

OBITUARY: RAY SWINFIELD 1939–2019

by Lindy Swinfield*

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Ray Swinfield, who was born on December 14, 1939, died on October 4, 2019 aged 79. He played woodwinds with everyone from Count Basie to The Beatles. Lindy Swinfield has very kindly shared with London Jazz News this tribute to her late husband:

Ray's active 50-year career in music began in his native Australia. Aged eight, his love of music began in the primary school Fife Band. He recalled once in an interview that even from that early age, he knew he wanted to be a musician and was determined to work hard to achieve his goal.

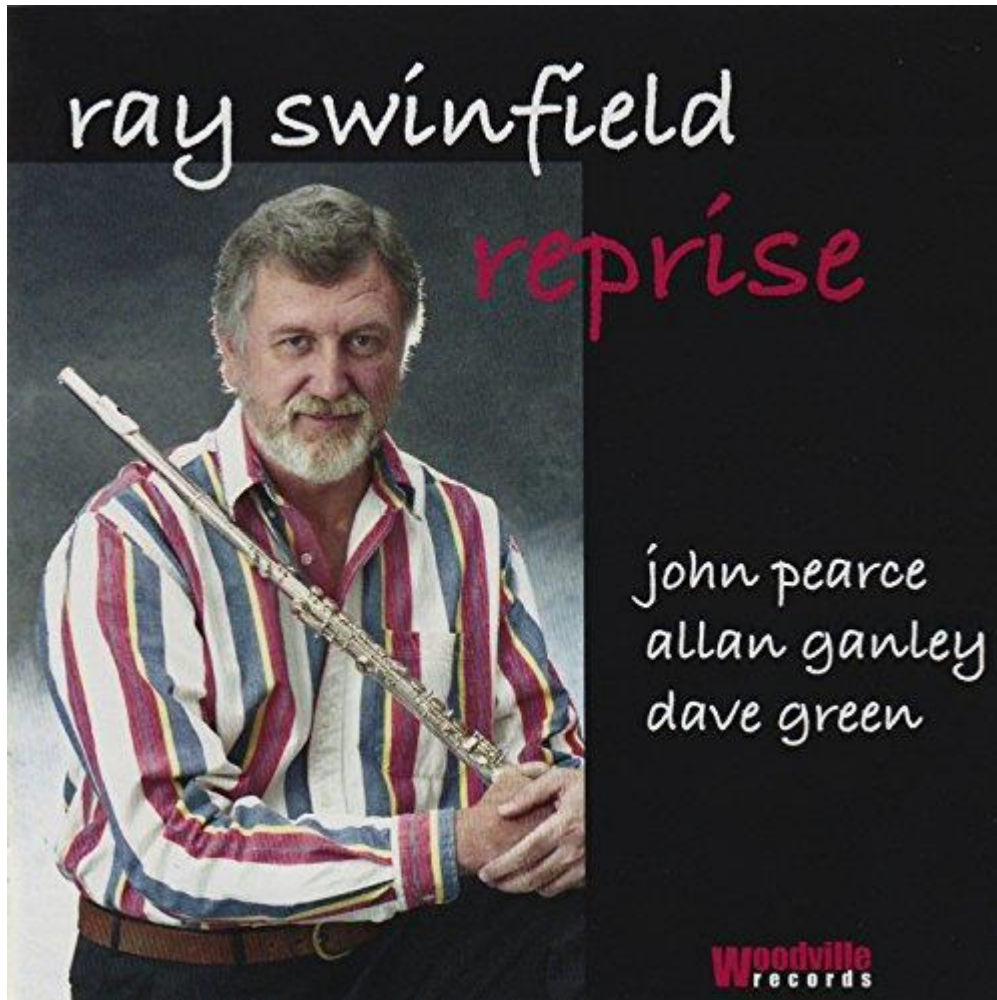


Ray Swinfield on flute: from an early age, he knew he wanted to be a musician...

In his teenage years, jazz became his main focus. He would race home from school to listen to his latest vinyl of Buddy DeFranco, Benny Goodman, Artie Shaw, Charlie Parker or Ben Webster, then practise the clarinet, saxophone and flute for hours. He was thrilled to see The Ted Heath Orchestra perform in Sydney, little knowing he would one day become a prominent member of that orchestra until its final performance in 2002.

**Lindy Swinfield is the wife of Ray Swinfield.*

At 17, his professional career began and he quickly proved to be a much sought-after player on the Sydney scene. This included numerous TV shows, studio work, jazz clubs, and recordings. Highlights throughout that time were a TV Special with Nat King Cole and playing in the orchestra conducted by Bill Miller for Frank Sinatra in his 1962 Australian concerts. At that time, he never imagined that one day he'd be playing in the Count Basie Orchestra behind Sinatra at The Royal Festival Hall.



Swinfield on the cover of his Woodville album, Reprise

In 1964, he arrived in England for an intended 12-month stay. His versatility and skill as a woodwind player was quickly recognised and led him to living and working here for the next 44 years, working beside musicians he highly regarded.

He became a regular and valued addition to the British music scene, which included session work, film soundtracks, commercials, TV shows, Royal Command Performances, BBC radio broadcasts, West End shows, pop recordings of the '60s... Tom Jones, Petula Clark, Dusty Springfield, Engelbert Humperdinck, The Beatles' *Penny Lane*, etc...

He made regular appearances with the LSO, the RPO, recorded albums with his own group Argenta Ora, worked with Harry James, Tubby Hayes, George Shearing, John Dankworth, Andre Previn, Henry Mancini, Michel LeGrand, Jerry Goldsmith... the

list is endless. He played in concerts, recorded or toured with Cleo Laine, Peggy Lee, Sarah Vaughan, Ella Fitzgerald, Tony Bennett, Bing Crosby, Fred Astaire, Natalie Cole, Liza Minnelli, Lena Horne, Kiri Te Kanawa, Mel Torme, too many to mention. He played in several bands but was a permanent member of The Don Lusher Band for many years. There were also dozens of TV shows from *Top of the Pops*, *The Dame Edna Experience* to *Strictly Come Dancing*.

Twice a *Downbeat* Poll winner, a guest lecturer at flute conventions, here and abroad, Album of the Year in jazz publications, Ray's mastery of his instruments received numerous accolades throughout his career but as Dave Gelly once said in *Jazz Journal*, it was "a brilliance lightly worn".



Ray Swinfield (left) is pictured in Sydney with Gill Falson, wife of the Australian trumpeter/arranger Ron Falson... PHOTO © RON FALSON ARCHIVE

21 years ago, Ray began to develop symptoms which, seven years later, were diagnosed as Parkinson's Disease. The first neurologist he saw, in 2002, told him he could no longer play with this condition and asked, "Is there anything else you can do?" Needless to say, Ray changed doctors and continued playing for another six years. Ray blew his last note on, ironically, *Parkinson*, the long running interview show hosted by Michael Parkinson.

To those who knew him, Ray wasn't just a brilliant musician but an inspirational man of integrity and generosity, endowed with a great wit and sense of humour.

He succumbed to dementia on October 4, 2019.