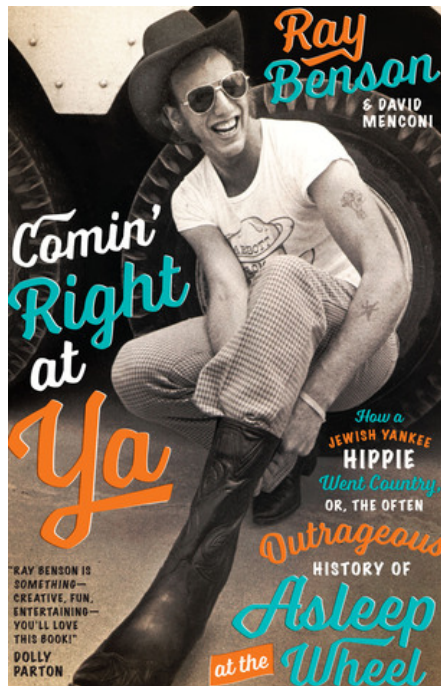




# Comin' Right at Ya: How a Jewish Yankee Hippie Went Country, or, the Often Outrageous History of Asleep at the Wheel

*Ray Benson*

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## **Comin' Right at Ya: How a Jewish Yankee Hippy Went Country, or, the Often Outrageous History of Asleep at the Wheel** Ray Benson

A six-foot-seven-inch Jewish hippie from Philadelphia starts a Western swing band in 1970, when country fans hate hippies and Western swing. It sounds like a joke but—more than forty years, twenty-five albums, and nine Grammy Awards later—Asleep at the Wheel is still drawing crowds around the world. The roster of musicians who've shared a stage with the Wheel is a who's who of American popular music—Van Morrison, Willie Nelson, Dolly Parton, Emmylou Harris, George Strait, Vince Gill, Lyle Lovett, and so many more. And the bandleader who's brought them all together is the hippie that claimed Bob Wills's boots: Ray Benson.

In this hugely entertaining memoir, Benson looks back over his life and wild ride with Asleep at the Wheel from the band's beginning in Paw Paw, West Virginia, through its many years as a Texas institution. He vividly recalls spending decades in a touring band, with all the inevitable ups and downs and changes in personnel, and describes the making of classic albums such as Willie and the Wheel and Tribute to the Music of Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys. The ultimate music industry insider, Benson explains better than anyone else how the Wheel got rock hipsters and die-hard country fans to love groovy new-old Western swing. Decades later, they still do.

## **Comin' Right at Ya: How a Jewish Yankee Hippy Went Country, or, the Often Outrageous History of Asleep at the Wheel Details**

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## From Reader Review *Comin' Right at Ya: How a Jewish Yankee Hippie Went Country, or, the Often Outrageous History of Asleep at the Wheel* for online ebook

### Julie says

I cannot wait to read this book! Anticipating good things!!!  
I will update this review once I have been able to purchase and read!

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### Carlotta Ungaro says

I've read several autobiographies of musicians and this has been the best. Ray Benson is so witty I was often laughing out loud. This book is almost as fun as seeing *Asleep at the Wheel* live!

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### Bob Graham says

The title says it all. One of the most improbable stories you will ever hear, but here it is: at a time when old-time country music was definitely considered "uncool", a Yankee hippy almost single-handedly starts a renaissance/revival of Western swing. Reading this book is a lot like listening to an *Asleep at the Wheel* album; bright, bouncy, fun and wise. Hard times are mentioned matter of factly, but not dwelled upon. It's on to the next track/town. Ray is a great story teller, and he tells one story about Dolly Parton that is downright hilarious. A great, fun read!

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### James says

I love Western swing and, for a long while, *Asleep at the Wheel* was more or less the only game in town. I read this memoir by founder and sole remaining original member Ray Benson at the same time I was reading Carrie Brownstein's well-written but, for my money, dispiritingly earnest and angsty *Hunger Makes Me a Modern Girl*. *Comin' Right At Ya* is episodic and chatty and largely disposable, just as you might expect from an as-told-to reminiscence, but I found it to be by far the more enjoyable read. Benson is a self-described "road dog," with more than forty years of touring to his credit, and while rock and roll only appears tangentially in this narrative, there is no shortage of sex and drugs. I didn't know about the band's origins in a West Virginia commune or about their sojourn in San Francisco and their association with fellow redneck/hippies Commander Cody and His Lost Planet Airmen. Reading *Comin' Right At Ya*, I was reminded of Dave and Phil Alvin, the Blasters founders I saw perform last year. These days, everyone (or every post-rock white hipster, at any rate) loves Americana, but Benson, like the Alvins, was crate-digging his way to the Old Weird America when such explorations required a lot of actual footwork and not just a YouTube search and when country most decidedly wasn't cool. Uncle Tupelo, while unquestionably excellent and bold enough, I suppose, were very much of a piece with a self-conscious retro milieu. By contrast, in their own time and place, *Asleep at the Wheel* was a sport of nature and Ray Benson a visionary genius. I wouldn't want to diminish the importance of riot grrrl, but I couldn't help feeling that, of the two musicians, despite Brownstein's deep investment in an iconoclastic identity, *this guy* was the real revolutionary.

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## Sam Sattler says

One of the presentations I most looked forward to at the 2015 Texas Book Festival was the one featuring Ray Benson of Asleep at the Wheel. Even though Ray and his co-author David Menconi were allotted the very last time slot on the second day of the festival and I still had a three-hour drive ahead of me, I was determined to make that session. Good decision.

I've been a fan of Ray's music since the early eighties and especially appreciate his efforts to keep Western Swing music alive. Not only has Asleep at the Wheel recorded Western Swing albums of its own, Ray has produced three very fine Bob Wills tribute albums, and recorded a successful swing-oriented album, "Willie and the Wheel" with the one and only Willie Nelson. But that's the public Ray Benson everyone knows. And I wondered if he would be anything like that public persona when seated on a small stage to discuss his new autobiography, Comin' Right at Ya? Well as it turns out, I had nothing to worry about.

Comin' Right at Ya is the life story of Ray Benson Seifert, one of four children born into a Jewish Philadelphia family, a guy whose inventor father founded the Seifert Machinery Company and whose schoolteacher mother earned a master's degree from the University of Pennsylvania. Ray Seifert grew up and became a self-described "Jewish Yankee Hippie" – and then his love of roots music led him to invent the "character" that the world now knows as Ray Benson, Texas country music star.

It took a while for Ray to make his way to Austin, Texas but thanks largely to Willie Nelson's invitation he finally got here. And he brought Asleep at the Wheel with him. And the rest is history. The Jewish Yankee hippie is now one of the state's favorite sons, even to having been named "Texan of the Year" in 2011 by the Texas legislature.

A whole lot happened to Ray and the band before he achieved that lofty status, of course, and Ray tells it all - well, most of it because he admits that his publisher lightly censored some of his stories. But even with the publisher looking over his shoulder, Ray shares stories about Willie, Dolly, Garth Brooks, Vince Gill, George Strait, Lyle Lovett, a lot of other friends he's made in the business, and a few folks he doesn't think too highly of. Ray is as bluntly honest about his business and personal failures as he is about his successes, and his is a career which has seen many of both, including the nine Grammys Ray and the band have earned along the way.

Comin' Right at Ya is for the fans, especially those who appreciate the heck out of Ray's music but are only vaguely aware of his roots and how he has so successfully reinvented himself. He's Texas's number one "Jewish Yankee Hippie" now, and the state is proud to claim him as one of its own.

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## Cornelia says

What an entertaining read! Brother Ray takes the reader along on the band's journey from the very beginning. It's hard to believe Asleep at the Wheel is still rolling along 40+ years on.

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## Steve Brooks says

A really easy read, yet a very in depth look at one of our true icons of country swing. Ray has paid his dues over and over in this business. He is a legend. Love the T-shirt on the cover!

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## The Jewish Book Council says

Review by Ben Freed for the Jewish Book Council.

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## Gary Anderson says

Ray Benson is the leader of the venerable country-swing band Asleep at the Wheel, and his new autobiography *Comin' Right at Ya* is just as rollicking as an Asleep at the Wheel show. If you're interested at all in country music, especially outlaw country or country swing, you probably already admire Asleep at the Wheel, and you really need to read this book. It brought back many good memories for me from the days when I went to a lot of outlaw country concerts and it seemed like either Asleep at the Wheel or Pure Prairie League was always the opening act. Asleep at the Wheel has always been respectably successful but never quite Alabama-successful or Brooks and Dunn-successful. Ray's band has always kept things authentic, and they have paid a price for not courting commercial radio. That not-quite-a household-name level gives Ray Benson an excellent point of view from which to tell about country music, the recording industry, and life on the road in a working band.

And Ray tells it like it is in this book. He's a great storyteller. Included here are unforgettable anecdotes involving Merle Haggard, Dolly Parton, Bill Clinton, Bob Dylan, Bob Wills, Willie Nelson, and many more. He doesn't shy away from honest self-examination, but Benson always approaches things with as much humor as possible, just like he does every night on stage.

If I have one quibble with *Comin' Right at Ya*, it's that it's too short. Although this book is shaped by Ray's life story, he says in the epilogue that he has a lot more stories. I hope that means he'll do another book!

Thanks to University of Texas Press for providing me with a copy of this book through Goodreads Giveaways.

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