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Beginning over 20 years ago as an "on-call" studio maintenance technician, Terry Howard and Ray Charles became instant friends from their very first introduction. While Charles sat by in his control room, Howard installed a new tape machine and then played a joke by saying he never saw a tape deck smoke like that before. Charles not smelling smoke asked: "OK, who's messin' with the blind man?" Howard snapped back with: "Blind? I thought you wore sunglasses because you're a musician!" Immediately enamored with Howard, Charles said "You're a nice guy, I like people who don't know I'm handicapped, put some skin in the pocket!" (Meaning to take his hand and shake it) Howard later found out that Charles never felt he was handicapped because he had lost his eyesight. "God never took away his hearing away--he would have been truly handicapped had he



lost his hearing," Howard notes.

A few years later after Charles recovered his master tapes from ABC, Dunhill and other labels, Howard, now nickname "Mr. T" or just "T", became his main engineer who helped Ray get all the tapes organized and remastered. Ray Charles was a very "hands-on" artist who knew every nook and cranny of his control room and most things engineering. Intimately aware of the sound of every component in the signal chain, one time Charles called Howard down on a weekend to check the monitors. Howard says: "I came in there and could not hear what Ray was hearing. He said there was a difference in the bottom end between the left and right monitors. I ended up playing a test tape and found a 1/4 of dB dip at 100Hz on the right channel. After I fixed the problem, unbelievably he heard the difference right away. He had amazing golden ears and could hear that 1/4 dB difference!"

Even though Ray often recorded his own vocals and piano by himself, for most sessions Ray and Howard always sat shoulder-to-shoulder at the console. Howard values the many lessons Charles taught him about music and sound. From picking tempi and keys that best fit his voice and the song's emotion to identifying a mysterious distortion way down inside the music mix, Ray Charles had it all.

Howard goes on with: "Ray taught me so many production skills and mixing tricks but I'll always remember him telling me to never let the music out shine the star. When another producer would critique Ray's vocal timing, Ray would say: 'you can tell the drummer, you can tell the horn section and you can tell the bass player that I'm the singer and I don't have a timing problem 'cause what I'm doing is emotion!'"

Recently Terry Howard and Ray Charles finished a duets album called "Genius Loves Company" on Artemus Records. Ray sings with Willie Nelson, Johnny Mathis, Michael MacDonald, Elton John, Gladys Knight, Bonnie Raitt, Norah Jones, BB King and others. Terry Howard along with others produced and engineered what was to be Ray Charles' last album.

Howard said that for his part of that record he and Ray returned to the old school of production where everything was worked out and recorded all together with the musicians live in the studio. Howard goes on with: "Ray had gotten used to coming in and overdubbing piano and vocal on finished tracks supplied by producers. After working this way again he told me that he hadn't had such a great time in years. Ray said 'the only way to spell work is F U N.'"

Barry Rudolph is an L.A.-based recording engineer. Visit his Web site at: [WWW.BARRYRUDOLPH.COM](http://WWW.BARRYRUDOLPH.COM)

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