

= Ray Ray =

Ray Ray is the second studio album by American recording artist Raphael Saadiq , released October 5 , 2004 , on his record label Pookie Entertainment . After being dropped from Universal Records , Saadiq formed the label and worked on the album , for which he sought looser , 1970s @-@ inspired direction than his debut album Instant Vintage ( 2002 ) . He produced Ray Ray with Michael Angelo , Jake and the Phatman , and Kelvin Wooten .

Titled after Saadiq 's childhood nickname , Ray Ray has a looser , more conventional style than his debut album and incorporates funk . Its groove @-@ oriented songs exhibit Saadiq 's characteristic fusion of programmed beats , strings , neo soul melodies , and live guitar . They are arranged in a song cycle and touch on lighthearted romantic themes and socially conscious messages .

The album debuted at number 86 on the U.S. Billboard 200 chart , but fell off the next week . Upon its release , Ray Ray received generally positive reviews from music critics . Although some were ambivalent towards its loose blaxploitation concept and Saadiq 's songwriting , critics praised the album 's production quality and vintage musical approach . It is currently out of print .

= = Background = =

In 2002 , Saadiq released his debut solo album Instant Vintage , which received critical acclaim and earned him five Grammy Award nominations . However , despite attaining a following among listeners in Europe , it was largely ignored by contemporary R & B listeners in the United States and did not sell well . After its release , he was dropped by his record label Universal Records .

Saadiq subsequently formed his own label , Pookie Entertainment , on which he released the double live album All Hits at the House of Blues in 2003 . The live album showcased Saadiq 's solo material and songs he recorded as a part of Tony ! Toni ! Toné ! during the late 1980s and 1990s . Saadiq also continued working as a producer for other recording artists , including Erykah Badu , Kelis , Jill Scott , Nappy Roots , Earth , Wind & Fire , Sunshine Anderson , and Jaguar Wright .

= = Recording = =

Having fulfilled his creative ambition with Instant Vintage , he sought a looser direction for a follow @-@ up studio album . He said of the direction for Ray Ray in an interview for Rolling Stone , " You only get to make a first statement one time , and I had definite ideas of how I wanted it to sound . Ray Ray represents a more fun side of what I do . I wanted to have a good time with it . " In an interview for The Baltimore Sun , Saadiq discussed the inspiration behind the album 's blaxploitation concept , stating :

Saadiq recorded the album with producers Michael Angelo , Focus ... , and Jake and the Phatman , among others . He also worked with singer @-@ songwriter Joi , former Tony ! Toni ! Toné ! member D 'wayne Wiggins , singer @-@ songwriter Teedra Moses , singer Dawn Robinson , formerly of Saadiq 's other group Lucy Pearl , singer @-@ songwriter Babyface , and rapper Allie Baba , Saadiq 's nephew . The album 's title is a reference to his mother 's nickname for him , also a childhood name . Its cover artwork was inspired by the blaxploitation films of the 1970s . It shows Saadiq dressed in a vintage cornflower blue suit , knicker pants , and lime green argyle socks , while leaning on a white 1967 Mercury Cougar .

= = Music and lyrics = =

The album contains a more funk @-@ oriented sound than Instant Vintage , while it features romantic and some message @-@ oriented themes . In comparison to that album , Saadiq has called Ray Ray " more aggressive , more radio @-@ friendly ... one of those good , Saturday @-@ playing records " . It incorporates R & B , funk , and soul styles , as well as elements of gospel and hip hop music .

As with his debut album , Ray Ray features Saadiq 's characteristic fusion of programmed beats ,

strings , neo soul melodies , and live guitars . The songs are mostly mid @-@ tempo and groove @-@ based , and also feature rubbery bass lines and horns . Allmusic 's Andy Kellman views that the album 's music is " a little funkier and a lot more energetic than 2002 's Instant Vintage , yet just as full of Saadiq 's stylish flourishes . " He writes of the album 's subject matter , " for every song that 's charmingly simple and full of lighthearted romantic sentiments , there 's something message @-@ oriented " . Ken Capobianco of The Boston Globe characterizes the album 's mood as " playful " and writes that it is composed as " a bouncy song cycle that 's a throwback to ' 70s funk . "

The album 's first two tracks , " Blaxploitation " and " Ray Ray Theme " , serve as audio vignettes introducing Saadiq 's alter ego as the main character of a faux @-@ Blaxploitation soundtrack . The latter track has singer Joi calling upon the character , addressing him as " soul brother number one " , to " shoot me with your bop gun " . Both songs help establish the character as a ladies ' man with a penchant for fast cars . However , the concept is not sustained in the following songs on the album . " I Know Shuggie Otis " is a tribute to psychedelic recording artist Shuggie Otis and features a screeching guitar solo . " This One " features orchestral pop and gleeful tones . " Chic Like You " contains elements of G @-@ funk , gospel @-@ styled , vocal " mmms " and fluid , funky keyboards . Its lyrics depict sensual images : " She soaks in green tea lotion / Her legs are so outspoken " .

" Not a Game " features a spare hip hop beat and an emotional vocal delivery by Saadiq . " Rifle Love " utilizes the sounds of barrel clicks and gunshots as a rhythm section in its chorus . Both " Live Without You " and " I Want You Back " are pleas to an ex @-@ lover and have romantic crooning by Saadiq over a gritty funk groove . " I Want You Back " also features elements of Miami bass and electro @-@ styled synthesizers . Saadiq adopts a falsetto / high tenor singing voice on " Grown Folks " . It features socially conscious lyrics and a Latin @-@ tinged arrangement . " Save Us " has a theme of disillusionment and features sparse keyboard and a somber refrain .

= = Release and reception = =

Ray Ray was released by Pookie Entertainment on October 5 , 2004 , in the United States . Two singles were released in promotion of the album , " Chic Like You " and " I Want You Back " . The album debuted on the U.S. Billboard 200 chart in the week of October 23 . It was the album 's only week on the chart . Ray Ray also spent eight weeks on the Billboard Top R & B / Hip @-@ Hop Albums , on which it peaked at number 18 . It eventually went out of print in the U.S. In France , the album charted for two weeks and reached number 145 .

Ray Ray received generally positive reviews from critics . At Metacritic , which assigns a normalized rating out of 100 to reviews from mainstream publications , the album received an average score of 66 , based on six reviews . Phil Johnson of The Independent called it " madder and badder " than Saadiq 's debut record and found its sound " more radical " , stating " no one can distress a production like Raphael , whose multi @-@ instrumental talents and Stevie Wonder @-@ ish voice make him a Prince for the Noughties . " Andria Lisle of Paste commended Saadiq 's " versatility " and found the album " softer than Cee @-@ lo and sexier than Ricky Fanté " . Neil Drumming of Entertainment Weekly complimented Saadiq 's " bass virtuosity " and " grown and sexy " vibe , although he viewed some of his songwriting as " amateur " . The Boston Globe 's Ken Capobianco observed an " overriding sense of joy and mischief throughout jams " , and found Saadiq 's " musical exuberance ... infectious " .

Although he found it lacking a " centerpiece track " , Capobianco ultimately praised the album as a " funk " departure from most of the contemporary soul he found " studied and overly reverent " . Slant Magazine editor Sal Cinquemani found it flawed as a concept album , but commended Saadiq for " conjuring soul greats like Stevie Wonder ( ' Live Without You ' ) , Curtis Mayfield ( ' Grown Folks ' ) , and Prince ( ' I Know Shuggie Otis ' ) throughout " , and stated , " just because the storyline ( s ) ... ceases to exist after the first few songs that doesn 't mean the rest of the tracks aren 't good . " Geoffrey Himes of The Washington Post noted Saadiq for having " a rare gift for linking seductive melodies to slinky grooves " and stated , " Ray Ray is just a collection of disconnected songs ... failing to establish a narrative . But what terrific songs they are . "

Allmusic 's Andy Kellman complimented its " varied " subject matter and wrote in summation , " Ray

Ray occasionally loses focus , slipping into moments that are either undercooked or worthy of the cutting room , but it 's enjoyable enough to keep his followers happy and will certainly act as a remedy for those who don 't like the gold @-@ bricked path being taken by mainstream R & B. " Ethan Brown of New York stated , " Despite its faults ? and there are many ... Ray Ray is a startlingly inventive record " , and found Saadiq " at his best when he revives the sad soul of Sam Cooke " on songs like " Not a Game " . Andrew Simon of Vibe found a " handful " of songs to be poorly conceived and viewed that the album 's strength was Saadiq 's " crisp " production and bass playing , writing that " On a dime , the thick tones of the multi @-@ instrumentalist 's weaopn of choice go from low and rumbly to high and tight . " He ultimately commended Saadiq 's intentions with the album 's concept , stating " Ray Ray hits more than it misses in its celebration of a time when George was making the mothership connection and Marvin just wanted to get it on . "

= = Track listing = =

Credits adapted from liner notes .

? ( co . ) Co @-@ producer

= = Personnel = =

Credits for Ray Ray adapted from liner notes .

= = Charts = =