RAY TALIAFERRO

Born Raphael Vincent Taliaferro, "Ray" began his earliest career as a musician. Taliaferro is a conductor, pianist and pipe organist. He established the Ray Tal Chorale which performed throughout the city and appeared on television programs, including The Tennessee Ernie Ford show and other television network specials. He served as Minister of Music for nearly 16 years at Third Baptist, the largest African American church in San Francisco. While in that capacity, Maestro Taliaferro organized and conducted historic performances in the African American community with the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra. Concerts included the complete presentation of Handel's 'Messiah', Mendelssohn's 'Elijah', and Haydn's 'Creation', resulting in reviews and headlines such as, "Flawless Messiah" by the San Francisco Examiner.

As a child, young Raphael mastered piano at an early age and enjoyed listening to the Arthur Fiedler Pops with the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra. To his amazement, he found himself years later, as President of the San Francisco Arts Commission and Chairman of the Pops, introducing Arthur Fiedler.

It was during this time that Maestro Taliaferro met the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at Third Baptist. Dr. King delivered his sermon and Taliaferro and his choir performed music requested by Dr. King. On perhaps the most memorable occasion, at the request of Dr. King, Taliaferro conducted the all city mass choir which performed at the Cow Palace for Dr. King at the interfaith civil rights rally on June 30, 1964. Following King's assassination, Mayor Joseph Alioto asked Commissioner Taliaferro to organize an official city tribute to Dr. King outside City Hall. Thousands of people gathered to express their grief. Recently, actual footage of that event has been recovered.

In 1972, Ray brought to San Francisco, "Black Quake", the largest and most encompassing black artistic and cultural exposition featuring Ray Charles and the most prominent African American artists and musicians in the country.

Ray Taliaferro has literally owned the Bay area's overnight radio listening audience on his KGO NEWSTALK AM 810 talk show. Five days a week, four early-morning hours each day, Ray shared his passion and opinions with thousands of people; he gets them talking like few others can.

Ray joined KGO Radio in 1977 and has been in broadcasting for over 40 years. He started in talk radio in 1967 at San Francisco's KNEW. Shortly thereafter, he also got into television, commuting every day to Burbank to host a show, "Tempo" on KHJ-TV with fellow co-host, Regis Philbin. He subsequently accepted a news anchor position at San Francisco's KRON-TV. Over the years, Ray has interviewed everyone from Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., Shirley Chisholm, Gordon Parks and Roy Wilkins to Count Basie, Sammy Davis, Sarah Vaughan, Ella Fitzgerald, Lena Horne, Kirk Douglas, Johnny Mathis, Carol Channing, Redd Foxx, Francis Ford Coppola, Marlene Dietrich, Vincent Price and Ginger Rogers, to Carl Sagan and Ansel Adams, to name a few of his favorites.

When Ray joined KGO Radio, he also co-hosted KGO-TV's AM Weekend program. Ray was the first Black talk show host on a major market radio station in the United States of America. He helped found
the National Association of Black Journalists in 1975, and was honored by the San Francisco Black Chamber of Commerce in 1994 with the Black Chamber Life Award, recognizing him as a "forerunner in broadcasting."

In July 2010, the National Association of Black Journalists named a scholarship in Ray's honor known as "The Ray Taliaferro Entrepreneurial Spirit Award." In September of the same year, he was inducted into the Newseum Hall of Fame in Washington, D.C.

Among his many achievements, Ray Taliaferro served as president of the San Francisco Chapter of the NAACP where he successfully addressed discrimination against African Americans to work in auto dealerships, hotels, San Francisco Police and Fire Departments, Municipal Railway (MUNI) and BART, to name a few. He also served as President of the Frederick Douglas Symposium, and was named Board President of the Northern California Chapter of the Leukemia Society of America from 1995-2000. Ray has been committed to many causes throughout the years including cystic fibrosis and sickle cell anemia. His name will forever be linked to the KGO radio and TV Leukemia Cure-A-Thon as he annually hosted the event, which has raised over $20 million throughout the years.

Ray was also appointed by the Mayor to the War Memorial Board of Trustees from 1992-2000, and President of the San Francisco Art Commission for 16 years. The Arts Commission is responsible for approving the design of all major public buildings. What was once a large hole in the ground is now the George Moscone Convention Center, a project approved by Commissioner Taliaferro. During his tenure, he initiated the development of several community cultural centers throughout the city and provided oversight for the establishment of the Louise Davies Symphony Hall. He also helped to restore the Conservatory of Flowers in Golden Gate Park. He is most proud of his efforts to protect street artists from police harassment by authoring the Street Artist's Law--the first of its kind in the country, later enacted in other cities. Similarly, Commissioner Taliaferro is responsible for the two percent ordinance requiring 2% of the cost of city construction be directed for art in public places, also replicated by other cities throughout the country.

Ray is a founding member and emcee of the Monterey Bay Blues Festival. Etta James, Ray Charles, B.B. King, James Brown, Ruth Brown, Mavis Staples, and Millie Jackson, are just a few of the Blues giants who have performed at the annual festival. Ray is a chief supporter of the Monterey Bay Blues in the Schools Program, which seeks to enhance the Blues in local school districts by using the talents of respected working professionals.

A humanitarian and philanthropist, Ray Taliaferro has helped raise hundreds of millions for arts and cultural, civic and charitable organizations by serving as emcee for countless fundraising events. He is proud of his work with the Commonwealth Club where for many years he has been emcee of presentations for national and international dignitaries. He conducted the last interviews with historic CBS TV anchor, Walter Cronkite and Dorothy Height, Founder and President of the National Council of Negro Women, before their passing. Ray Taliaferro is named in the Freedom Plaza square of the Fillmore district. He has proudly served with San Francisco mayors including, Joe Alioto, George Moscone, Dianne Feinstein and Frank Jordan. He is the recipient of hundreds of honors and awards, including dozens from local NAACP chapters, the A. Philip Randolph Institute, the Leukemia Society of America, Inc. and the Tuskegee Airmen organizations. He annually serves as emcee for
Tuskegee Airmen banquets and events.

Ray Taliaferro has been honored with a tribute in the Congressional Record of the 112th Congress, had a day proclaimed for him in San Francisco and was presented with the key to the city. Ray has committed his life to improving the quality and beauty for all humanity.

Currently Ray's voice can be heard as narrator for the historic San Francisco documentary, "Sutro's -- The Palace At Land's End" (2011). He will also co-narrate with Robert Redford in another documentary film (2012) celebrating the splendor of California.

Ray Taliaferro is currently writing his autobiography, "The Kid from Hunters Point", which begins with a letter to his namesake, Booker Taliaferro Washington.