

IGOR KARPOV about the recording of RAY CONNIFF IN MOSCOW, celebrating its 50th anniversary

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Introduction and photo captions in English by his friend Dmitry:

50 years ago, in 1974, the All-Union Recording Company "Melodiya" for the first time began releasing music discs of foreign performers under licenses from foreign record companies, to the delight of Soviet music lovers. Before that (and often even after 1974), records by foreign musicians, as a rule, were distinguished by poor sound quality, since they were published in a practically "pirated" manner.

In the same 1974, a unique musical project for the country was carried out, which became an unofficial symbol of the "détente" policy between the USSR and the USA. The popular American conductor Ray Conniff came to Moscow to record a "Russian Album" in the studio, which was not only supposed to improve the image of the USSR in the world, but also to bring in a good profit from sales at home and abroad. This idea was continued in similar projects, for example in 1982 with the French conductor Caravelli, whose Moscow studio recordings were heard even in Europe and Japan. Looking ahead, it must be said that such bright ideas were born in the heads of Soviet leaders who knew and loved Western popular music and jazz. They made efforts to ensure that musicians in the USSR had the opportunity to make technically high-quality studio recordings.



Videoclip: <https://fanclub.paulmauriat.ru/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/1974-50th-ann.-RC-in-Moscow.mp4>

The discs of most foreign touring artists in the USSR were performances from Moscow concert halls, where recording was cheap and simple. This product was intended for domestic consumption, and the possibilities for its export were limited by the little-known status of these musicians in the world. Only occasionally were studio recordings made of foreigners, such as Anna German (Poland), Karel Gott (Czechoslovakia) and Dean Reed (USA and GDR). And it was already impossible to get a "real" Western performer, such as Frida Boccara (France), for a similar recording after her resounding success at home. Having recorded a disc with songs by Soviet composers in 1966, Boccara never performed in the Soviet Union again after her victory at the Eurovision Song Contest 1969.

The new approach, namely, to record world-famous conductors of popular music in the USSR in a studio, promised to show foreign listeners the high level of the Melodiya ensemble, similar to what happened in the world of classical music. To what extent this was implemented is a big question. The musicians of the Melodiya ensemble themselves preferred not to remember working with the American conductor, as well as with the French one. It seems that the head of the ensemble, Georgy Garanyan, was not involved in these recordings, having found more important things to do.

Here is an article by Igor Karpov, a member of the Ray Conniff International Fan Club since 1994, about the recording of the epochal album.

«RAY CONNIFF IN MOSCOW» FIFTY YEARS LATER

This year marks the 50th anniversary of two albums by Ray Conniff released in the Soviet Union. Back in 1974, the Melodiya company released the record «Ray Conniff — Alone Again (Naturally)» under license, and in December of the same year, Ray Conniff recorded an album of Russian melodies «Ray Conniff in Moscow» with Moscow musicians and singers.

Joseph Raymond (Ray) Conniff (Nov. 6, 1916 – Oct. 12, 2002), an American jazz musician and arranger, created his easily recognizable and unique style in the mid-1950s, the distinctive feature of which was the dubbing of orchestral instruments by human voices. This unusual and innovative sound, which later received the name "Ray Conniff Sound", very quickly became popular all over the world and even penetrated the "Iron Curtain".



In the Soviet Union in the 1960s, several individual tracks by Ray Conniff were released on flexi discs and various compilations of the series "Musical Kaleidoscope", "Everyone Who Loves Song", "Krugozor" and others. But Melodiya was able to release a full-length album only after the Soviet Union joined the Geneva Copyright Convention in 1973.

The Soviet side in transactions with Western companies was then represented by the firm "Soviskusstvo" of the All-Union Association "Mezhdunarodnaja Kniga" (MK) of the Ministry of Foreign Trade of the USSR, and not the firm "Melodiya", as many music lovers mistakenly believe.

The first licensing agreement was signed with the Spanish company "Hispanavox S.A." to release records by artists such as Raphael, Sara Montiel and the Spanish rock band Los Angeles. Also, under license from the British company EMI, a record by the Belgian chansonnier Salvatore Adamo was released. Then it was America's turn, and a contract was signed with the largest company CBS to release three albums in three different genres in the Soviet Union: "Ray Conniff - Alone Again (Naturally)" - popular music, "Miles Davis At Carnegie Hall" - jazz, "Stravinsky Conducts Perséphone" - classical music.

Ray Conniff's record was the first of these three to be released in 1974. In the Soviet Union, it was released without a title, on the front side of the sleeve was written "Ray Conniff" in letters stylized as the American flag, and there was also his portrait, which was transferred from the back of the cover of the original edition. 15,000 copies of the record were released, which, of course, was like a drop of water in the ocean even for Moscow alone. Therefore, few people saw this disc on open sale; all copies went to the black market, like most other licensed records released in the Soviet Union in limited editions.

The director of "Soviskusstvo" from MK in the 1970s and 1980s was Igor Nikolaevich Preferansky. It was he who put a lot of effort into organizing the recording of Ray Conniff's Russian album in Moscow in December 1974. Igor Preferansky also participated in the purchase of technical equipment and musical instruments abroad for the implementation of this project. It was Igor Nikolaevich who met Ray Conniff with his wife and daughter at Sheremetyevo Airport on December 8, 1974 and organized their stay in Moscow.

Ray Conniff arrived in Moscow after his concert tour in Great Britain, where he also took part in the recording of the soundtrack to the film "Paper Tiger". The Soviet side provided him with a full-fledged big band (18 musicians), the core of which was made up of jazz musicians from the Melodiya ensemble and 16 vocalists recruited from the Moscow Chamber Choir and the Ulybka quartet. Melodiya's regular pianist Boris Frumkin, for some reason, was unable to take part in the recording; he was replaced by Nikolai Levinovsky, the future founder and leader of the Allegro jazz ensemble. The famous Mosfilm sound engineer Viktor Babushkin was invited to record the album, and Rafik Ragimov assisted him. Ray Conniff himself was a good sound engineer and paid great attention to sound quality from his first recordings on Columbia in the mid-1950s. Babushkin was one of the best sound engineers in the Soviet Union, and Ray Conniff later praised his work in an interview with the American press.

"My engineer, Viktor, came closer to duplicating the rhythm sound I got on my old records" Conniff brags, "than some of the guys I'm working with in the U.S.". (People Magazine, January 20, 1975)

The arrangements were written by Conniff in advance, back in September. Moscow sent him the sheet music of 26 Soviet songs, of which he chose 11 and added an overture piece of his own composition, "Ray Conniff in Moscow." The recording took place from December 10 to 14 in the building of the Anglican church on Stankevich Street, where the Melodiya recording studio was located.

According to Nikolai Levinovsky, the orchestra musicians coped with Conniff's arrangements easily, but there were some problems with the choir, who had no idea about Conniff's jazz style and did not understand what he wanted from them. Ray Conniff later recalled that he had similar problems while working on his first album, "S Wonderful!" in 1955.

Sound engineer Viktor BABUSHKIN (left) and Ray CONNIFF at the control desk at Melodiya studio in Moscow in 1974. Photo taken and signed by Igor PREFERANSKY.

The head of the firm «Soviskusstvo» – a division of the «Mezhdunarodnaya Kniga» (MK) for the export and import of music recordings, Igor Nikolaevich PREFERANSKY in 1982.



«To Dear Ray, the greatest artist, with every best wishes and love as a memory of unforgettable days in Moscow from yours devoted, amateur photographer.

Igor Preferansky
16.XII 1974»

Joint CBS/Melodiya press conference, August 1974. From left to right: CBS Records International Vice President for A&R Sol RABINOWITZ, CBS Records International President Walter YETNIKOFF; CBS Records Group President Goddard LIBERZON; Director of «Mezhdunarodnaya Kniga» (MK) for sound recording activities Igor PREFERANSKY; Senior Economist at the USSR Embassy in Washington Yuri MELNIK.



A moment when Ray CONNIFF and his family posed to photographer Arkady GERSHMAN at St. Basil's Cathedral on Red Square in Moscow in December 1974.

The very first edition of the «Russian disc» with gatefold cover (released in 1975)

Ray CONNIFF with some members of the Melodiya ensemble. Far left: journalist Gleb SKOROKHOV, author of the annotation of the future record and a report in the sound magazine «Krugozor», No. 5 (May)/1975.

From left to right: assistant sound engineer Rafik RAGIMOV, sound engineer Viktor BABUSHKIN, Ray CONNIFF in Melodiya studio, December 1974.

Reissues of the album «Ray Conniff in Moscow» on CDs in Russia



1999
Boheme Music CDBMR 907078 /
Melodiya MEL CD 60 00453

2007
Melodiya
MEL CD 60 00453

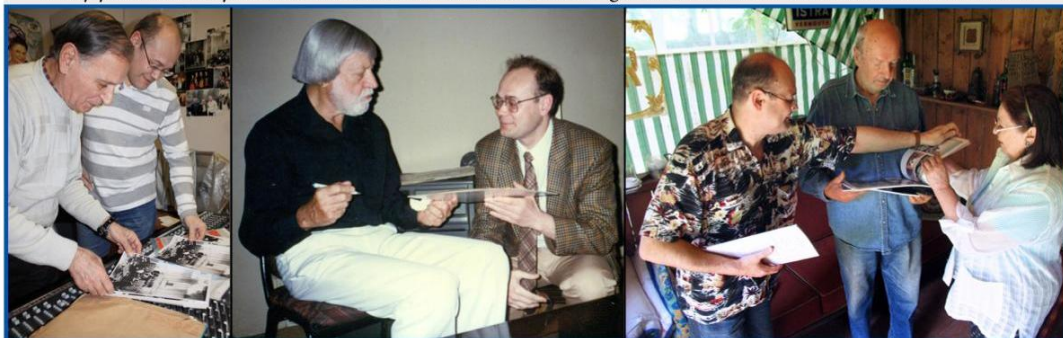
Editing and overdubs were completed by December 18. A quadraphonic version of the album was also recorded, which was impossible to release in the Soviet Union, because the production of household quadraphonic equipment in the country never began and remained only as a project.

During a break between recordings, Ray jammed with Soviet jazzmen consisting of soprano saxophone, trumpet, trombone, bass guitar and drums. They performed two jazz standards: "Muskrat Ramble" and "Tin Roof Blues". They planned to perform several concerts for the Moscow public, but unfortunately it did not work out. But they managed to film Ray Conniff's performance on television, which was not in the plan. This happened thanks to the initiative of the television director of the music department of the Central Television Marietta Rudina and her husband, the cameraman of the Ostankino television center Vladimir Zhoukov. Marietta and Vladimir wrote the script for the program, agreed with the television management about the studio and late in the evening of December 18 filmed an interview and the maestro's performance with the choir. This performance was shown on the program "Blue Light" on March 8, 1975. Later, it was partially repeated in the New Year's program of 1976. Unfortunately, this video recording was erased and for a long time it was considered lost forever, but fortunately, after Ray's death, when Manfred Thöncke, the president of the international fan club, was sorting through his archive, he found a tape with a fragment of this program. Later, he digitized this video recording and now it is available to many fans of the maestro's talent. (Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4PdM5OxOt-M>)

Pictures from the TV program «Blue Light» (filmed on 18.12.1974, broadcast on 08.03.1975) with the participation of RAY CONNIFF and Soviet vocalists in the studio of the Ostankino television center.



Many years later, Ray Conniff International Fan Club member Igor KARPOV with the heroes of his researches.



Meeting with sound engineer Rafik RAGIMOV in 2010, who assisted in the recording of R. Conniff's album in 1974.

Meeting with Ray CONNIFF at a concert in Brazil in 1996.

Meeting with Conniff's big fans in 2008: Marietta RUDINA, the director of «Blue Light» with R. Conniff in 1974 and her husband Vladimir ZHOUKOV, TV cameraman.



Ray CONNIFF, Vera CONNIFF, in the center Tamara CONNIFF – future editor-in-chief of the American magazine «BILLBOARD». Photo by Arkady Gershman

Conniff's work in Moscow was widely covered in the United States. "RAY CONNIFF PUTS SOVIET-AMERICAN DETENTE TO MUSIC", "RUSSIANS LIKE AMERICAN MUSICIAN", "CONNIFF FINDS KEY TO DETENTE" - read the newspaper headlines (see below ↓).

The host party organized a cultural program for Ray. He watched the ballet "Swan Lake" at the Bolshoi Theater and a jazz concert by Oleg Lundstrem at the Central Concert Hall "Russia".

On December 20, Ray Conniff and his family went to Switzerland to celebrate Christmas with his wife's parents. A year later, the album "Ray Conniff in Moscow" appeared on the shelves of the country. The record was printed at different factories in the Soviet Union and with different cover designs. There were no circulation restrictions, as in the case of the licensed record "Alone Again (Naturally)", so music lovers had no problems with purchasing this album. Conniff's Moscow album was also released in Spain, Portugal and several Latin American countries.

In 1999, already in the era of digital technology, the company "Boheme Music" released the album "Ray Conniff in Moscow" on CD, and in 2007 it was released on CD by "Melodiya" itself. Currently, the music from this album is a nostalgic journey into the past for many listeners.

Ray Coniff Puts Soviet-American Detente To Music

By GORDON F. JOSELOFF
MOSCOW (UPI) — Working in a one-time church in central Moscow, Ray Conniff has literally put Soviet-American detente to music.

The internationally known American musician, orchestra and chorus leader has recorded 11 songs in Moscow for Melodiya, the state recording company, using Soviet singers and players.

He is the first American musician to be invited by the Soviets to undertake such a project.

Ten of the songs are Conniff arrangements of popular Russian melodies. The 11th is his own composition written especially for the occasion.

All have the distinctive Conniff sound—lots of brass, rhythm, and singers "do, do-ing"—which has resulted in more than two million annual worldwide sales of his 55 albums.

"I feel quite honored by the invitation," Conniff said in an interview, exuding an almost gee-whiz, little boy amazement. "I had no idea I was popular in Russia."

He said he hoped "in a small way that it brings our two countries closer together. Everyone understands music. Its been a lot of work but its been worth it."

The idea to bring the Attleboro, Mass., native to Moscow was first suggested by Melodiya executives during talks last summer with Columbia Records, Conniff's U.S. recording company.

Melodiya and Columbia subsequently signed an agreement allowing each the right to distribute the others works.

"They sent me 24 or 25 songs and I picked the ones I thought I could write the best arrangements for," Conniff said. "I

didn't know which was more popular than the other so I had to go by instinct."

He said the songs had lots of variety, more than would be found in the American top tunes of the day.

"There were ballads, up tempo stuff, what I would call contemporary music and a couple of kazatkas, you know, the down-on-the-floor, kicking-the-feet kind of thing."

He scheduled the Moscow trip following an English concert tour, bringing along his Swiss-born wife, Vera, and their daughter, Tamara, 2.

"Normally I wouldn't do something like this without my own orchestra and singers, but they wanted to use their own people," he said. "Since this was a special kind of thing, I said okay."

Working in Melodiya's main recording studio, a one-time Protestant church not far from the Moscow Conservatory, reminded Conniff of the New York recording session for his first album in 1956.

"At first I was disappointed in the response here," he said. "But then as I thought a little more about it and thought back to the first time I brought this type of work into a studio with American musicians and singers, I had exactly the same problems with people trying to understand what I was trying

to accomplish.

"No one had really ever heard anybody trying to use singers as musicians. The engineer didn't know what I was trying to do. We had to go over and over and over. When I get to thinking back along that line, I really can't say that the Russians were slow in catching on, what with the language barrier and all.

"The engineer, Viktor, was a great asset. Soundwise he came

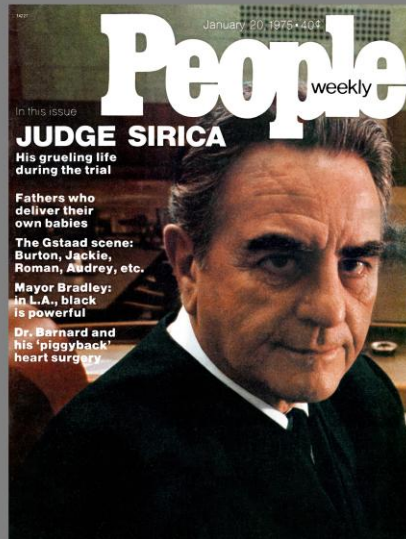
closer to duplicating the rhythm sound I got on my old records than some of the guys I'm working with now. The chorus was just great, too."

Conniff said it took four 3-hour sessions to do the 11 songs, longer than it would have taken with his own people. But he said he expected this.

"It was blood, sweat and tears every inch of the way, but I think we've got a real good product," he said.



(The Salina Journal, Wednesday, January 22, 1975)



FOR A SONG



Soviet pop music fans got to know Ray Conniff through an album of his American songs (above), recently issued in Russia.



During a break in the 10-day recording session, Conniff relaxes at the podium in a church-turned-recording studio.

Conniff, wife, Vera, and Tamara pose in Red Square for a Russian taking a cover picture for the new Soviet album.

CONNIFF GOES TO MOSCOW TO CUT A RUSSIAN ALBUM



What is it that the Soviet workers' paradise lacks that the capitalist proletariat has? At least in the mind of Melodiya—the Soviet state recording agency—it apparently is the sing-along quality of U.S. pop music with its big beat, heavy brass arrangements and massed singers "do-doing" and "boo-booing" in the universal language of choral accompaniment.

Corny? Maybe. But the Russians have nothing like it. And so Melodiya went to the fountainhead, 58-year-old American composer-arranger Ray Conniff, nine of whose 55 albums, beginning with *S'Wonderful* back in 1956, have been best-sellers.

As Conniff tells it, the Russians sent him two dozen popular Soviet songs and asked him to choose 11—and then to come over and record them. "I didn't know which were most popular, so I had to go by instinct," he says. "There were ballads, up-tempo stuff—what I would call contemporary music—and a couple *kazaki* songs, you know, the down-on-the-floor, kick-the-heels kind of thing." He graded them A+ to E-, took three weeks to arrange his choices—and then in a burst of enthusiasm wrote a twelfth song himself.

Melodiya wanted Conniff, but not his orchestra or chorus, although they did invite his 30-year-old Swiss-born third wife, Vera, and their daughter, Tamara, 2½. "Normally I wouldn't do this without my orchestra and singers. But, since this is special, I agreed."

The Russians provided him with 16 singers and 18 musicians, plus a swarm of recording technicians. "In the beginning," Conniff recalls, "I was reminded of my first recording session in 1956. No one understood what I was trying to do." Not the least of his problems was the recording studio—a former Protestant church where resident pigeons cooed during breaks.

But the Russian engineers quickly caught on to Conniff's echo-chamber techniques, and the singers responded to his (translated) exhortation: "More life—more rhythm!" Says Conniff, "I don't think they ever worked so hard before." He is obviously pleased with the results, which will be issued this month as an LP album selling in Soviet department and music stores for \$3.50. "My engineer, Viktor, came closer to duplicating the rhythm sound I got on my old records," Conniff brags, "than some of the guys I'm working with in the U.S." □

Photographs by Dick Nolan

Russians like U.S. musician

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(Above: The Ludington Daily News, January 21, 1975; below: The San Francisco Examiner, January 11, 1975)



Conniff finds key to detente

Bandleader Ray Conniff is making music for all of us in an old church in Moscow. Page 4.



The odds on an IRS audit

If you're careful and take safe deductions, you just might survive income-tax time. Page 31.

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