talented singer, comedian and television actor, has reached his showbiz zenith in 'Ray.'

did not realize how he went blind, how he traveled on a Greyhound bus from Northern Florida to Seattle, how he got off that bus as a blind man on his own, experienced discrimination, addiction and sorrow, and yet found his way to become an incomparable artist. I thought, 'This man's story must be told.'"

So, for over fifteen years, Hackford devoted himself to making this bio-pic a reality, working closely with the aging icon who willingly shared his very intimate feelings on subjects ranging from watching his younger brother drown to never relying on a cane or a seeing-eye dog, though sightless to his decades of heroin addiction to his flagrant womanizing to his reaction to the sting of the segregated South.

And now finally, that labor of love has arrived in theaters as Ray, a multi-generational costume drama with "Academy Award"

written all over it from start to finish.

Jamie Foxx's spellbinding transformation into the title character is nothing short of amazing. For it is a cinematic treat to observe how he meets the challenge of presenting a fresh interpretation of an already familiar cultural figure without relying on recognizable cliches.

The rest of the cast is almost as impressive, including Sharon Warren as his mother, Aretha, Kerry Washington as his wife, Della, Regina King as his fiery mistress/Raelette Margie Hendricks, Bokeem Woodbine as fellow junkie/saxophonist David Fathead Newman, Larenz Tate as Quincy Jones, and Curtis "Booger" Armstrong as Atlantic Records producer Ahmet Ertegun.

Other support roles are capably handled by such familiar faces as Aunjanue Ellis, Clifton Powell, Richard Schiff and Terence Howard.

The seamless storyline traces Ray's life from birth through the late Sixties, with a poignant post-script in the 1979, when

"Georgia on My Mind" was declared the State Song of Georgia.

This and other trademark hits have been woven so imperceptibly into the plot that the musical breaks are never noticed.

With Foxx lip-synching undetectably, the film, of course, features haunting refrains from a key selection of Ray's tunes. There's "Hit the Road, Jack," "Drown in My Own Tears," "Unchain My Heart" and "I Can't Stop Loving You," to name a few.

Because Ray Charles insisted that this picture not sanitize any of the unfortunate aspects of his life, the ensuing dedication to honesty translated on screen as a powerful, emotionally-engaging experience which will inform, entertain and uplift audiences both today and for time immemorial. Not to be missed.

Excellent (4 stars). Rated PG-13 for frank sexuality, the depiction of drug addiction, and other adult themes.

Lawsuit

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artists regrouped earlier this year, but the harmony was short lived.

Just a week ago, Kelly's publicist was denying rampant rumors that the two headlines weren't even speaking, with Jay-Z reportedly growing more frustrated with what he saw as Kelly's unprofessional behavior.

Meanwhile, despite the breakdown of their tour, the duo's new collaborative album, *The Best of Both Worlds: Unfinished Business*, released last Tuesday, is poised

to hit number one on the *Billboard* charts this week, and Jay-Z is reportedly not thrilled at the prospect.

"It makes it seem like you can act any old way and still have a number one album," Jay-Z told the *New York Times*.

The Best of Both Worlds tour was supposed to be Jay-Z's last, as the 35-year-old impresario is due to take over as president of Universal Music Group's Island Def Jam label, having previously announced that he planned to retire from his musical career.



Haitian-American rap star and Grammy Award-winner Wyclef Jean, formerly of The Fugees, rides a bicycle in the yard of the World Food Program warehouse in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, on October 30, 2004. Jean is in Haiti to film a music video and to help distribute food to the hundreds of thousands of victims of Hurricane Jeanne flooding.

Wyclef wants end to Haiti unrest

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP)—Hip-hop star Wyclef Jean visited Haiti to try to help end a wave of violence that has left at least 79 people dead, including several police officers and two street gang leaders.

The singer met with community and gang leaders in Bel Air Sunday as gunshots rang out. The neighborhood, filled with supporters of former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, has become a flash point for violence.

Jean said he planned to talk to all sectors of Haitian society during his four-day visit

to promote dialogue and plans for a peace concert in December.

The U.S. presidential election could help or hinder the process, he told The Associated Press.

"Everyone is watching the elections so close from here," he said.

"I think if (President) Bush comes in power then there's not too much of a negotiation with Haiti. It's more like whatever ... he wants to do he's just going to do it," Jean said in an interview Monday.

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