



Ray Romano

INTERVIEW BY ANTHONY SCIARRATTA

Ray Romano is an actor and comedian best known for his role as Ray Barone on CBS's *Everybody Loves Raymond* (1996-2005). He created and starred in *Men of a Certain Age*, had a recurring role on *Parenthood*, and voiced Manny in the *Ice Age* films. Romano recently starred in *The Big Sick* and Martin Scorsese's *The Irishman*. Romano made his directorial debut at the 2022 Tribeca Film Festival where he showcased *Somewhere in Queens*, a film inspired, in part, by the Italian American family.



Three of Romano's four grandparents were born in Rome or Palermo before immigrating to the United States. His paternal grandfather fought in the Italian army during World War I.

What was it like being raised in a predominantly Italian neighborhood in New York City as opposed to where you currently live in Los Angeles? Do you miss your old neighborhood?

Yes, I do miss the old neighborhood. I still consider myself a New Yorker. I came out to Los Angeles when I booked *Everybody Loves Raymond*. My family stayed at home for the first year. We were waiting to see if the show was going to stick around. When the show got picked up for a second season, I moved my wife and kids out to Los Angeles. We've been there ever since. I still consider Forest Hills and New York my home. It's different than Los Angeles, there's not the same feeling of a community as there was in Queens. In Forest Hills, you know everybody on the block. In Los Angeles, people have houses with gates, and you don't even get to see your neighbors. I like California, but I miss the overall sense of community in Forest Hills.

How would you say your Italian heritage influenced you?

My brothers and I were raised as American Italians, but it was my wife's family who had the old school traditions. My wife's parents were off the boat Italians and didn't immigrate to America until their 40s. At their house, every occasion was a big catered event like somebody had a mini wedding. I went to a ton of communion, confirmation, and sweet 16 parties. I recently wrote and directed a movie about an Italian family using that same world.

Can you talk more about your new film, *Somewhere in Queens*?

Somewhere in Queens is a new film that I wrote and directed. It's kind of loosely based on things that I experienced in my life, but through the world of this Italian family in Queens. It's about a guy and his son who is a basketball star. His son is about to graduate high school with expectations to work in the family business. The father wants to see if his son can continue to play basketball instead of coming in the family business, which causes friction. I would label it a Dramedy. It's funny, real, and emotional. I wanted to write about this type of environment, especially one that I lived in, for a long time.

Did you always know you wanted to be in entertainment?

I wasn't initially sure about stand-up comedy, but I was attracted to performing. When I was a teenager in Forest Hills, Our Lady of Mercy started a teen club to keep kids off the street and out of trouble. They allowed us to go into the church basement and use the space. My friends and I were inspired by Saturday Night Live, which just came out around that time. We wrote sketches for the kids in the neighborhood and called it the No Talent Show going by the name, No Talent Incorporated. It was there that I caught the bug and realized performing was something I really had a passion for. I was always a fan of stand up, but it wasn't until I heard about an audition night at a club in Manhattan called The Improv that everything changed. I did a few minutes of horrible stand-up material, but those one or two laughs in the crowd got me hooked.

What advice would you give to an up-and-coming entertainer who wants to model their career after yours?

The only thing I know from my own experience is that nothing is a better teacher than getting on stage. Whether it's successful or the worst experience of your life, it's still a learning experience. You get better at the most horrible and best nights that you have. There is no shortcut to success. The comedy scene is a little different now, and I'm not sure how things exactly work. What I do know is that you only get better by getting on stage. You quickly learn what works and doesn't work and you master those experiences over time. I quit my regular job when I started to make a decent amount of money. From there it's all word of mouth. Each time you go on stage, you're getting exposure. What you must hope for is that you're experienced enough when you're able to get paid.