



A large, stylized cursive signature of the word "Ray" in black ink.

Production Information

“Soul is a way of life, but it is always the hard way.”

—Ray Charles

If a life is merely the sum of its parts, then the story of Ray Charles might read as a tale of personal highs and lows behind a lengthy, award-winning career in the music business.

But for a man who synthesized his struggles, pain and personal darkness as effectively as he incorporated a myriad of musical styles—Jazz, Rhythm & Blues, Rock and Roll, Gospel, Country & Western—into his art, the story reads much differently, transformed from a sequence of events and accomplishments into a compelling and

ultimately inspiring journey of a one-of-a-kind genius with a distinct vision...who, along the way, gave the world a new way to hear.

Ray is the never-before-told, musical biographical drama of American legend Ray Charles, brought to the big screen following a 15-year journey by award-winning filmmaker TAYLOR HACKFORD and featuring a remarkable performance from the multifaceted JAMIE FOXX.

Director Hackford (*The Devil's Advocate*, *Dolores Claiborne*, *An Officer and a Gentleman*)—who, along with producing partner STUART BENJAMIN (*La Bamba*, *The Long Walk Home*, *Everybody's All-American*), spent the last 15 years developing this story with Ray Charles—presents a well defined portrait of an artist who turned his personal encounters with darkness into a burning light. The story of *Ray* – that of an impoverished, blind child of the segregated South who went on to break down social and artistic barriers and change the history of American music – is the quintessentially American story of a man's fight to control his own destiny.

With Foxx assuming the title role in a performance of intensity, breadth and truth, *Ray* follows the most volatile period of Charles' career, which starts the moment this young, black, blind teenager courageously boards a Florida bus all alone and heads across the United States to hone his art in the happening Seattle jazz scene. From Ray's early struggles to be treated fairly and find his own path, to his discovery by Atlantic Records and subsequent meteoric rise to global fame, to his battles with addiction and his torrid love affairs, the journey of *Ray* leads not only forward but back to Ray's youth. For, even as he becomes one of his generation's greatest musical heroes, Ray must come to terms with the fifth year in his life when his brother George died and he began to lose his vision—a time that had an indelible effect on Ray's drive, emotions and immortal music.

Ray is a Universal Pictures and Bristol Bay Productions presentation of an Anvil Films Production, in association with Baldwin Entertainment. Jamie Foxx takes on the role of music icon Ray Charles and is joined by a diverse ensemble cast that includes KERRY WASHINGTON (*The Human Stain*, *Against the Ropes*) as Ray's loving wife Della; CLIFTON POWELL (*Never Die Alone*) as Ray's early musical partner and road manager Jeff Brown; HARRY LENNIX (*The Matrix Revolutions*) as Joe Adams, who took over the role of manager later in Ray's career; TERRENCE DASHON HOWARD

(*Biker Boyz*) as Jazz guitarist Gossie McKee; LARENZ TATE (*Why Do Fools Fall in Love*) as the young Quincy Jones; RICHARD SCHIFF (*The West Wing*) and CURTIS ARMSTRONG (*Dodgeball*) as influential Atlantic Records executives Jerry Wexler and Ahmet Ertegun; BOKEEM WOODBINE (*Detonator*) as saxophonist David “Fathead” Newman; AUNJANUE ELLIS (*Garden State*) as Ray’s backup vocalist Mary Ann Fisher; newcomer SHARON WARREN as Ray’s hardworking and dedicated mother, Aretha Robinson; and REGINA KING (*A Cinderella Story*, *Jerry Maguire*) as Ray’s girlfriend and powerful backup singer, Margie Hendricks. *Ray* is produced by TAYLOR HACKFORD, STUART BENJAMIN, HOWARD BALDWIN and KAREN BALDWIN. The story is by TAYLOR HACKFORD and JAMES L. WHITE, with a screenplay by JAMES L. WHITE. The film is directed by TAYLOR HACKFORD.

To bring the vibrancy of Ray Charles’ life and times to the screen, Taylor Hackford has also gathered a highly accomplished behind-the-camera team that includes director of photography PAWEL EDELMAN (Oscar®-nominated for *The Pianist*), production designer STEPHEN ALTMAN (Oscar® nominee for *Gosford Park*), editor PAUL HIRSCH (Oscar® winner for *Star Wars*), composer CRAIG ARMSTRONG (Golden Globe, AFI and BAFTA Award winner for *Moulin Rouge!*), music supervisor CURT SOBEL (*The Insider*) and costume designer SHAREN DAVIS (*Antwone Fisher*). The executive producers are WILLIAM J. IMMERMANN and JAIME RUCKER KING; the co-producers are RAY CHARLES ROBINSON, JR., ALISE BENJAMIN and NICK MORTON.

Knowing Ray: Introduction To The Man’s Life

For many people, the birth of American Soul can be traced directly back to 1954 and the incendiary Atlantic Records single “I’ve Got a Woman,” performed by a rising young artist named Ray Charles. Mixing the Blues and Gospel in ways that had previously been taboo and mysteriously managing to merge sexual and spiritual, raw and tender, longing and lightness into one unforgettable, heart-pounding sound, the song literally shook the world. It was the catalyst that lit a fire in countless young musicians who’d never heard anything like it, and the spark that helped set off an explosively

creative period in American culture that led to the rock ‘n’ roll revolution and beyond...not to mention igniting Ray Charles’ own 50-year career.

But just as amazing as the sound was the man from whom it emerged. The late musical legend Ray Charles has been dubbed “The Genius of Soul”—but what about the soul of the genius? While almost everyone knows and loves Ray Charles’ music—which would grow to encompass and re-create nearly every uniquely American style from Jazz to Country—few know the real story behind his hard-fought journey to artistic triumph.

Ray Charles was not only a brilliant performer at his trademark piano, a savvy businessman who took unprecedented control of his career and a musical pioneer who forged a path for others to follow...but he was also a man in search of his own redemption. The same childhood tragedy that inspired Ray Charles to create so feverishly also haunted his every move until he was able to finally face his past.

Says Taylor Hackford: “Ray Charles’ life was an absolutely fantastic journey. In this film I wanted to present the complexity of this American genius, warts and all. Ray had immense courage and brilliance, but his life also contained horrible tragedy and elusive demons. With *Ray* we have tried to show the evolution of an artist through an incredible period of cultural change. I hope people see through this film that Ray Charles is so much more than a musician of the past. He influenced a vibrant, cultural revolution in America that is still going on today.”

In an interview a few months before his death, Ray Charles said about the film: “I can see that Taylor’s done his homework. He’s got my life down pretty good. I would like for the people to understand the trials and tribulations that I’ve gone through from when I was a little kid up until I really got into my career and all the different things that happened to me over the years. I mean, I’ve had some wonderful things to happen to me, but yet I’ve had some pretty dramatic things to happen to me, too. I would like for people to know that you can recover from a lot of adversity that you might have in your life if you keep pressing on—if you still feel you know where you want to go. In other words, you don’t give up just because you get knocked down a few times.”

Ray Charles was a man of uniquely American contradictions, a dichotomous blend of big-city savvy and back-country simplicity, of sincerity and guile, of shouts and whispers. He never liked labels or barriers of any kind, so his songs transcended genres,

tapping into the whole wide range of American roots music and blurring the separations between Jazz, R&B, Country and Gospel to create something original, exuberant and moving. It was said that he could just as easily make you dance as break your heart, could evoke joy as deeply as desolation, and sometimes he did both in the same song. For Ray Charles, life itself was like that...full of pain, trouble and sorrows as well as exaltation, beauty and salvation.

Born into crushing, Depression-era poverty on September 23, 1930 in Albany, Georgia, Ray Charles Robinson fell in love with music at a very young age. He was exposed to both the call-and-response hymns of his Baptist church and the rough-and-tumble Blues of local musicians. Before he was five, he was already learning piano. Then, a series of tragic events altered the course of his life. First, Ray witnessed his brother George's drowning death in an accident for which Ray blamed himself. Shortly thereafter, a combination of glaucoma and the trauma of watching his brother die caused Ray to progressively lose his sight. By the age of seven he had gone completely blind and, at his tough but devoted mother's insistence, learned to navigate the world based on his acute sense of hearing and fascination with sound. He never used a cane, a dog or any other tool he associated with dependency. Instead, with his gifted, wide-open ears, Ray found his own way to approach life as a blind person. Through it all, music kept him going. Later, Charles would write in his book *Brother Ray*: "I was born with the music in me, that's the only explanation I know of."

In the hopes of providing a better future for Ray, his mother sent him 160 miles away to the state school for the blind in St. Augustine, where Ray learned to read music in Braille, studied several instruments and soaked up the local Jazz, Swing, Gospel, Blues and Country scenes. Tragically, Ray's mother died while he was at the school for the blind and he was left alone in the world. Motivated by his mother's oft-expressed wish for him to become his own man, the teenaged Ray wasted no time. He began to score gigs in small clubs, dance halls and bars across northern Florida. He even played with a Country & Western band, The Florida Playboys. Life wasn't easy for a blind, inexperienced teen in this wild, rough-edged world, but Ray grew up fast.

In March of 1948, at age 17, Ray crossed the country alone on a Greyhound bus to make his way on the Seattle circuit as a piano player and smooth-voiced crooner in the

tradition of Nat King Cole and Charles Brown. He quickly became successful enough in Seattle to land a record deal with Jack Lauderdale and his Swingtime Records label.

Ray recorded his first single for Swingtime Records in 1949. Lauderdale quickly put him on the road with R&B guitarist Lowell Fulson—but he was still basically an anonymous musician searching for his own original sound. And it was a lonely existence for Charles. Although he was recognized by the Fulson band as a talented musician, he was on his own much of the time on the road, spending a lot of hours alone in his hotel room. It was during this period of experimentation that Ray also discovered something else: heroin.

But his true breakthrough came in the early 1950s when Ray signed to Atlantic Records, recruited by upstart indie music executives Ahmet Ertegun and Jerry Wexler, who were scouting for new sounds. It was Ertegun and Wexler who put him on the road backing up the legendary “Miss Rhythm,” Ruth Brown. Soon, Ray began to try something considered highly controversial: mixing together the churchly passion of Gospel with the more earthly desires of the “devil’s own music,” the Blues. The result was galvanizing—and so controversial that his early hits were banned by many radio stations.

Controversy or no, the power of his art was undeniable—just listening to Ray Charles stirred people’s souls and created a following. Although it was a time when the phrase “race records” was used to refer to albums by African-Americans, Ray’s genre-busting music appealed to a broad cross-section of both white and black listeners. In his own 1993 book, Jerry Wexler said of Ray Charles’ genius: “Ray saw past categories and simply played what he felt.”

Now known simply as Ray Charles (he dropped his last name, Robinson, to avoid confusion with the popular boxer Sugar Ray Robinson), he released the ground-breaking “I’ve Got a Woman” in 1956, with its Blues-tinged lyric of desire set against a spiritual vibe. This was followed by a string of unforgettable smash hits, including “What’d I Say,” “Drown in My Own Tears,” “Unchain My Heart” and “Hit the Road Jack.” By his early 20s, Ray Charles was being described by those in the business with a word that was then rarely used: he was called “the genius.”

In 1959, Ray switched record labels, despite his devotion to Ertegun and Wexler (in fact, he would return to Atlantic many years later). He went to ABC-Paramount, lured by an irresistible deal that allowed him to own his masters. This groundbreaking deal gave Ray the kind of financial control that no musical artist had enjoyed up to that time. To his new label's shock, Ray Charles next shifted his style 180 degrees, embarking on an exploration of Country & Western music. Rather than alienate fans, however, he expanded his audience even farther with such classics as "Georgia on My Mind," "I Can't Stop Loving You," "Born to Lose" and "Busted." Just when it seemed he'd reached the pinnacle of his career, Ray Charles soared higher. In 1966 Thomas Thompson wrote in his profile for *Life Magazine*: "The best Blues singer around? Of course, but don't stop there. He is also an unparalleled singer of Jazz, of Gospel, of Country and Western. He has drawn from each of these musical streams and made a river which he alone can navigate."

It was also the 1960s that propelled Ray into becoming an activist for Civil Rights. Touring in the '50s he had learned to shrug off the pervasive presence of segregation and unjust treatment of African-American artists and audiences. But now he would become the first artist to boldly refuse to play in segregated clubs, a move that cost Ray a substantial amount of money and spurred the state of Georgia to ban him "for life." (In 1977 the State of Georgia issued a formal apology to Ray Charles, the state legislature honored him and they declared "Georgia on My Mind" the official state song.)

Yet the 1960s also brought Ray Charles' chaotic life on the road to a head. His marriage was weakened by his continuing infidelities. Then, in 1965, he was busted for heroin possession flying into Boston's Logan Airport from Montreal. Recognizing that his addiction threatened the career and the music he held so dear, Ray decided to kick his two decades-long dependency on heroine and he checked himself into a rehabilitation hospital. No matter how strong the lure of heroin, Ray's desire to continue making music proved more powerful. He never touched heroin again.

In the wake of overcoming his addiction and facing his worst demons, Ray Charles resumed his career. He continued to tour, playing more than 200 concerts a year until liver disease finally slowed him down last year. In the 1970s he released one of his most enduring classics: a stirring re-working of "America the Beautiful" that gave the

anthem a shot of heartfelt soul and sacrifice that seemed to make the song more powerful than ever.

Throughout his career, Ray Charles earned 12 Grammy Awards, as well as a 1988 Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award. He placed 76 singles on the best-selling charts and recorded more than 75 albums. He was a Kennedy Center Honors recipient, received the National Medal of the Arts and was an inductee into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, the Blues Hall of Fame and the NAACP Image Awards Hall of Fame. Never forgetting his roots or the obstacles overcome in his triumphant career, Charles was responsible for raising more than \$20 million for black charities, education and arts. Most of all, his influence can be heard nearly every time a song plays on the radio, as his musical inventiveness washed over generations of Rock, Soul, Jazz, Gospel and Country artists.

Ray Charles passed away June 10, 2004 at the age of 73.

Uncovering Ray: A 15-Year Quest

Like most people, director Taylor Hackford first encountered Ray Charles through the fervid emotion of the man's music. In the 1950s, Hackford recalls hearing "I've Got a Woman" for the first time and immediately being hooked by the soulful sound. "From the minute I first heard Ray Charles sing, I knew there was an extraordinary fire there," says Hackford, "and I followed his career from then on."

As Hackford watched Ray Charles develop and grow into one of America's essential musical voices, he also witnessed the culture around Ray shift and explode. "It became clear that Ray was doing something truly groundbreaking that was having a real effect on mainstream American society. So many artists were influenced by Ray Charles: from Elvis Presley and BB King to Stevie Wonder and the Rolling Stones, and on to current stars such as Outkast, Alicia Keys, Norah Jones and Justin Timberlake. His place in the pantheon of culture is monumental," notes Hackford.

Decades later, in the 1980s, Hackford was himself known not only as an accomplished director of such films as *An Officer and a Gentleman*, but as a filmmaker with a unique passion for the history of American music. He began his career with the musical *The Idolmaker*, and he went on to direct the acclaimed documentary *Chuck Berry*

Hail! Hail! Rock 'n' Roll and produce the Ritchie Valens story, *La Bamba*, which became one of the first popular bios of an early rock-era legend.

Now, Hackford wanted to make a film about the man whose career had been inspiring him for so many years. It wasn't just Ray Charles' music that moved Hackford. It was also learning of the rags-to-riches story that lay behind Ray's success—a story filled with tragedy, adversity, prejudice and addiction, as well as genius, love, beauty and ultimately, the will to overcome. Hackford and his long-time producing partner Stuart Benjamin saw it as a deeply American story.

Says Hackford: “To really understand Ray Charles, the music is important, but there is so much more to the man. When I first heard the stories of his life, I thought, ‘My God, I never had any idea.’ I did not realize how he came up, 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, an incredible businessman and an American icon. I thought, ‘This man’s story must be told.’”

Benjamin comments, “We had made the Ritchie Valens story, *La Bamba*, which told the story of this young Latino kid who came from nothing and rose to stardom, if only for that brief moment. Ray’s story transcends musical periods and generations—it’s the quintessential American success story. Ultimately, what got it made was our strong belief in the project. All the stars eventually came together at the right place and the right time.”

Hackford first met Charles in 1987 while trying to secure rights to his life story; their working relationship over the next 15 years left an indelible impression on the filmmaker. “He was a very gracious man yet also very tough,” recalls the director. “He was one of the smartest people I’ve ever met and he was also very, very candid. Of course, he was not an easy person, but nobody that accomplished is easy. Having overcome the monumental obstacles he’d faced in his life, Ray exuded a confidence that can only come from being a self-made man. He was also a perfectionist who demanded total concentration and dedication from others. And it was impossible not to be inspired by him.”

Following that first meeting, the filmmakers and Charles developed a bond of trust and soon Hackford and Benjamin were able to acquire the rights to the musician's life. Yet to their surprise, Hackford and Benjamin would spend more than a decade trying to stir up interest in Hollywood. "Stuart really kept this project alive," says Hackford. "He was very tenacious and just wouldn't let go. We always believed this film would strike a chord in audiences, and that it was just a matter of time. It is with great sadness that we faced Ray's death before the film could be released."

Based on intensive and intimate personal interviews with Charles, covering subjects ranging from what it "feels like" to be blind to his complex relationship with his late mother and the brother he saw drown as a five-year-old, Hackford wrote a screen story for the film in the late '80s. He and Stuart Benjamin also used their extensive friendships in the music business—including such renowned Ray Charles collaborators as Ahmet Ertegun and Quincy Jones—to obtain first-hand insights into the man from friends and family.

"It was important to us, and it was also important to Ray, that he be accurately depicted, flaws and all," says Benjamin. "We did not hold back, because if you don't show the downside then the upside is not as impactful, or as real, and it only tells half the story. Ray Charles was not without vices, but part of what makes his story so powerful is that he overcame them when he came to the realization that they were threatening what he loved most in life."

Throughout the entire process, Ray Charles was more than cooperative, insisting at every turn that the filmmakers never shy away from the darker parts of his reality. "Ray actually said, 'You can tell any story you want and you can make me look any way you want, but I will not let you *not* tell the truth, because that wouldn't be right,'" explains Hackford.

Another key contributor to the project was Charles' son, Ray Charles Robinson, Jr., who became one of the film's co-producers. "Through all the years, and all the attempts at getting the film made, Ray Jr. stuck with it and he was able to keep us from losing heart and keep his father from losing heart. He has an incredible love and respect for his father," says Benjamin, "and he also has a real understanding of his father's importance, not just to the musical world, but the world at large."

More of the “stars aligned” with the involvement of Philip Anschutz, Howard Baldwin and Karen Baldwin, whose motion picture company (where Benjamin had served as Executive Vice President) put the Ray Charles story into active development.

As the project progressed, Hackford and Benjamin brought in screenwriter James L. White, who makes his feature film debut with *Ray*, to write the screenplay. “Jimmy had a lot in common with Ray’s story,” explains Hackford. “He’s from the South, he’s African-American and he’s had some painful moments in his life he’s had to struggle with. He really understood and felt very strongly about Ray’s story. He took what I had started and built on that, bringing out some emotional authenticity. His sharp ear for Ray’s unique country flavored dialogue infused his first draft screenplay with a palpable authenticity.”

White conducted numerous interviews with Ray Charles and also spent endless hours with many of Ray’s closest friends and family members, including his former wife and life-long confidante, Della. “The more I talked to people, the more I began to see what I was writing as a series of love stories,” says White. “It’s about Ray’s love for his brother who drowned, his love for his mother who inspired him, his love for Della and, most of all, his love for the music which saw him through these times and inspired so many people,” says White.

Hackford wanted to experiment with Ray’s music as a major narrative element, so he strategically placed dozens of Charles’ most evocative songs throughout White’s script—not only to create rhythm and pace, but also to illustrate Ray’s emotional state of mind when he created them.

When the script was complete, the filmmakers had it translated into Braille and delivered to Charles – then they waited nervously for the famous perfectionist’s response. “He came back with only two changes,” recalls Hackford, “both factual, and neither of them having to do with the more controversial sides of his character. Ray turned out to be a fantastic person to work with. He was tough and demanding but what he demanded from us was nothing less than what he demanded from himself: a sense of excellence and commitment. What more can you ask for?”

At long last, when the project finally got off the ground, it was clear that Hackford was the only person who could direct it. Says producer Stuart Benjamin, “I

don't think there could have been anyone else, because Taylor has such a deep understanding of all the things that made Ray Charles who he was—not only his musical genius, but the hardships he endured and the charm, warmth and power of the man. He also knows better than anyone how to transform music into cinematic storytelling. What Taylor has done is show that this is a story that transcends generations. It's a deeply human story.”

Being Ray: Casting Jamie Foxx

Once *Ray* was underway, the filmmakers were faced with a daunting question: where would they find an actor able to embody such a highly recognizable and unique character from American culture? The answer was an unexpected one. Hackford and Benjamin decided to take a chance on Jamie Foxx, best known at the time as a stand-up comic and television star, but also an actor with whom they'd been impressed by his performances in Oliver Stone's *Any Given Sunday* and Michael Mann's *Ali*.

When he met with Foxx, Hackford told the actor his main concern was that whoever played Ray Charles would have to reveal an innate relationship to the very soul of music. As it turns out, Foxx, similar to Ray Charles, had started playing piano at age three. The actor later led the band at his Texas gospel church in his youth and received a university piano scholarship. “When Jamie told me this, I just kind of sat back and thought, ‘My God,’” remembers Hackford. “I'd like to say it was planned, but it wasn't. We got lucky.”

The next test was to have Foxx and Ray Charles meet – which they did at two side-by-side pianos, while the filmmakers held their breath. Hackford recalls the story: “Ray was not easy, as I've said, and when it came to music, he demanded perfection. Jamie came over and immediately started playing the piano and Ray could hear at least that he could play. So they started playing and Jamie is playing a little funk and Gospel, but then Ray goes into some Jazz, some Thelonious Monk. And I'm thinking, ‘Oh, no, Jamie doesn't know it.’ Ray was saying, ‘Come on, man, it's this,’ and he keeps playing this Monk phrase, only Jamie is not getting it. Then Ray gets even tougher, saying, ‘Come on, man, it's right under your fingers.’ And I'm thinking, ‘This could really blow

up in my face.’ But when Jamie finally got it, Ray, who had been pretty tough on him, said, ‘This is it. This kid can do it, see? He’s the one.’”

Hackford continues: “Ray anointed him right then and there and you could see Jamie just kind of glow. In a sense, he had won the role directly from Ray Charles.”

Foxx had known little about Ray Charles beyond his music before being cast in the role, and found himself on his own personal journey into the man’s fascinating and embattled background. “When I read the script I realized that this was a really phenomenal story, not just about music, but about a man who overcame all kinds of difficulties to become a real leader of the culture. The way he intertwined everything he experienced in his life to make this amazing music, it was really something special.”

Foxx threw himself headlong into the role. After meeting with Charles, Foxx began by adapting many of the singer’s physical trademarks, from his close-cropped hair to his bodily mannerisms, born out of a combination of Charles’ history, blindness and unstoppable inner sense of music. The actor immersed himself in Soul, Jazz and Blues recordings to set the mood; attended classes at the Braille Institute; and spent weeks during rehearsal and production walking around with his eyes sealed tight for 12 hours a day, to gain an intimate understanding of what it really means to be blind. “It was interesting to me that not being able to see made me angry at first,” comments Foxx. “It’s frustrating. But I also noticed my sense of hearing becoming more acute, and I became sensitive to all kinds of sounds nobody else was even hearing.”

Many on the set were stunned by how spontaneous and natural the actor’s embodiment of Charles became. But imitation was never the point. “The key word for me was nuance, because I didn’t want to simply impersonate him,” says Foxx. “Rather, I wanted to capture some part of his spirit, that’s all. There were a lot of little touches which I tried to layer—his musicality, his warmth, his sense of balance, his posture—until the physical side of things all fell into place.”

To get even deeper into the soul of Ray Charles, Foxx began to consider the extreme highs and lows of his emotional life. Foxx calls Ray Charles’ childhood “a blessed curse,” an intense time of suffering that nevertheless marked the beginning of his development as an extremely open-minded artist. He says, “To a certain degree, I believe what happened to Ray as a child is what molded who he was, but it was a large price to

pay. Yet, what is so amazing about him is that he never gave up. Instead, he said, ‘I don’t want to be poor, black and blind, so I’m going to take control and make my life happen.’ His decisions were always completely clear, there was no wavering, because he didn’t have time to go backward.”

It shocked Foxx to think about how much drive it must have required to make it in a world that held forth obstacles of every kind—whether based on his race, his blindness or his initially lowly status as a backup musician. “What really amazed me is Ray’s business savvy. To be blind, and to have to trust other people’s word to a certain degree when it came to money and contracts, yet to control your own career in an era when nobody controlled their own career...wow. I came to see that Ray had a certain type of energy and charisma that really inspired people to be loyal to him and stay in his good graces,” says Foxx.

Foxx was also moved by the love story behind Ray Charles’ early career with his devoted wife Della, who saw him through his darkest hours—despite his infamous knack for seducing women he met on the road—and pushed him to face up to both his talent and the devils chasing him. “I know Della really loved Ray and vice versa. Early on, she must have said to herself, ‘I’m going to love this man in spite of anything he does,’ and she did. She was really a strong woman, and she held everything together and, in a way, I think she allowed Ray to be the artist he was,” says Foxx. “She was the glue in his life. Despite everything he did, I’m certain deep down inside Ray knew he had the greatest woman.”

The more he reflected on Ray’s tough reality and propulsive talent, the more Foxx understood why Charles indulged in so many illicit activities. “He lived in a very unpredictable world and there were only a few things he could count on,” explains Foxx. “He could count on music, he could count on sex and he could count on heroin. He went with the things that he knew could bring him satisfaction until he saw he was hurting the people he loved.”

Despite the challenges of playing the many sides of Ray Charles, Foxx found an indescribable joy in the role, especially in trying to get to the bottom of Charles’ life-loving, hard-driving energy. “You hear it in all those great songs,” says Foxx. “Now, I look at Ray Charles’ legacy and I realize that he was so necessary...necessary for all of

this music he helped create, for all the inspiration he brought, for the moment he carved out of history. He left behind a real mark and it's exciting to have gotten to know him as I did."

Ray Charles was excited to be portrayed by Foxx. In an interview before his death, he said: "I can't believe how good [Foxx] is. I've had a couple of people who saw him work and they came back and said, 'Ray, you just won't believe this guy! He's got you down so pat that he even walks like you! He does everything exactly like you.' I only go by my personal experience with him and I think he's phenomenal. He's a wonderful man."

Loving Ray: The Women

It was said that the only time Ray Charles acted blind was when he was around a beautiful woman. His gift for seduction and romantic escapades were legendary; yet women also played a major role in shaping the man he was and the man he would become. Four of these women are at the center of *Ray*: Della Bea Robinson, Ray's devoted wife, played by Kerry Washington; Margie Hendricks, the fiery vocal legend from the Raelettes (so named, it was said, because to become one, the women had to "let Ray"), portrayed by Regina King; Mary Ann Fisher, played by Aunjanue Ellis, the Kentucky singer who was also known as the "Queen of Blues" before and after she toured with Charles in the mid-1950s; and Ray's beloved mother Aretha, a role taken by Sharon Warren, making her screen debut.

When Kerry Washington read the screenplay for *Ray*, she realized she barely knew the man whose music she had adored throughout her life. She was especially moved by his relationship with "Della Bea," a former Gospel singer who inspired Ray early in his career and stood behind him through fame, controversy and even addiction—until his lifestyle began to threaten their family. "Della accompanied Ray on this whole incredible journey from having not very much money to overwhelming wealth and popularity," notes Washington. "She loved him and believed so strongly in his gifts, but there also came a point when she realized she couldn't be with a man who was destroying himself."

For Taylor Hackford, Washington was the perfect choice for the role of the woman who was Ray's foundation and inner strength for many years. "Kerry captured Della's sweetness and vulnerability but also showed how she became a real rock of a woman," he states. "Kerry has such an innocent, bright-eyed look, but when you see her go through so much pain and trouble, you see how she becomes the only person who could really talk to Ray."

Washington met with the real "Mrs. Robinson" as part of her preparation. "Mrs. Robinson's a remarkably non-judgmental person," observes the actress. "She said to me: 'I don't like broccoli, so I don't want anybody to tell me to eat broccoli, and that's why I didn't go around telling people not to drink or do drugs, because everybody makes their own choices, everybody has their own journey.' I saw that she was a very independent and strong woman, and also a very spiritual woman who made difficult choices. I think she loved Ray as much as she could until she saw that this love was taking away from her ability to love herself and her family."

Once on the set, Washington found that working with Jamie Foxx brought new dimensions to her character. "Jamie turned out to be so talented and committed," she says. "The scenes we had together were very special because they were so intimate. When Ray was with Della he was able to really show his soul, the essence of who he was, and Jamie did that so gracefully and beautifully, it made it easy for me to respond emotionally."

She summarizes: "To me the story of *Ray* is about people learning to embrace their own gifts. For Della, it's about learning to love herself as much as she loves Ray, and for Ray it's about forgiving himself enough to stop running from his demons. I think it's an important message—and behind it all is the power of Ray's music. I now own every single Ray Charles CD ever made!"

Regina King had a very different challenge in playing another of Ray Charles' influential lovers: his mistress and tremendous singing talent in her own right, Margie Hendricks, who tragically passed away of a drug overdose after she had left the Raelettes. Hendricks had started out in the '50s all-girl backup band known as The Cookies, but soon added a magic touch to Ray's 1960s recordings, counter-pointing Ray's mischievous baritone with her own evocative, belted voice.

“There’s very little written about Margie,” notes King, “which is pretty amazing because she had one of the most unique voices ever in American music. I think in many ways she was Ray’s Muse. He heard in her voice that church-like sound that inspired him to mix his own Blues into it and create something new. When I read the script and remembered her voice, I knew I wanted to play her because there is something very powerful and real about her.”

Margie’s attraction to Ray, and Ray’s attraction to Margie, had everything to do with the music, says King. “Their passion for the music is what brought them together and kept them together as long as they were, but they were both reckless people back then, and when she started to drink their relationship burnt out. Yet I think he really loved her—he was a human being like the rest of us, brilliant as he was—and she was an important part of his life.”

Taylor Hackford was impressed with how King brought the role of a woman few really know so richly to life. “Regina bowls you over in the same way that Margie Hendricks must have bowled people over. As an actress, Regina is better known for her fun, comic personality but here, she gets down; she’s earthy and tragic and I thought her performance was fantastic.”

Mary Ann Fisher—who, according to Charles’ autobiography, served as his inspiration for the songs “Mary Ann,” “What Would I Do Without You” and “Leave My Woman Alone”—joined Ray on tour in 1955 and performed vocals in the act even after the 1957 addition of the Raelettes; she left the band (and her romance with Charles) in 1958.

“One of the things I found really interesting about Mary Ann,” supplies Aunjanue Ellis, who portrays her, “was that her involvement in Ray’s life and his music played an influential role. She was there just when his sound began to expand to include female vocals—and also when his attentions began to veer away from his wife and marriage. She was one of the first talented singers whose life and art became professionally and personally intertwined with Ray’s.”

Aunjanue’s performance as the feisty Mary Ann registered strongly with Hackford, who says, “Aunjanue is remarkably adept at bringing out a whole range of

Mary Ann's colors in a relatively brief space of screen time. She's incredibly sexy and memorable in the role."

But perhaps the woman who most weighed on Ray Charles' mind throughout his life was his mother, who would not allow her son to get discouraged by his blindness for even a second. She once told him, "You're blind, not dumb; you lost your sight, not your mind." Taking on the role of Aretha Robinson is actress Sharon Warren, who prior to being cast in *Ray* had worked primarily in Southern regional theater.

Hackford remembers the serendipitous nature of casting the woman who would bring Ray's mother to life and says, "During our search to find an actor to play the young Ray, a woman walked into our office in Atlanta, Georgia. She had a headshot, but she didn't even know what movie we were making. She had a lot of charisma, a lot of energy. I gave her a couple of pages of dialogue, she looked at it for 15 minutes, and then I put her on tape. While we were taping, I thought, 'My God, this is Aretha.' I hadn't been able to find an actress who could embody what Ray Charles told me his mother was—a bone-thin person who had died when she was 31, but who had incredible fierceness of spirit, incredible strength. He gave her credit for who he was in life. He said, '*This* was the most important person in my life.' That's a heady recipe to have to satisfy. And Sharon Warren walked in off the street—that is a Cinderella story."

Hackford had later played a scene for Charles involving Warren, where the words scripted for the actress had come directly from Charles' memory of Aretha. He says, "He was listening in his inscrutable way, and then he started talking to the screen, saying, 'Yes, that's right. That's the truth.'"

Warren dove into the role by doing as much research as was possible into a woman who died, tragically and anonymously, in her early 30s. "The greatest help I received in creating this character was my 87-year-old grandmother, Annie Lou Gould Walker, who shared her life stories about the rural South during those times. Unfortunately, my grandmother died just before I began working on *Ray*. I am also eternally grateful to Ray Charles, Jr. for the intimate portrait he shared with me of his grandmother and her life. I also gained great insights from screenwriter James L. White and valuable advice from director Taylor Hackford.

“Aretha’s history is very mysterious,” she comments. “What we do know is that she was very, very poor and very frail. She washed clothes to make money because that’s the only thing she could do. She worked hard to provide for her children, because she loved them. When she lost George and Ray went blind, she still did not give up. She was determined to prepare Ray to take care of himself, despite his blindness.”

Warren continues: “She demonstrated ‘tough love’ for Ray because she knew that, if he was going to survive in the world, he was going to have to be extremely strong. She knew what it was like to be an outcast, to be seen as a cripple and she didn’t want that for her son. The more I thought about her and what she went through, the more I wanted to give as authentic and powerful a performance as I could, so this woman would be known to the world.”

Managers and Musicians

Ray Charles was surrounded by numerous talented and ambitious people who helped to bring his genius to the fore, and in the making of *Ray*, this required assembling a diverse cast of charismatic actors. Among the list of Ray’s most important friends and associates were two men who served as his managers: his friend Jeff Brown, played by renowned character actor Clifton Powell, who became his road manager on the Chitlin Circuit and saw him through his early success; and the man who would controversially replace Brown, the suave Joe Adams, who became Ray Charles’ manager for the next 40-some years and is played by frequent Spike Lee collaborator Harry Lennix.

For Taylor Hackford, snaring Clifton Powell to play Jeff Brown was a key casting coup. “Clifton Powell is a fabulous actor,” he notes, “and he really embodies this character. Through Clifton’s performance you get a real sense of these two guys who are just starting out in a music business that was often very unfair. Jeff is a witness to how many people underestimated Ray Charles’ talent, intelligence and ambition in those early days.”

To play Joe Adams, whose smooth sophistication replaced the old school style of management Ray was used to, Hackford chose Harry Lennix, who remembers seeing Ray Charles play Carnegie Hall when he was in college. “It was one of those magical nights,” he recalls. “Unforgettable.”

Lennix found the role to be a kind of trip into history, as he met with the real Joe Adams and learned up-close what it was like to be an ambitious African-American in that era. “Joe was kind of a renaissance man,” Lennix observes. “He’s from Watts, but he has a real debonair quality to him. He was an actor in the ‘50s who traded roles with Sidney Poitier and Harry Belafonte; he was a Tuskegee airman; he was the first black DJ to be broadcast from coast to coast. He’s just a fascinating guy.”

Also among the fascinating real-life characters portrayed in *Ray* are the legendary Ahmet Ertegun and Jerry Wexler of Atlantic Records, the upstart indie which became the premiere Rhythm and Blues label in the ‘50s and the nation’s leading Soul label in the ‘60s. Ertegun, a Turkish immigrant, not only helped to bring Ray Charles to the mainstream but was involved in the early success of Ruth Brown, Big Joe Turner, The Drifters and The Coasters. Later, he would helm Atlantic in the ‘60s and ‘70s as the company oversaw acts ranging from Aretha Franklin to Led Zeppelin. To play him, the filmmakers chose character actor Curtis Armstrong, who has himself produced several CD reissues of Harry Nilsson’s work and who was also forced to shave his thick, black hair to embody the balding Ertegun.

Once Armstrong began to learn about Ertegun’s past, it all seemed worth it to play this legend of modern recording history. “The more I heard about him, the more intrigued I became,” says Armstrong. “Ahmet was a hard-headed, ruthless businessman, but he was also a talented music man. The relationship he developed with Ray was really beautiful because Ahmet was very much like a mentor to him. He saw that spark in Ray and, perhaps most important of all, he gave him the freedom to really let go and discover what was inside him. He wasn’t afraid to label Ray a genius, because that’s what he was. Even after Ray went to ABC, Ahmet and Ray remained good friends, because there was too much affection and respect between them.”

Jerry Wexler joined Atlantic in 1953 as one of the industry’s first name producers. In addition to Ray Charles, he worked with Aretha Franklin, Wilson Pickett, LaVern Baker, Dr. John, Dusty Springfield and Bob Dylan, among others. In the role of Wexler, Richard Schiff, best known to audiences as Toby Ziegler on *The West Wing*, hoped to capture his unique combination of street smarts and musical knowledge. “In those days, Wexler and Ertegun were really pioneers, they were explorers, they were figuring it out

as they went along, but what they shared was a real love for music,” says Schiff. “When I talked with Jerry, he told me that those were the happiest days of his life, and I wanted to do that justice.”

Says Taylor Hackford, “Curtis Armstrong and Richard Schiff give a real sense of the symbiotic nature of the partnership between Ahmet Ertegun and Jerry Wexler that became so important to American music and to Ray Charles’ career in particular.”

Also portrayed in *Ray* are a number of famous musicians, most notably the legendary jazz artist Quincy Jones, played as a young and hungry trumpeter by Larenz Tate. Tate previously had starred as ‘50s doo-wop legend Frankie Lymon in *Why Do Fools Fall in Love*, and he was excited to take another excursion into real musical history. For Tate, the role presented a rare opportunity to get to know the iconic Quincy Jones personally. “I think it’s amazing that these two legends, Quincy Jones and Ray Charles, were actually friends as young men before either one was famous,” says Tate. “When I met with Quincy, he shared with me that they had stayed close and loved one another for 55 years. It’s just extraordinary and I was just happy to be a part of telling this story.”

In a case of art imitating real life, it turns out that Tate and Jamie Foxx are themselves close friends. “I keep telling Jamie, I expect my phone to keep ringing for the next 55 years,” he jokes. “But to already have that camaraderie made it easy for Jamie and me on the set. To be playing legends—it doesn’t get any better than that—and to see Jamie literally become Ray Charles before our eyes, it’s been an amazing experience. The way I see it, people like Ray Charles and Quincy Jones paved the way for guys like myself and Jamie. There were no roads and they paved them for us. Mostly I feel grateful to these guys.”

Rounding out the cast are a number of actors starring as real-life musicians, including NAACP Image Award winner Terrence Dashon Howard as Jazz guitarist Gossie McKee; Bokeem Woodbine as noted Jazz musician David “Fathead” Newman; Chris Thomas King as West Coast Blues-man Lowell Fulson; and David Krumholtz as Jazz impresario Milt Shaw.

Decades of Designs

After casting, one of *Ray*'s biggest challenges was bringing to life the world that surrounded Ray Charles...from his dirt-poor upbringing in the South to the wild and sweaty Chitlin Circuit clubs he toured as a young man to the state-of-the-art '60s studio he created for himself in Los Angeles. With a story that spans the 1930s to the 1970s, Taylor Hackford and Stuart Benjamin knew they would need a very creative and devoted design team.

Says Benjamin: "This film crosses several decades in American history and deals with several real-life cultural icons, so it was important to us to capture the spirit of each of those times as accurately as possible. The production design, the costumes, even the vintage cars and instruments became very important to us."

The decision was made to shoot much of the film in one of America's most musical cities, New Orleans, long home to Jazz and Blues innovators, despite the fact that the action takes place in cities ranging from Seattle to New York to Atlanta. With its fresh, rarely used locations and deep connection to the history of music in America, New Orleans provided its own inspiration to the crew.

"New Orleans is the most musically evocative city in America," says Hackford. "I've owned a home there for 20 years, and it still amazes me. Not only is it the birthplace of Jazz, but it still produces some of the greatest musicians in the world. Ray Charles spent a lot of time there early in his career and he was deeply influenced by the city's R&B horn stylings. He produced his first million-selling record in New Orleans—Guitar Slim's 'The Things That I Used To Do.' So even though we used New Orleans to create different cities all over the country, we had that sense of always being in a place that is all about the music."

For production designer Stephen Altman, an Oscar® nominee for his designs for *Gosford Park*, *Ray* was a chance to do something unlike anything he'd done before. "My main goal on every film I do is to make sure my movies don't look like any other movies I've seen," states Altman. "New Orleans helped me to keep the look of the film original."

Altman wanted to infuse *Ray* with authentic realism but quickly discovered that many of the clubs and theatres Ray Charles played in his early career were never even

photographed—and Charles himself, of course, never “saw” them. “We did as much research as we could into how clubs in that era were furnished and decorated, what the bands looked like on stage, but we also used imagination,” admits Altman. “Most of all, we wanted to capture the spirit of sensuality and freedom that flourished in these clubs.”

To do this, Hackford, Altman and costume designer Sharen Davis all agreed that the look of the film should be summed up in one key word: *vibrant*. They wanted rich colors and strong textures throughout to emphasize the passionate, sensual nature of Ray’s music and his turbulent inner and outer worlds.

Because *Ray* was made on a limited budget, Altman didn’t have the financial resources to recreate the myriad locations around the world where Ray had lived and performed. Therefore, he and Hackford devised a plan to utilize historical stock footage throughout the film to establish “master shots” of period scope and detail which could otherwise have not been created within the film’s budget. Stock shots of such cities as Seattle, New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Paris and Rome featured incredible added production values—hundreds of historical buildings, thousands of period cards and product billboards. Says Hackford: “Our strategy was to establish each major location with stock shots and then cut into smaller, more contained sets and locations in New Orleans that Steve had designed to integrate with the original footage. As you can imagine, we did major research in advance in order to find the right historical footage that Steve could match to.”

Obviously, some of this stock footage was of extremely poor quality, but advances in digital processing allowed filmmakers to clean up damaged or faded film and transform it into cinematic acceptability. “We ‘stepped on’ [photographically degraded] some our own footage,” says Hackford, “so that the transitions in and out of these stock shots would be less noticeable.”

Altman used approximately two-thirds real locations, one-third soundstage sets, the latter giving his team the advantage of being easily shifted from one decade’s styles to the next. Among the authentic locations utilized was Los Angeles’ RPM Studios on Washington Boulevard, which Ray Charles himself founded in the 1960s and would serve as his business headquarters for the rest of his life. “It was a thrill to shoot there, but we had to do quite a bit of work to de-modernize it,” says Altman. “Everything

changes so fast in the music industry and we had to bring the studio back in time.” Other locations included two historic New Orleans theaters: the turn of the century Orpheum Theatre and the Roman statue-lined Saenger Theater, built in 1927. In Los Angeles, the production shot the exterior of Ray’s first California house, near the Coliseum, on Hepburn Street, and both the interior and exterior of Ray’s mansion in View Park.

Throughout his work on *Ray*, Altman collaborated closely with Taylor Hackford and also Pawel Edelman, the film’s Polish director of photography best known in the U.S. for his evocative, Oscar®-nominated work on Roman Polanski’s *The Pianist*. “Pawel brought a real artistic eye to everything,” comments Altman.

Adds Taylor, “I’d seen Pavel’s work in Poland where he’d collaborated with one of my favorite directors, Andrzej Wajda. Like most of us, Pavel had been a huge Ray Charles fan growing up, but unlike the rest of us, he’d had to scrounge for ‘underground’ copies of Ray’s records in Poland.”

Hackford and Edelman spent many hours discussing the “photographic looks” of *Ray*, because Hackford wanted different visualizations for each of the three separate levels of reality in the film: first, the Linear Story that follows Ray’s evolution as an artist; second, Ray’s Flashbacks that show actual events in his childhood; and third, Ray’s Visions of Aretha, which are psychological dream/nightmares of his mother speaking to him at crucial life moments.

“Usually, filmmakers will photograph their linear, ‘real time’ sequences in natural colors and then de-saturate or mute their flashbacks,” supplies Hackford. “We reversed that equation, deciding to use a de-saturated bleach bypass for the Linear Story and go with a natural color look for the Flashbacks. Actually, even our ‘natural colors’ were ultra-saturated...almost hyper-real. Remember, Ray was born sighted, so I wanted to communicate how vibrant the colors must have seemed to him on his first Spring day.”

Edelman photographed the entire film without special processing, because the filmmakers decided to create the separate looks in post-production using the Digital Intermediate process. (The Aretha Visions became almost monochromatic “solarizations.”)

Hackford and Edelman also worked out a strategy for camera movement. In the Flashbacks, the only world that little Ray knew was Jellyroll, so his life is totally stable;

thus, there is very little camera movement in those scenes, the camera appearing almost rooted in the red earth of Georgia. However, when Ray gets on that Greyhound bus and travels across America, the camera starts moving and never stops...just like his life.

Hackford explains, “In the early scenes we used dollies and cranes, which provided smooth, steady movement. Then, when Ray meets and marries Della, the camera temporarily slows down, because she provided stability for him. However, as Ray’s ambition/ego heats up, and his use of heroin accelerates, we switched to a hand-held camera style to show the increasing instability in his life. At the end of the film, when Ray kicks heroin and resolves his relationship with his mother and brother, the camera finally slows down and stops.”

Costume designer Sharen Davis also contributed to the re-creation of an American past that hasn’t often been depicted on-screen. She began her work by poring over photographs of Ray Charles and other musicians on the Chitlin Circuit and beyond as styles morphed radically between the ‘40s and ‘70s. Though Ray himself was never a flashy dresser (his early “uniform” was a suit and bow tie), the Raelettes brought in more pizzazz; Davis took that one step further. “I used the original silhouettes of their costumes and enhanced the colors to make them pop even more,” she explains.

As Ray becomes more successful, his fashions expand into the colorful tuxes that became his trademark in the ‘60s and ‘70s; the Raelettes also become freer. “In the beginning, the Raelettes dressed very prim and proper because that’s what Ray wanted. He didn’t want them to be seen as sex kittens, but as something more classy. We made them just a little sexier by bringing down the necklines a little and making the dresses more form-fitting.”

Davis was fascinated to discover that Ray Charles numbered all of his clothing so he would always be able to dress himself. She also learned that the one thing that really mattered to him was fit. “It makes sense that the one thing he could really tell was the feeling of the clothes on him, so he always insisted that things fit him perfectly. To accurately depict this, almost every piece of clothing was custom-tailored to fit Jamie Foxx, because that’s how Ray really did it.” In the end, Davis would get to know Jamie Foxx quite well, simply because he had more than 100 costume changes during the

production! And, usually, his outfits were completed by one of several dozen pairs of Ray Charles' trademark wrap-around sunglasses.

For Kerry Washington's Della Robinson, Sharen Davis created a variation on the "Happy Homemaker," dressing her in sweet, candy-colored pastels, and then changing her outfits as Della grows wiser and stronger. "Della is usually either pregnant or in the house. She's never out on the road, so there is a domestic quality to her character," observes Davis. "But then, by the 1960s, when she has more money, you can see her style change a bit. Suddenly, she's wearing jewels and very tailored outfits. But she's never, ever gaudy."

Margie Hendricks, on the other hand, is "bright and wild and dripping with jewels." Says Davis, "Margie is never subtle and she always looks like she's ready to go out on the town. She also wears pants, which was a very bold fashion statement for women in that era, but she was a very strong woman."

As she worked, Davis found a surprisingly close collaborator in Taylor Hackford. "Taylor is that rare sort of person who notices absolutely everything," she says. "Right down to a sock or a purse, he would be able to say exactly what he wanted and what did and didn't work. I learned so much working with him."

To complete the look of the actors, creative makeup was essential. It was an especially major component of turning Jamie Foxx into a close approximation of a blind Ray Charles. Foxx's extensive, hour-long daily makeup routine involved, among other things, having uncomfortable prosthetics applied to his eyes for 12-hour days. Explains LaLette Littlejohn, key makeup artist, "Ray Charles had one eye essentially sewn shut and the other, though blind, was left open. So we tried to create this look for Jamie, with his right eye glued and his left eye partially closed, which was very difficult for him. It actually made him a little seasick, because his equilibrium was off. But it also helped him to learn how to feel his body movement in a whole different way which was essential to becoming Ray Charles."

Filmmakers felt strongly that the visual style of the filmic storytelling should echo not only the great artist's music, but also "some of the themes and feelings not easily expressed in words," according to Oscar®-winning editor Paul Hirsch. He continues, "This film gave us many opportunities for a poetic level of visual images—the bottle tree,

the sheets, memories from Ray's childhood when he could see. What you see on the screen is in the script; the interweaving of songs and scenes is by design. That was not something that Taylor and I created in the editing room, because it was planned even before shooting. What we did do was use our transitions in interesting ways. I'd say we used fade in/fade outs more than in most films today. There are several instances where we fade in only after the scene has begun, with voices in darkness, which subliminally gives the feeling of blindness."

With Hackford shooting on location, Hirsch was not able to view dailies. Instead, the director delivered the film to Hirsch (their first-time collaboration), who says, "He turned me loose with absolute freedom from the beginning. I asked how he preferred to shoot and learned that he's the type of director who knows what he wants and works toward that without stopping until he gets it—so I knew the shot he was going for was generally going to be one of the last takes. Taylor's intentions are quite specific in each scene and were easy to see. As an editor, I like to take first whack at a cut and present it to the director; then, we make changes to bring it in alignment with the sensibilities of the director.

"You only get one opportunity to see a picture for the first time," continues the editor. "It's my goal to make the experience for the director a good one, presenting as polished a cut as possible. I aim for something better than 'rough,' like if I feel the scene needs scoring, I'll put something in—obviously, that wasn't necessary on *Ray*."

Hirsch delivered his cut to Hackford four weeks after principal photography wrapped. After viewing, the two spent months in the editing room to refine the cuts. Hirsch comments that since the film was (initially) an independent feature film, "Taylor and I were the only ones in the editing room and we cut the picture without any other input—which I think is the best scenario possible."

"Paul came on the picture late," says Hackford, "about a month into the shoot, which is quite unusual. I'd never worked with him before and had selected him because of his resume, which included some great films. He flew to New Orleans and we spent the entire weekend talking about my vision of the picture. Then he went back to Los Angeles and started cutting. Three months later when I sat down to watch his editor's cut I had some trepidation, but after a couple of minutes I totally relaxed—he'd done a

fantastic job. It's uncanny how accurately he read my intentions. Working with him over the next several months was a total joy."

Quite Simply, The Music

The very heart and soul of telling Ray Charles' story had to be his music, which is why Taylor Hackford decided to evoke the emotions and events of Ray's life as much as possible through the power of his songs. From the beginning, Hackford had made a list of the key songs he wanted to appear in the film. These included:

- **I Got a Woman:** The song that propelled Ray Charles to fame and forever altered the future of music by melding sacred Gospel to secular R&B and defining a new form called "Soul." The song drew the attention of Elvis Presley when it hit the 1955 R&B charts. It also brewed controversy over the blasphemy of using ecstatic Gospel phrasings in a song about desire.
- **Drown in My Own Tears:** Ray Charles' 1956 smash hit, which was originally written by Henry Glover for the singer Lula Reed. His downbeat, Spiritual-style version had a heart-wrenching effect that made it a classic ballad.
- **What'd I Say:** For many, the definitive Ray Charles sound was captured on this 1959 hit, which showcased Ray on electric piano and was driven by a moaning call-and-response vocal that was pure primal sensuality. The song was at first banned by some radio stations, but in 2003, the Library of Congress chose to preserve this song as one of the most significant American recordings.
- **Georgia on My Mind:** This Hoagy Carmichael standard became Ray Charles' first #1 pop record and later the official Georgia state song. It took Ray in a new direction, using a lush choir and string orchestra instead of the Raelettes to back up his sweet, suave vocal.

- **Hit the Road Jack:** A #1 across-the-board chart-topper in 1961, this song highlighted Margie Hendricks, whose voice bores a hole in the heart as she begs Ray to get out of town.
- **Unchain My Heart:** A funky, soulful rendering of a man begging to be released from a one-sided love affair, featuring Latin rhythm, the Raelette's famous three-part harmony and Ray Charles' emotional vocal effects.
- **I Can't Stop Loving You:** Charles brought his own soulful touch to classic country with this first single off *Modern Sounds in Country & Western*. The soaring ballad wound up on the Billboard R&B charts for 10 straight weeks, selling more than a million copies.

Says Taylor Hackford: "Musically, this film was a very complicated piece. We were using some 40 different songs throughout the film, and using them to tell a story, so when the music ends, the mood is carried over and vice versa. When a song is on-screen, you're seeing that the song came from the emotion and the drama in his life and that the two are necessarily intertwined and related."

To help with the task of recreating Ray Charles' music with all the vitality and electric vibrancy it had from the get-go, Hackford brought in musical supervisor Curt Sobel, who was drawn to the scope and what he sees as the importance of the project. "I think Ray Charles was crucial to the history of 20th century culture," says Sobel. "He was the first person to succeed in pooling together everything great about our country's music, the feeling of Gospel, the joy of Boogie-Woogie, the depth of Blues, and turning it into something very unique."

Sobel was given full access to Ray Charles' vaults of recordings through the decades. But he also had the great luck to be able to work with Ray Charles himself in replicating his early recordings, collaborating with a group of New Orleans musicians who jumped with relish into pretending to be members of his original backing bands. Once these recordings were completed, Jamie Foxx then lip-synched his performances—replete with Ray's impassioned, swaying singing style—in order to capture him as a

much younger man. Although the musically gifted Foxx was able to do, by all accounts, an uncanny re-creation of Charles' singing voice, Sobel says: "Ray Charles was just too great not to use him when we had the chance."

For Sobel, working with Charles was a dream come true. "He was incredible to work with and it was extremely exciting for me," says the music supervisor. "He was such a gentleman in the studio and it was very interesting to see how he worked with the musicians with such perfectionism. We came to him with certain songs that we wanted him to record and played them for him on a CD and he listened for a minute or so and then he would just go into the studio and start playing it on piano. He was a phenomenal musician and we were truly lucky to have his involvement."

Sobel even shot video of Charles playing the piano so that Foxx could copy the movements of his hands. As shooting progressed, Sobel was overwhelmed by the work Foxx had done. "Sometimes you could swear you were looking at Ray Charles in the room," he notes. "Jamie's also a terrific piano player and he was able to learn all these very difficult parts. It's hard for me to imagine that anybody else could have taken on this role so fully."

To compose the score for the film, Hackford wanted someone with a deep passion and understanding for all forms of music, from the rush of a pop song to the emotions of string orchestrations. He chose multi-talented Scottish composer Craig Armstrong, who is known for his innovative, award-winning arrangements for the hit musical *Moulin Rouge!*, but equally for his work with such pop artists as Madonna, U2 and Massive Attack, as well as his own critically lauded classical compositions. "The film is driven by Ray's own music, but what we wanted the score to do is highlight more of Ray's inner world, to show how a man who went through a lot of suffering emotionally came out the other side," explains Hackford. "Craig gave us a beautiful score that is inspired by Ray Charles but serves as a contrast to his timeless music."

Ultimately, Hackford was gratified by watching so many different artists and craftsmen contribute to creating the story of Ray. "The one thing that really pleases me about the film is that in every element, from the music to the settings to the performances, it feels very immediate and exciting. I think what the actors and the crew have accomplished is something that's not at all about looking at the past, but about a man

who started something revolutionary—something that is still inspiring artists who will make new breakthroughs tomorrow.”

Universal Pictures and Bristol Bay Productions Present An Anvil Films Production, In Association with Baldwin Entertainment: Jamie Foxx in *Ray*, starring Kerry Washington, Clifton Powell, Harry Lennix, Terrence Dashon Howard, Larenz Tate, Richard Schiff and Regina King. The casting is by Nancy Klopper, C.S.A. The costume designer is Sharen Davis. The music supervisor is Curt Sobel; the score is composed by Craig Armstrong; original and new recordings are by Ray Charles. The film is edited by Paul Hirsch. The production designer is Stephen Altman. The director of photography is Pawel Edelman. The line producer is Barbara A. Hall; the co-producers are Ray Charles Robinson, Jr., Alise Benjamin and Nick Morton. The executive producers are William J. Immerman and Jaime Rucker King. *Ray* is produced by Taylor Hackford, Stuart Benjamin, Howard Baldwin and Karen Baldwin. The story is by Taylor Hackford and James L. White, with a screenplay by James L. White. The film is directed by Taylor Hackford. © 2004 Universal Studios. www.raymovie.com

RAY CHARLES TIMELINE

- September 23, 1930 Ray Charles Robinson is born in Albany, Georgia.
- 1937 A year after his brother drowns, Ray Charles loses his sight.
- 1948 Ray leaves the South and heads to the jumping Seattle scene.
- 1949 Makes his chart debut with “Confession Blues” on Swingtime Records.
- 1952 Atlantic Records signs Ray Charles.
- 1955 “I Got a Woman” hits No. 2 on the R&B charts.
- 1956 Ray has his first #1 R&B hit with “Drown In My Own Tears.”
- 1959 Leaves Atlantic Records for ABC Paramount.
- 1960 “Georgia on My Mind” becomes Ray’s first crossover #1 pop hit, and garners him his first Grammy Award.
- 1960 Ray’s debut ABC record, *The Genius Hits the Road*, goes Top Ten.
- 1962 *Modern Sounds in Country & Western Music* becomes #1 album.
- 1966 Convicted of heroin possession and subsequently goes into rehab.
- 1979 “Georgia on My Mind” becomes Georgia’s state song.
- 1986 Ray Charles inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.
- 1987 Receives Lifetime Achievement Award at the Grammy Awards.
- 1994 Wins the 12th Grammy of his career (for “A Song for You”).
- 2003 Library of Congress picks “What’d I Say” as one of America’s most significant recordings.
- June 11, 2004 Ray Charles dies at age 73.

About The Cast

Jamie Foxx (Ray Charles) is enjoying success in a multifaceted career that already encompasses dramatic roles in films and television, as well as stand-up comedy and music. Though previously best known for his comedy work, his emergence as a leading dramatic actor is evidenced in his most recent and upcoming roles. He most recently starred opposite Tom Cruise in Michael Mann's thriller *Collateral*; Foxx portrays Max, a taxi driver who becomes "collateral"—an expendable person—when he and his cab are hijacked for a night by a contract killer (Cruise) in town to carry out five hits before dawn. In addition to his title role in *Ray*, Foxx is set to star in the action thriller *Stealth* for director Rob Cohen, which is slated for release in 2005.

Foxx recently received critical acclaim for his portrayal of gang member-turned-Nobel Peace Prize nominee Stan Tookie Williams in the cable movie *Redemption*. He also starred opposite Gabrielle Union in the urban romantic comedy film *Breakin' All the Rules*.

Foxx first came to fame as a popular stand-up comedian and comedy actor. During the early 1990s, he was a regular on the comedy series *In Living Color*, alongside Keenan Ivory Wayans, Damon Wayans and Jim Carrey. He also had a recurring role on the series *Roc*, and guest-starred on several other shows.

In 1996, he launched his own series, *The Jamie Foxx Show*, which became one of the top-rated shows on the WB network. Foxx not only co-created and starred on the show, but also served as an executive producer and directed several episodes. During the show's five-year run, Foxx won an NAACP Image Award and earned three more nominations for Outstanding Actor in a Comedy Series.

On the big screen, Foxx received praise from both critics and audiences for his performance as a breakout star quarterback in Oliver Stone's 1999 football-themed drama *Any Given Sunday*, in which he joined an ensemble cast that also included Al Pacino, Cameron Diaz and LL Cool J. In addition to his on-screen role in the movie, Foxx wrote, produced and performed two songs featured on the film's soundtrack, including the title track and the chant "My Name is Willie."

He went on to co-star with Will Smith in the 2001 biopic *Ali*, which marked Foxx's first collaboration with director Michael Mann. His portrayal of Muhammad

Ali's corner man and constant inspiration, Drew Bundini Brown, brought Foxx another Image Award for Outstanding Supporting Actor in a Motion Picture. His additional film credits include *Bait*, *The Truth About Cats and Dogs* and *The Great White Hype*.

In 2002, Foxx brought down the house in his first HBO comedy special, *Jamie Foxx: I Might Need Some Security*. He also has the distinction of hosting the top-rated *Saturday Night Live* of the 2001-02 season.

Nominated for her first Independent Spirit Award for Best Actress in the film *Lift* in 2002, **Kerry Washington (Della Bea Robinson)** is proving to be one of the busiest actresses in Hollywood. She recently completed production on 20th Century Fox Studios' *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*, starring Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie.

Washington was most recently seen in the lead role opposite Anthony Mackey in Spike Lee's latest film, *She Hate Me*. In addition, she also recently wrapped Sidney Lumet's HBO film *Strip Search*—the story exposes some of the McCarthy-like paranoia that has plagued America since 9/11; she co-stars with Ellen Barkin, Glenn Close and Maggie Gyllenhaal. At the same time that she was shooting *Strip Search*, she was also filming and has finished work on the independent film *Sexual Life*, a series of vignettes about people and their relationships; in this film, Washington co-stars with Tom Everett Scott, Dulé Hill, Anne Heche and Azura Skye. Prior to those two films, Washington completed production on *Ray*.

She was also seen in Paramount Pictures' *Against the Ropes*, starring Meg Ryan. In this film she plays Renee Butler, the best friend and co-worker of Jackie Kallen (played by Ryan) who encourages her to re-invent herself as a boxing promoter. Washington was also seen in Paramount Classic's *The United States of Leland*, opposite Don Cheadle, Kevin Spacey and Ryan Gosling.

Other film credits for Washington include Miramax's *The Human Stain*, starring Nicole Kidman and Sir Anthony Hopkins; Jerry Bruckheimer's *Bad Company*, starring Chris Rock and Sir Anthony Hopkins and directed by Joel Schumacher; and *Lift*, written and directed by DeMane Davis and Khari Streeter. She's probably best known for her role in Paramount Pictures' *Save the Last Dance*, where she starred opposite Julia Stiles and Sean Patrick Thomas, in which Washington received a Teen Choice Award for Best

Breakout Performance. Prior to that, Washington starred in the highly acclaimed independent film, *Our Song*, playing a wise but conflicted teen.

A celebrated actor, **Clifton Powell (Jeff Brown)** most recently appeared in the thriller *Never Die Alone*, directed by Ernest Dickerson and starring DMX. His prolific list of feature film credits includes *Menace II Society*, *House Party*, *3 Ninjas*, *Deep Cover*, *Dead Presidents*, *Phantom* (opposite Peter O' Toole), *Deep Rising*, *Next Friday* and *Friday After Next* (with Ice Cube), *Rush Hour*, *Why Do Fools Fall in Love*, *The Brothers*, *Crime Partners* and Ernest Dickerson's *Bones*. His performance in the film *Civil Brand* garnered him a Best Actor award from the American Black Film Festival; the actor has also received several NAACP theater awards. He will soon be seen starring in *Woman Thou Art Loosed* (which won the Best American Film at the 2004 Santa Barbara Film Festival), opposite Kimberly Elise and Loretta Devine.

His many television credits include the series regular role of Bobby Deavers in the critically acclaimed *South Central*, Andre on *Roc*, as well as guest-starring roles on a diverse list of hit series, including *CSI*, *The Practice*, *Law & Order*, *Third Watch*, *N.Y.P.D. Blue*, *Martin* and *The Jamie Foxx Show*. He played Martin Luther King, Jr. in the telefilm *Selma, Lord, Selma* and his other telefilms include *Play'd*, *Buffalo Soldiers* (opposite Danny Glover), *A Private Affair* and *Having Our Say: The Delany Sisters' First 100 Years*. He also starred in Nickelodeon's Cable Ace Award-winning *Four Points*, hosted by Shaquille O'Neal, and appeared in Showtime's *Riot*, an anthology about the Los Angeles riots.

His live theatrical credits include the national tour of *A Soldier's Play*, as well as regional productions of *The Fabric of a Man*, *The Talented Tenth*, *Fraternity*, *The Mighty Gents* and *Zooman & the Sign*.

Chicago native **Harry Lennix (Joe Adams)** most recently starred in *Barbershop 2* and reprised the role of Commander Lock in *The Matrix Revolutions*, after originating the character in *Matrix Reloaded*. He starred in *The Human Stain* with Nicole Kidman and Anthony Hopkins, appeared in the independent film *Don't Explain* and portrayed Congressman Adam Clayton Powell in the Showtime Networks production *Keep the*

Faith, Baby, opposite Vanessa Williams. He starred this summer in the thriller *Suspect Zero* with Aaron Eckhart and Carrie-Anne Moss.

Lennix has co-starred in the Spike Lee films *Get on the Bus* and *Clockers*. Among his other feature credits are *Titus*, *All or Nothing*, *Love & Basketball*, *Guarding Tess* and *Bob Roberts*. He made his feature film debut starring in Robert Townsend's *The Five Heartbeats*.

A recipient of many awards for acting, Lennix began performing while a seminarian of the Roman Catholic Church. He later served as a teacher in the Chicago Public Schools for eight years. He is a member of artistic staff of The Goodman Theatre, and on the Board of Directors for Congo Square.

Lennix began his professional career while at Northwestern University (where he serves on the Board of Advisors). Thereafter he began working in many Chicago theaters. After moving to New York, he worked with Theater for a New Audience under the direction of Ms. Julie Taymor. With her, he later filmed *Titus*, for which he won The Golden Satellite Award from the International Press Academy.

Also with TFANA, he was part of the first American company to be invited to the Royal Shakespeare Company for a production of William Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* in 2001.

Terrence Dashon Howard (Gossie McKee) was the recipient of the NAACP Image Award, an independent Spirit Award and a Chicago Film Critics Award for his work in Malcolm D. Lee's *The Best Man*. After coming to the fore with a riveting performance in *Mr. Holland's Opus*, he has gone on to become a presence on both the big and small screens. Howard turned in a memorable performance as Cowboy in the Hughes brothers' *Dead Presidents*, starred in the action drama *Biker Boyz* and opposite Bruce Willis in Gregory Hoblit's *Hart's War* about American POWs. His films also include *Glitter*, *Angel Eyes* (with Jennifer Lopez), *Big Momma's House* and *The Players Club*, directed by Ice Cube. He'll next be seen in *Crash* with Sandra Bullock and Don Cheadle, and recently finished for television Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, starring Halle Berry.

Terrence will also be coming out in Ruben Santiago-Hudson's *Lackawanna Blues*, directed by George C. Wolfe for HBO. He is currently working on the independent film *Hustle & Flow* for John Singleton, in which he has the lead opposite Anthony Anderson.

Howard's television credits include the Showtime series *Street Time* and *Soul Food*. Aside from his extensive film and television career, Howard is also a scholar—he studied chemical engineering at the Pratt Institute and physics at Cooper University.

Larenz Tate (Quincy Jones) has earned the reputation as one of the most promising young actors in Hollywood. Tate, who received a Best Actor NAACP Image Award nomination for his role in Theodore Witcher's *Love Jones* (which won the Audience Award for Best Film at the 1997 Sundance Film Festival), will next be seen in the Paul Haggis-directed *Crash*.

Tate made his feature film debut in the Allen and Albert Hughes' drama *Menace II Society*. His other film credits include Clement Virgo's *Love Come Down*; Warner Bros.' *Why Do Fools Fall in Love*, opposite Halle Berry; Warner Bros.' *The Postman*, opposite Kevin Costner; the Matty Rich comedy *The Inkwell*; the Hughes brothers' acclaimed *Dead Presidents*; DreamWorks' *Biker Boyz*, opposite Laurence Fishburne; and F. Gary Gray's *A Man Apart*, opposite Vin Diesel.

On television, Tate earned recognition for his performance in the critically lauded Fox series *South Central*; the ABC series *New Attitudes*; and the CBS series *Royal Family*.

Tate studied music, theater and art with his two brothers Larron and Lahmard at the Inner City Cultural Center in Los Angeles. He made his professional acting debut in an episode of *The Twilight Zone - The Series*.

Born in Chicago, Tate now resides in Los Angeles.

Richard Schiff (Jerry Wexler) is perhaps best known for his role as Toby Ziegler, the White House Director of Communications, on the award-winning NBC television series *The West Wing*, for which he won the Emmy for Best Supporting Actor and received two subsequent nominations.

Schiff is an accomplished veteran of more than 40 feature film roles. He has acted in such films as Spike Lee's *Malcom X*, David Fincher's *Seven*, Steven Spielberg's *The Lost World: Jurassic Park*, *Hoffa*, *City Hall*, *Deep Impact*, *Dr. Doolittle*, *Living Out Loud*, *Forces of Nature*, *Heaven*, *People I Know* and *I Am Sam*.

Additionally has worked in television, giving memorable performances on the critically acclaimed series *Relativity*, as well as guest-starring on the series *Ally McBeal*, *The Practice*, *Chicago Hope* and *ER*.

Schiff began his career at the Manhattan Repertory Theater, directing both on and off-Broadway productions. After moving to Los Angeles to join Tim Robbins' Actors' Gang, Schiff won a Dramalogue award for the starring roll as Goose in David Rabe's *Goose and Tom Tom* and an Ovation Award for his roll in *Urban Folktales*.

Quickly becoming one of Hollywood's most sought-after talents, **Aunjanue Ellis'** (**Mary Ann Fisher**) resume is as versatile as she is. This beautiful, talented and intelligent actress has kept herself very busy nurturing a career in theater, film and television.

Ellis made her Broadway debut in George C. Wolfe's *The Tempest*, which began as a Shakespeare in the Park production. This spring, she appeared in *Drowning Crow*, an update of Chekhov's *The Seagull*, with Alfre Woodard at Broadway's Biltmore Theatre; she portrayed Hannah Jordan, the innocent little girl caught up in desire opposite Anthony Mackie as C-Trip, the tortured playwright.

Ellis starred in Imagine and Universal's hit *Undercover Brother*. Directed by Malcolm Lee (*The Best Man*), *Undercover Brother* is a live-action comedy based on Urban Media's popular website series. Aunjanue partners with Eddie Griffin to infiltrate a sinister underground movement led by Mr. Feather (Chris Kattan) and Penelope Snow (Denise Richards).

This follows her work with Cuba Gooding, Jr. in Fox 2000 Pictures' *Men of Honor*. In this film, based on a true-life story, Ellis plays Jo, the strong-minded wife to the first African-American Navy diver, Carl Brashear (Gooding). Director George Tillman, Jr. took months to cast the role of Jo because he needed an actress who was

capable of portraying a character who was not only beautiful and supportive, but sharp and intelligent as well.

Ellis will be seen in Fox's new show *Johnny Zero*. Other television credits include ABC's *The D.A.* and last year's medical drama *MDs*. She has appeared as a recurring character on *The Practice*, NBC's *Third Watch* and Fox's *New York Undercover*. Sidney Lumet had Ellis play several guest leads on his A&E show *100 Centre Street*.

Ellis studied acting in the graduate drama program at NYU after receiving her BA in African-American studies from Brown University.

Bokeem Woodbine (Fathead Newman) sprang to national attention in his first film *Strapped*, the directorial debut of actor Forrest Whitaker. He was recently seen in the award-winning Showtime feature *Jasper, Texas*.

Woodbine has amassed an impressive string of credits in a variety of feature film projects. He has acted in such comedies as director Christopher Guest's *Almost Heroes*, *Life* (opposite Eddie Murphy), *The Big Hit* and *Gridlock'd*. The actor has received critical notice for performances in many fine dramas, such as Mario Van Peebles' *Panther*, *Jason's Lyric* and Spike Lee's *Crooklyn*. Woodbine has given memorable television performances in the award-winning shows *The Sopranos* and *City of Angels*.

Woodbine is also a talented rock musician who both composes and plays the guitar. The actor is also a formidable martial artist, having studied Kung Fu in the Far East. He will next be seen in the independent feature *The Circle*.

Sharon Warren (Aretha Robinson) makes her feature film debut in *Ray* with her performance as Aretha Robinson, Ray Charles' fiercely independent mother.

In August 2002, Warren was performing in local theater productions in Atlanta when she heard of auditions for the film. After several impressive readings, her unrelenting passion won over award-winning director Hackford and she landed the highly coveted role. In a very short period of time, the Tuskegee, Alabama native went from local theater roles to a key film role in a major motion picture.

Warren always had an insatiable love for the arts. Her journey began as a child with a fusion of dance, vocals, music, art history, literature, Greek mythology, Shakespeare and Latin. Each discipline enhanced her development as a performer. In 1999, while majoring in Business Administration at Auburn University, Warren auditioned and won the role of Beneatha in the play *A Raisin in the Sun*. Her magnetic performance earned her a nomination for the prestigious Irene Ryan Award and gave her the motivation to pursue acting professionally.

Warren landed her first professional role in Ayoka Chenzira's play *Flying Over Purgatory*, portraying the daughter of famed actress Ruby Dee. It was after a wardrobe fitting for the role of Kat in *The Music Lesson* that Warren heard about the auditions for *Ray* that would change her life.

Warren is currently residing in Los Angeles.

Curtis Armstrong (Ahmet Ertegun) made his film debut as Tom Cruise's best friend in *Risky Business* and went on to appear in over 30 films, including *Revenge of the Nerds*; *Better Off Dead*; *Clan of the Cave Bear*; *One Crazy Summer*; *Hi, Honey, I'm Dead*; *The Adventures of Huck Finn*; *Jingle All the Way*; *Big Bully*; *National Lampoon's Van Wilder*, and many others. He is featured in the recent hit comedy *Dodgeball* and will be seen later this year in the Will Smith-produced *The Seat Filler* and with Tommy Lee Jones in *Cheer Up*.

He has also appeared in many stage and television productions and is particularly well known for close to 50 guest appearances on such shows as *Murphy Brown*, *Third Rock from the Sun*, *Cybill*, *Ally McBeal*, *Good Morning Miami*, *Joan of Arcadia* and *One on One*. He also had recurring roles in *Ed* and *Felicity*, as well as a memorable co-starring role (as Herbert Viola) in *Moonlighting*, with Bruce Willis and Cybill Shepherd, and on *The Chronicle* (as Sal the Pigboy). This fall, he will be heard on two new animated series: Disney's *Maggie* and on *American Dad*, in the role of Snot.

Armstrong is also a recognized expert on singer/songwriter Harry Nilsson and has co-produced a series of reissues of Nilsson's CDs.

Thanks to roles in a number of prominent films, **Regina King's (Margie Hendricks)** distinguished talents have not gone unnoticed by Hollywood. The skilled actress most recently starred in *A Cinderella Story*, opposite Hilary Duff and Jennifer Coolidge; King plays Mandy, the warm and likable woman who befriends Duff's character. King has also recently shot *Miss Congeniality 2*, opposite Sandra Bullock. The sequel finds Bullock reprising her role as FBI Special Agent Gracie Hart and King will play Samantha, a fellow FBI agent; the duo—at odds with each other at first—are partnered up and must head to Las Vegas on a new case they've been assigned.

She also appeared alongside Reese Witherspoon in *Legally Blonde 2: Red, White and Blonde*, the hotly anticipated sequel to the 2000 hit *Legally Blonde*. Last year, she also added *Daddy Day Care* to her impressive list of credits, starring opposite Eddie Murphy.

Born and raised in Los Angeles, King made her television debut on the hit sitcom *227*. After five seasons, King made the leap to the silver screen with a role in John Singleton's powerful directorial debut, *Boys N the Hood*. She would soon collaborate with Singleton again in *Poetic Justice* and *Higher Learning*. King has always been consistent in showing her dynamic range, bouncing effortlessly from dramatic material to comedic performances, like in the hit film *Friday* with Ice Cube and in *A Thin Line Between Love and Hate*, opposite Martin Lawrence.

But if there was a definite turning point in her career, it came in 1997 with her memorable role as Cuba Gooding, Jr.'s wife Marci in the blockbuster film *Jerry Maguire*. This led to starring roles in *How Stella Got Her Groove Back* with Angela Bassett; the hit action thriller *Enemy of the State*, opposite Will Smith; the family adventure *Mighty Joe Young*, with Charlize Theron; and the comedy *Down to Earth*, opposite Chris Rock.

King also found her way back to the small screen in 2000 with a role in HBO's acclaimed telefilm *If These Walls Could Talk 2* and in the 2002 NBC comedy, *Leap of Faith*.

King currently lives in Los Angeles with her husband Ian and her eight-year-old son, Ian, Jr.

About the Filmmakers

Taylor Hackford (Director / Producer / Story By) began his entertainment career at KCET, the Los Angeles public television affiliate, where he pioneered the presentation of uninterrupted Rock 'n' Roll performances on American television. In addition to creating several award-winning documentaries for the station's cultural department, he also served as an investigative reporter in their news division where he received an Associated Press Award and two Emmy awards for his journalism.

In 1979, Hackford won an Academy Award® in the category of Best Live-Action Short Film for his first dramatic effort, *Teenage Father*. He proceeded to make his feature directorial debut in 1980 with *The Idolmaker*, starring Ray Sharkey and Peter Gallagher.

An Officer and a Gentleman, starring Richard Gere and Debra Winger, was Taylor's second film which became a commercial and critical hit in 1982. It received five Academy Award® nominations and brought home Oscars® for Louis Gossett, Jr. as Best Supporting Actor and Best Original Song ("Up Where We Belong"). In addition, Hackford was nominated by the Directors Guild of America for his outstanding achievement.

On all his subsequent films, Taylor has functioned as both director and producer. His credits include *Against All Odds*, starring Jeff Bridges, Rachel Ward and James Woods; *White Nights*, starring Mikhail Baryshnikov, Gregory Hines, Helen Mirren and Isabella Rossellini; *Everybody's All-American*, starring Dennis Quaid, Jessica Lange and John Goodman; and the acclaimed documentary *Chuck Berry: Hail! Hail! Rock 'n' Roll*, featuring Chuck Berry and Keith Richards.

Hackford formed New Visions Pictures to produce modestly budgeted quality movies with other directors. Some of his producing credits include the much lauded *The Long Walk Home*, starring Sissy Spacek and Whoopi Goldberg; *Queens Logic*, featuring an ensemble cast which included John Malkovich, Kevin Bacon, Joe Mantegna, Jamie Lee Curtis and Linda Fiorentino; *Mortal Thoughts*, starring Demi Moore, Glenn Headley and Bruce Willis; and *Defenseless*, starring Barbara Hershey, Mary Beth Hurt and Sam Shepard.

Taylor, who has been fascinated by all things Latino since his stint as a Peace Corp volunteer in South America (1968-69), developed and produced *La Bamba*, the Ritchie Valens biography, which launched Lou Diamond Phillips' career. Written and directed by Luis Valdez, *La Bamba* became a sleeper success, breaking new ground for Hispanic artists in Hollywood.

He returned to directing after five years to helm the epic drama of East L.A., *Blood In, Blood Out (Bound by Honor)*. This film earned Hackford a trophy as Best Director at the 1993 Tokyo Film Festival. His next film, *Dolores Claiborne*, released by Castle Rock Entertainment and Columbia Pictures, starred Kathy Bates and Jennifer Jason Leigh. *Dolores* was selected for screening at the 1995 Venice, Deauville and Tokyo Film Festivals.

In 1996 Hackford discovered some unreleased documentary footage of the legendary Muhammed Ali/George Foreman title fight in Zaire, Africa. Originally shot in 1974 by filmmaker Leon Gast, Taylor restructured this footage into a feature documentary. He conducted present-day interviews with Spike Lee, Norman Mailer, George Plimpton and others, then edited them into the historical footage to reveal the hype, politics and personalities that made up this larger-than-life event. The completed film, *When We Were Kings*, was a hit at the 1996 Sundance Film Festival and won the 1997 Academy Award® for Best Documentary Feature.

In 1998 Hackford directed the critically acclaimed, world-wide hit *The Devil's Advocate* (1999), a contemporary morality tale set in the world of New York's powerful legal profession starring Al Pacino and Keanu Reeves. Then in 2001 he delivered the riveting *Proof of Life*, with Meg Ryan, Russell Crowe and David Morse, based on William Prochnau's *Vanity Fair* article "Adventures in the Ransom Trade," about the real-life kidnapping of American businessman Thomas Hargrove.

James L. White (Screenplay / Story By) hails from Mt. Sterling, Kentucky. After high school, James left Kentucky and joined the U.S. Navy, achieving rank as a communications supervisor, serving on destroyers. After four years in the military, James attended the University Of Massachusetts (Boston) on his G.I. Bill. White moved to California to pursue his dream of becoming a writer. He was first hired by Sidney

Poitier and Columbia Pictures in 1993, to write *Red Money* (a.k.a. *The Better Half*). In 1994, the John Davis Company and Fox Television hired him to write *The Bo Jackson Story*. The following year, 1995, MGM (with David Ladd as the executive on the project, *The Harlem Six*) retained James to pen the screenplay. In 1997, the award-winning Danny Glover series *American Dreamer* hired White to write an episode of *American Dreamer II* for HBO. James lives in Santa Monica, California, with his wife, Liz, their three children and their cat, Neo. He is represented by ICM.

Stuart Benjamin (Producer) has been active in the entertainment industry for nearly two decades. A graduate of the University of Southern California and Harvard Law School, he began his career in 1970 with the law firm of Wyman, Bautzer, Christensen, Kuchel & Silbert. He became a partner in 1975, specializing in business, securities and entertainment litigation, as well as sports law, and was chairman of the firm's entertainment department at the time he left the firm in January, 1988.

In 1971 Benjamin and director Taylor Hackford formed New Visions, Inc. Throughout most of the '70s they produced documentaries, docu-dramas and a great number of music concert shows. In the late 1970s, their short film *Teenage Father* won an Oscar® in that category. Films produced under the New Visions banner included *Against All Odds*, *White Nights*, *La Bamba* and *Everybody's All-American*. Outside of New Visions, Benjamin was actively involved in the production of the highly acclaimed *Testament*, which garnered an Oscar® nomination for Jane Alexander. Benjamin has served as the executive producer on *La Bamba*, *Everybody's All-American*, *Rooftops*, *Sweet Talker*, *Queen's Logic*, *Defenseless*, *The Long Walk Home* and *Mortal Thoughts*, as well as the American Playhouse production of *Billy Galvin*.

In 1988, Benjamin and Hackford formed New Visions Pictures, a joint venture between New Visions Entertainment and Cineplex Odeon. Benjamin served as President and Chief Operating Officer of New Visions Pictures from 1988 through 1991, during which time the venture produced six films. As a principal in New Visions Music Group along with Hackford and Joel Sill, Benjamin has been involved in a number of soundtrack albums, several of which have achieved gold or platinum status. New Visions Music Group has also been responsible for nine number one singles.

In 1991, he began his partnership with Alise Benjamin in Benjamin Productions. Together, they produced films for both network television and cable, including *Betrayal of Trust* for NBC, *The Abduction* for Lifetime Television and *Sodbusters* for Showtime. The company also produced *Corduroy*, an animated series for Viacom Productions and the USA Network, which became a Saturday morning series on CBS; and *Safe House*, starring Patrick Stewart and Kimberly Williams for Showtime.

In 2000 Benjamin was involved in the formation of Crusader Entertainment (now Bristol Bay Productions), a film and motion picture company financed by Phillip Anschutz and Howard Baldwin, and served as Executive Vice President of the Company from its formation until July, 2001, when he became a consultant/Independent Producer to Crusader with specific responsibilities on a number of Crusader's projects. It was while he was an executive at Crusader that the Ray Charles story was put into development.

In addition, Benjamin is the Managing Partner of Capstone Entertainment, which is in the business of producing specialized non-theatrical projects. Those projects include a reunion of the 1960s Vince Lombardi Green Bay Packers (which aired on ESPN Classics in January, 2002) and a series of comedy roasts with Shaquille O'Neal, shot at the MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas (which air on iNDemand as Pay-Per-View Specials). Capstone also promoted and produced a Ray Charles holiday/Gospel concert in December, 2002. The DVD of that concert, which Benjamin directed, has been distributed by Ventura Distribution and will be released as a CD for Christmas, 2004.

Benjamin also serves as one of the executive producers of the Ray Charles Tribute Concert, which is scheduled to take place on October 8, 2004, at Los Angeles' Staples Center, to be broadcast as a CBS television special.

Howard Baldwin (Producer) and Karen Baldwin formed the Baldwin Entertainment Group (B.E.G.) in February, 2004; Howard Baldwin is the President and CEO.

Baldwin was President of Crusader Entertainment and partner of Philip Anschutz from 2000 through early 2004. At Crusader, Baldwin developed and produced an impressive slate of films scheduled for release in 2004-2005, which include: the

Paramount action-adventure film *Sahara*, starring Matthew McConaughey and Penelope Cruz in the leading roles, based on the popular Clive Cussler book of the same name; *Swimming Upstream*, with Academy Award® winner Geoffrey Rush and Academy Award® nominee Judy Davis (MGM release); *Danny Deckchair*, the 2003 Toronto Film Festival Closing Night Gala film starring Rhys Ifans and Miranda Otto (to be released through Lion's Gate Entertainment); *Sound of Thunder* (Warner Bros.), with Academy Award® winner Sir Ben Kingsley; and *The Game of Their Lives*, starring Wes Bentley and Gerard Butler, written and directed by the team of *Hoosiers* and *Rudy* fame—David Anspaugh and Angelo Pizzo.

From 1984-2000 Baldwin formed and ran Baldwin/Cohen Productions with partner Richard Cohen, producing a variety of films such as *Sudden Death*, *Gideon*, *Resurrection* and the Russell Crowe hockey drama *Mystery Alaska*.

Prior to his career in film, Baldwin was integral in the formation and ownership of numerous sports franchises. In 1971, at the age of 28, he started the Hartford Whalers WHA hockey franchise; later he helped form Prism New England Sports Channel. Baldwin also co-brokered the historic merger of the WHA with the National Hockey League. In the early '90s, Baldwin became Chairman of the Board and owner of the two-time NHL Stanley Cup Champions, the Pittsburgh Penguins. Concurrently, Baldwin was the first American sports entrepreneur to break through the Iron Curtain and become 50% partner with the Russian government in ownership of the famous CCCP Red Army team in Moscow.

Equally noted for his diverse charitable activities, Baldwin was the driving force behind the Whalers' award-winning community relations program that was second to none in professional sports. He established the Whalers Foundation for Giving and a Whalers Teaching Chair in Pediatric Oncology at the University of Connecticut Health Center—a \$500,000 gift.

Presently, Howard Baldwin is partnered with Global Spectrum on the \$217 million Iowa Events Center under construction in downtown Des Moines, Iowa, that will house Baldwin's American Hockey League franchise.

Karen Baldwin (Producer), Senior Vice President of Creative Affairs for Baldwin Entertainment Group, has been involved in many different aspects of the entertainment business over the years. She feels her diversity of experience in all aspects of the entertainment business has helped to make her a well-rounded executive with an awareness of each component of the industry. Her wealth of personal experience “in the field” has served her well in her executive capacity. Having attended Holy Cross and Wellesley, Karen Baldwin graduated *Phi Beta Kappa* and holds a degree in psychology.

Baldwin began her career in professional sports as the Assistant All Star coordinator for the 1986 NHL All Star game hosted by the Hartford Whalers. She then went on to write and co-host her own local sports-oriented talk show in Hartford called *Ahead of the Game*.

A move to Los Angeles with her husband, Howard, in the ‘90s provided Karen with the opportunity to pursue an interest she had developed in high school and college—a career in acting. As an actress, her credits include *Blue Grass*, *Spellbinder*, *Sudden Death*, *Eyewitness to a Murder*, plus several other films and television guest appearances.

Having enjoyed a fair amount of success as an actress, Baldwin then became interested in the writing aspect of the business, which was to become her focus. She created several concepts for films and had them produced. *Redline*, *Hot*, *Eyewitness to a Murder*, *Seeing Red* and *Sudden Death* are a few of her writing credits.

Karen and Howard subsequently formed Baldwin/Cohen Entertainment with Richard Cohen, where Karen became interested in the development and producing end of the business and served as Vice President of Creative Affairs. During her tenure at Baldwin/Cohen, she helped develop and produce films such as *Sudden Death*, *Resurrection*, *Gideon* and *Mystery Alaska*.

Due to the death of their partner, Richard Cohen, the Baldwins then formed a partnership with Philip Anschutz and Crusader Entertainment was created. As Executive Vice President of Creative Affairs for Crusader Entertainment, Karen was involved with the day-to-day running of the company and the development and production of eight films in three years: *Joshua*, *Children on Their Birthdays*, *A Sound of Thunder*, *Game of Their Lives*, *Danny Deckchair*, *Swimming Upstream*, *Ray* and *Sahara*.

In 2004 the Baldwins formed their own independent development and production company, Baldwin Entertainment Group. With numerous projects in various stages of development, Karen Baldwin is currently the Senior Executive Vice President of Creative Affairs and a partner in the company. Her goal at Baldwin Entertainment Group is to work with talent (writers, directors and actors) in a highly collaborative fashion to develop quality scripts that will resonate with the public.

Pawel Edelman (Director of Photography) has worked primarily in Europe but won acclaim in the U.S with his starkly realistic photography for Roman Polanski's *The Pianist* set during the Nazi Occupation of Warsaw. His cinematography garnered an Academy Award® nomination, an ASC Award nomination, a BAFTA nomination and won the French Cesar and European Film Awards, among others. He reunites with Polanski on the forthcoming *Oliver Twist*.

Edelman graduated from the camera department of the Lodz Film School after earning a degree in Theory and History of Film at Lodz University. He first came to international attention in 1997 with two Polish features—Leszek Wosiewicz' *Kroniki domowe* and Jerzy Stuhr's *Historie milosne*—that earned him awards at film festivals around the world.

Since then, he has worked with master filmmaker Andrzej Wajda on three films: *Zemsta*, *Pan Tadeusz* and *Nastasja*. He also collaborated with Wladzyslaw Pasikowski on *Demony wojny*, *Slodko gorzki*, *Psy*, *Psy 2* and *Kroll*; shot Janus Zaorski's *Happy New York*; and photographed Lukasz Barczyk's version of *Hamlet* for Polish television.

Edelman is also an accomplished still photographer whose work has been exhibited in Lodz, Paris and Prague.

Stephen Altman (Production Designer) earned his first Academy Award® nomination, as well as AFI and BAFTA nominations, for his designs for the period mystery *Gosford Park*. He commenced his feature film career with the 1985 *Fool for Love*, and went on to design *The Player*, *Short Cuts*, *Prêt-à-Porter/Ready To Wear*, *Kansas City*, *Vincent & Theo*, *The Gingerbread Man*, *Cookie's Fortune* and *Dr. T & the Women*. His credits also include Kathryn Bigelow's vampire western *Near Dark*, the

Tina Turner biography *What's Love Got To Do With It?* and the hit comedy *Grosse Pointe Blank*. He most recently designed the comic thriller *The Big Bounce* for director George Armitage.

Paul Hirsch (Editor) has edited more than 30 films, including the first *Star Wars*, for which he won an Academy Award® in 1978, and *The Empire Strikes Back*. He has collaborated with Brian De Palma on 11 films, including *Carrie*, *Blow Out* and *Mission: Impossible*; worked with Herbert Ross on four films, including *Footloose*, *The Secret of My Success* and *Steel Magnolias*; and edited three films for John Hughes, including *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* and *Planes, Trains and Automobiles*. Hirsch most recently edited *The Fighting Temptations*.

Award-winning Scottish-born musician **Craig Armstrong (Composer)** has proved his versatility by fluidly shifting between musical genres, equally at home writing film scores or theatrical and classical compositions, producing/composing/arranging for world-class recording artists, and recording his own solo albums.

His scoring work was most recently heard in the tense thriller *The Clearing*, from director Pieter Jan Brugge, and in the ensemble romantic comedy *Love Actually*, from writer/director Richard Curtis.

His recent score for *The Quiet American* garnered him the Ivor Novello Award for Best Original Film Score. His work on Baz Luhrmann's groundbreaking musical *Moulin Rouge!* earned him AFI's Composer of the Year, a Golden Globe for Best Original Score of the Year and a BAFTA for Achievement in Film Music. His other feature film scoring credits include *The Magdalene Sisters*, *Kiss of the Dragon*, *The Bone Collector*, *Plunkett & Macleane*, *Best Laid Plans* and *Orphans*. His work as co-composer on *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (again with Baz Luhrmann) also earned him a BAFTA for Achievement in Film Music. He also composed additional music for the features *The Negotiator* and *Goldeneye*.

As a composer/producer/arranger, Armstrong has worked with a wide variety of artists, including U2, Madonna, Luciano Pavarotti, Massive Attack, Tina Turner, Suede, Pet Shop Boys, Michael Hutchence, Future Sound of London, Paul Buchannan and

Texas. Armstrong has recorded three solo albums: *As If To Nothing*, *The Space Between Us* and his latest, *Piano Works* (a collection of original piano pieces). He has composed two original works that premiered at the Edinburgh Festival (“20 Movements” in 1996 and *Chamber Opera* in 1993), and wrote “The Broken Heart” for the Royal Shakespeare Company (premiered 1994). And premiering in 2002 was “Northern Sound....Island,” which was commissioned by The Royal Scottish National Orchestra.

Curt Sobel (Music Supervisor) has previously collaborated with Taylor Hackford on *An Officer and a Gentleman*, *La Bamba*, *White Nights*, *Everybody’s All-American*, *Bound By Honor*, *Dolores Claiborne* and *Proof of Life*. His credits as a composer include *Alien Nation*, *Defenseless*, *A Cool Dry Place* and the soon-to-be-released *Tiptoes*. As a music consultant, his credits include *Donnie Brasco*, *Heat*, *Speed* and *The Secret Garden*. As a music editor, his credits include *Finding Neverland*, *The Majestic*, *I Am Sam*, *Bedazzled*, *X-Men*, *The Insider*, *Meet Joe Black*, *Men Don’t Leave*, *Hope Floats*, *Bright Lights*, *Big City* and *Risky Business*. He is an Emmy Award winner for his original song and a CableACE nominee for his original score for the telefilm *Cast a Deadly Spell*.

Sharen Davis (Costume Designer) last designed the costumes for *Out of Time*, starring Denzel Washington, which marked her fourth collaboration with director Carl Franklin. Previously, she worked with Franklin on *High Crimes* and *Devil in a Blue Dress*, as well as the acclaimed television series *Laurel Ave*. She has also worked with many of film and television’s most respected directors with credits that include *Antwone Fisher*, *Double Take*, *Nutty Professor II: The Klumps*, *Rush Hour*, *Dr. Dolittle*, *Money Talks* and *Equinox*. Davis’s next film will be *Beauty Shop*, starring Queen Latifah.

For television, her work includes *Vanishing Point*, *Nightjohn*, *Earth 2*, *Zooman*, *Midnight Runaround*, *State of Emergency* and *Younger and Younger*.