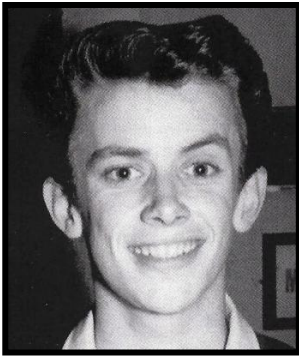


Ray Columbus OBE CM

4 Nov 1942 – 29 Nov 2016

You're only as good as your next show.



Raymond John Patrick Columbus was born on 4th November 1942 in Christchurch to Cressey (b. Bell) a milliner at *Ballantyne's Department Store* and John (Jack) Columbus, a hotel worker. Ray's Great grandfather Nicholas Columbus had emigrated from Greece and his mothers ancestors were Irish. In 1942 Jack joined the Army and fought in Egypt, returning in 1944 with sand damaged lungs. He became an alcoholic and was rarely home so life was hard for the Columbus family. There were 7 siblings; Brian, Patricia, Ray, David, Barry, Lorraine and Gail; They lived in a state house in Woolston and Cressey worked in the cafeteria of a panel beater and on the sweets counter at the *Avon Picture Theater*.

The Columbus's were a musical family; Jack played harmonica and Cressey was a very good whistler, idolising Ronnie Ronalde. Six year old Ray and his sister Patricia began taking singing and tap dancing lessons with Pauline Leathem; as the family had no money the pair would walk 10 kms to their class every Saturday. One of the pianists at the studio was Nellie Mayberry, the grandmother of Jack Mayberry. Patricia and Ray did well in competitions; through tap dancing Ray developed a love of performance and costume. Later he took up ballroom dancing at the *Sid Hollis Dance School*.

Ray went to *St Anne's School* and *Xavier College* where he excelled at soccer, later becoming a Canterbury rep. He was an altar boy and joined the church choir as a solo soprano. His first job was selling ice creams at age 9 and it was while working at the *Avon Theater* that he got to watch; James Dean's *Rebel without a Cause*, Elvis Presley's *Jailhouse Rock*, *Blackboard Jungle* with its theme tune by *Bill Hayley and his Comets*, *Rock around the Clock* and *The Wild One* starring Marlin Brando. Ray became hooked on Rock & Roll! He begun smoking at age 6, fishing his father's butts out of the fireplace and he eventually developed an 80-a-day habit.

Ray's first job on leaving school was in the *Tax Department* He had applied for the priesthood but was rejected. He started visiting the *US Navy* icebreakers at Littleton Harbour and buying American records, clothing and cigarettes from the sailors.

Around the end of 1958 Ray put together his first band with drummer Peter Ward, pianist Billy Karaitiana and Andy Jones on guitar. Their main influences were the *Everly Brothers*, Little Richard, Jerry Lee Lewis and Buddy Holly, although Columbus had started to pen his own songs. They called themselves the *Dominoes* and their first gig was with the Trinidad pianist Winifred Atwell.

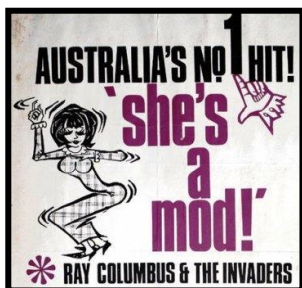


The band quickly broke up with Billy moving to *Max Merritt and the Meteors* and Peter joining Doc Foster's group, the *Downbeats*. Peter soon convinced Doc to take on Ray as their vocalist for the *Spencer Street Dancehall* gigs and As band members left they were replaced by members of the *Dominoes* until eventually Doc left and the old band was pretty the *Dominos* again. They got gigs at the *Bird Dog Club*, a social venue for *Operation Deep Freeze* servicemen, where they were exposed to American artists such as James Brown, Jackie Wilson and Ray Charles. *Cliff Richards and the Shadows* toured

New Zealand in March 1961 and impressed the boys with their *Fender* guitars, Vox amplifiers and echo units; the *Downbeats* ordered a matching set of 3 *fiesta-red Fenders* through their American friends. The line up was now Brian Ringrose and Dave Russell on Guitars, Peter Ward on drums, Mac Jamieson on bass and Ray on vocals.

They were offered a local television show, *Club Columbus*, which screened in 1962 and the group decided on a new name, the *Invaders*. They took on Mac Jamieson as their manager and he arranged for them to be the resident band at *The Plainsman* in Lichfield Street. Ray's dance skills began to shine through and he choreographed the bands movements to a polished performance.

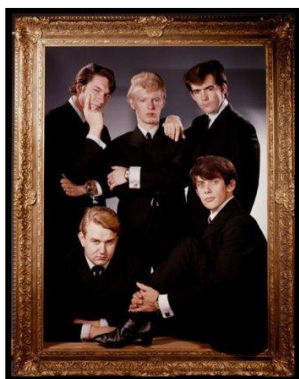
In 1963 Auckland promoter Dave Dunningham offered the boys 6 weeks work. 'We took the place by storm then signed a contract with Phil Warren to open the *Monaco* in Federal St. Phil also sold us to other clubs so we would play some nights at the *Shiralee*, Thursday nights at the *Oriental*, lunches at the *Bali Hi* and every Friday and Saturday night at the *Monaco*.' Eldred Stebbing signed them to a contract with *Zodiac Records* and their first release was two Columbus originals, *Money Lover* and *So in Love*. It bombed! Their next single is a cover of the instrumental *Ku Pow/Autumn Leaves* and that was followed by Lennon and McCartney's *I Wanna Be Your Man*. *Ku-Pow* got air play in Australia so Stebbing decided to finance a tour across the Tasman. In November 1963 they played at *Surf City* in Kings Cross, Sydney with Ray as their manager. The line up is now; David Russell (Lead Guitar), Wally Scott (Rhythm Guitar), Billy Karaitiana (Bass Guitar), Jimmy Hill (Drums) and Ray Columbus (Vocals).



In February 1964 the group returned to NZ to record a cover of *The Senators* song, *She's a Mod*. Initially none of the *Invaders* liked it although Columbus thought it had potential. Released in June 1964 it didn't attract much interest in New Zealand as the *Beatles* were visiting. The *Invaders* returned to Sydney and the song took off and New Zealand sales followed.

Ray acted in the film *Runaway* and the *Invaders* performed on two television programs, *Bandstand* and *Sing, Sing, Sing*, receiving good newspaper and magazine coverage. *The Easybeats* and *Bee Gees* copied their sound and dress. *I Wanna be your Man* got into the Australian Top 40, the first time a NZ recording charted in Australia. By October *She's a Mod* was top of the charts on both sides of the Tasman, the first New Zealand band to have an international No. 1 hit.

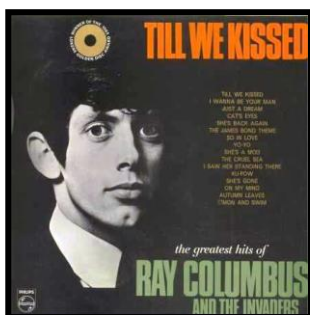
Ray met Le'Vonne at the *Shiralee* in Auckland and they married in August 1964, a day before he flew to Australia to promote *She's a Mod*. They had two children, Danielle and Sean.



The Invaders first Australian tour, Harry M. Miller's *Starlift 64*, included *The Searchers*, *Del Shannon*, *Peter & Gordon*, *Eden Kane* and *Dinah Lee*. The group next toured with *Billy Thorpe and the Aztecs* then joined *Big Beat 65* with the *Rolling Stones*, *Roy Orbison* and the *Newbeats*. Orbison reckoned they were the loudest band in the world; louder than the *Beatles* and the *Rolling Stones*.

Back in Sydney they recorded Dave and Ray's song *Yoyo*. An EP called *Now You Shake* was released but didn't sell well. They recorded their LP *Original Numbers* in Auckland and on it was *Till We Kissed*, originally called *Where Have You Been*, released by Canadian group *Guess Who*. Ray decided to record it as a ballad; they added 6 violins, Mike Perjanik on piano and then redubbed it five times. Released in July 1965 it reached number one in NZ and four in Australia and for 20 years held the record for the most copies sold in NZ, finally beaten by *OMC's How Bizarre*. The video was the first made-for-television in NZ. It was rated on *Cash Box* and *Billboard*, the first Australian record to do so.

In June 1965 they toured with the *Dave Clarke Five* and *Tommy Quickly* but soon after that the band broke up and Ray went solo! 'The band tried to get work visas to America after we had big hits in Australia and New Zealand and they turned us down because the consular general said, 'We need teachers and nurses, not musicians'. I knew I could get a green card but I didn't want to go without the group. Billy and Jimmy joined *Max Merrit and the Meteors* in Australia because they thought they could make more money.'



In November *Till We Kissed* won the *Loxene Golden Disc Award* and the same night Le'Vonne gave birth to Danielle by caesarean. In 1966 a greatest hits album was released and Columbus toured with *Tom Jones* and *Herman's Hermits*. Le'Vonne is an American citizen so Ray signed a contract with *Jim*

Ruder and moved his family to San Francisco. He is then taken up by *Al Zehner's Topstar Management*. Ray's song, *I Need You*, won an *APRA Silver Scroll* for best composition and it hit number 12 in the NZ hit parade.



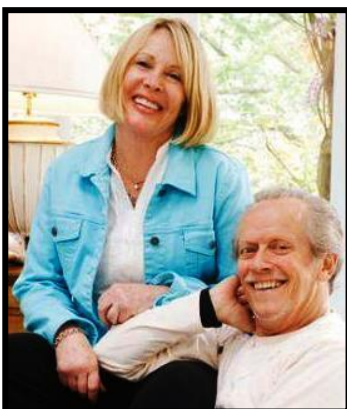
In 1967 Ray was also publishing and writing songs and founded the *Art Collection* which performed throughout California. His first US single *Kick Me* got good airplay but the band broke up soon after. In 1968 Ray returned to New Zealand to star on *C'mon 68* and worked with agent Phil Warren managing *The Chicks*, *Shane*, *The Rumour*, *Tina Cross*, *Challenge*, *Tommy Ferguson*, *Troubled Minds* and *Zed*. 1969 was another busy year with Ray doing another series of *C'mon* as well as his own weekly national radio show. He hosted *Girls to Watch Music By* and released *Travelling Singing Man*, a finalist in the *1970 Loxene Golden Disk Awards*. He performed in the *Super Pop 70* in front of Prince Charles and Princess Ann; produced by Max Cryer.

The following year *People Are People* made the finals for the 1971 Awards. Max Cryer arranged for Ray to take singing lessons from Dorothy Hopkins and Ray has his throat nodules operated on and was silent for six weeks. In 1973 the title track from the *Jangles, Spanners and Banners* album shared an *APRA* song writing award with pianist Mike Harvey. Ray also received the *VAC Benny Award* and a merit award from NEBOA. His television show *My Name is Ray Columbus* was broadcast.

1974 saw Columbus awarded *Entertainer of the Year* and he released his greatest hits album. Ray was Master of Ceremonies at the *Royal Command Concert* in Christchurch and received an *OBE*, the first NZ pop star to be awarded this distinction. He became a member of the *APRA Music Committee* supporting local composers, authors, and songwriters, from 1970--80 when he became a board member.

In 1975 he fronted TV2's *New Faces* followed by *That's Country* which ran from 1980--84, one of New Zealand's top rating shows and the first New Zealand-made entertainment show to be sold in the US. He was appointed to the *QE2 Arts Council* (1975-83) where he was branded 'Mr Quota' as he pushed for more local music on radio and television. With Hamish Keith he arranged an emergency grant of \$5000 for *Split Enz* when they were stranded in London in 1976 with their recording contract cancelled. His role in the music quotas campaign backfired when local radio stations refused to play his recording *I Want To Be The Singer*. In 1979 Ray visited Tokyo promoting NZ music for the *NZ-Japan Foundation*. In the early 80s he returned to the *Stebbing Studio* to produce several successful records for country singer Patsy Riggir.

In 1988 Ray was on the board of the *Sir Robert Kerridge Foundation*. He was employed by the *Foundation for Alcohol and Drug Education* in the late 1980s and again in the early 1990s as an event manager. He was presented with the *Commemorative Medal* in 1990 for contributions to the 150th anniversary of New Zealand. He later helped organise the *Ride against Drugs* in 1993 which saw sports personalities ride bikes the length of New Zealand.



Ray divorced in 1987 and in 1992 he married his present wife Linda and adopted her daughter, Tina. Ray was running an Italian-style cafe in Remuera but the next year they moved to a large property near Matakana where he managed the *Matakana Event and Function Centre*.

He sued the *NZ Truth* for \$675,000 in 1997 for claiming that Columbus received \$70,000 for organising 45 minutes of entertainment for the Auckland Rugby Union at a test match between the *All Blacks* and the *Springboks* at Eden Park. He actually got \$5000 from a \$70,000 budget, around 15%!

In 2002 Ray and Linda were involved in a major car accident in the US in which Linda broke every bone in her face. He suffered a heart attack 10 days before the election when was running for the former *Rodney District Council* in 2004. A stroke in 2008 led to much of his right side being paralysed and he suffered from an immune deficiency brought on by the heavy medication he has had to take.

In 2009 Ray Columbus and the *Invaders* were inducted into the New Zealand Music Hall of Fame. Two years later Ray released his biography *The Modfather*. Ray passed away on Tuesday 29 November 2016 after a lengthy illness.