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## Gene anthony ray interview

1962-2003 Actor, dancer Gene Anthony Ray shot to fame in the early 1980s when he took over the first and only important role of his acting career. Leroy Johnson also used his street-honed disco moves, good looks and tough-guy personality in the film and television versions of Fame to win over a generation of teenagers. A talented dancer, Ray's drug and alcohol problems forbade him from a successful comeback after Fame's popularity faded. He was born in New York City on May 24, 1962. He grew up with his mother Jean Ray and a younger brother on West 153rd Street in Harlem, surrounded by extended family of aunts and uncles. Although Ray has denied that he looked a lot like Leroy Johnson, the tough, street-kid Fame character who made him famous, the similarities abound. Like Leroy, Ray grew up on the streets in new york's rough, urban center in the 1960s and 1970s. Also like Leroy, she wasn't trained as a dancer, but rather honed her knowledge of dancing at neighborhood block parties. According to the London Times, Ray later recalled: Every block had a party, not just ours. And I went up to them and took out all the prizes. She once claimed the award as the best male disco dancer at New York's Roseland Ballroom. After making his debut in the dance class at Julia Richmond High School, Ray was accepted to Manhattan's School of Performing Arts, the same school he was at fame. It didn't last long, however, and was ruled out of disruptive behavior after a year. He later told Seventeen: I was fired. I got into a fight with the teachers, and I arranged them the way Leroy would, by asking the teachers out. Ray said as a dancer, he had to take a little attitude with him. He told the Express, Because I danced, I couldn't afford to be a meara. I mean, wherever I went to school, I had to come back to that area and survive on the street. On the day ray auditioned for fame, ray skipped school to attend. One of the 2,800 teenagers who tried for a role, 17-year-old Ray pushed the producers off their feet. According to The Daily Telegraph, the film's choreographer Louis Falco said of Ray's audition: 'Gene discovered something in me that I had never witnessed before. It was just unbelievable. I felt like I was in the same shoes as the person who may have seen Fred Astaire for the first time. His cheeky attitude, impressive looks and flashy disco moves earned him the role of Leroy Johnson. Fame Brought Fame Fame hit theaters in 1980 and received widespread attention, especially from teenage audiences. Critical reviews were mixed. Fame is spur to some authentic high spirits, noted John Coleman of the New Statesman, but continued: It also sadly srails its determination not to leave a contemporary trick. Despite his doubts, Coleman noted that Leroy was doing great by Ray. In The New Republic review, Stanley Kauffman sang the film's praises: 'You keep Star Wars and all the sequels, with their special-impact, lab-pampered cosmic powers, and i'm taking on the true comic power of these kids. The film follows the lives of students and several teachers at the School of Performing Arts, and the plot is driven along by hard-rocking disco music and dance routines mixed with dialogue. The film won an Academy Award for Best Music Score and Best Song. In the film, Ray's character, Leroy, is a street kid who, like Ray, has earned his place in elite school with sheer, raw talent. Like Ray, what Leroy danced lacked social skills. It was rough, tough and untouchable, in a way that the teenage girls fainted. His character, who helped make lycra pants and leg warmers a hit trend in the early 1980s, was so popular that it was one of the few to recreate the television series Fame, which ABC began airing in 1982. Only twenty years old, when the television series began to air, Ray's personal reputation was at its peak. He hired two secretaries to respond to 17,000 fan mail a day. She also began appearing at work wearing a platinum diamond-studded pendant and didn't cover much of her love of partying. Although the television series was positively reviewed in the United States, it failed to gain an audience and fell to ABC. Fame, however, followed 11 million viewers in the UK and was consequently hired by MGM Television, which was syndicies from 1983 to 1987. In 1982, Ray toured Britain with other fame characters. On The Kids from Fame, he also told a teenage audience. The following year, a television special was broadcast in the United States. The troubles took ray's life by 1983. In June, a \$400,000 house purchased in a white neighborhood of Rockland County, New York, was deliberately set on fire. Ray, who was just using the house over the weekend, planned to move into the house permanently after his younger brother finished high school in the Bronx. The two-storey house was set on fire in four different locations on the outside of the house, allegedly aided by petrol. No one was convicted, although it was rumoured that the fire was racially motivated. The following summer, in 1984, Ray's mother was arrested in a drug bust along with 14 others, including her grandmother, three aunts and three uncles. Ray's mother, Jean Ray, 46, was charged with trafficking heroin and cocaine. His grandmother, Viola (Lilly) Ward, 66, was carrying 6 ounces of cocaine and a loaded .38-caliber pistol when she was taken into custody. In March 1984, after a two-week trial, Ray's mother was convicted. He was selling heroin and cocaine to undercover officers in several purchases in 1983, which took place in bars in Harlem. He was sentenced to at least 15 years in April 1984 and released on parole in 1999. Although Ray, who remained very loyal to his mother, was never involved in drug transactions, he was under enormous pressure. After not being in fame rehearsals 100 times and admittedly taking drugs between shoots, he was fired from the show in 1984. Ray's drug and alcohol abuse continued unabated. He was in ruins in his personal and professional life, sitting idly by for five months, during which time he gained nearly thirty pounds. Eventually Ray started working, slimming down again to his usual 28-inch waist size. He spent the rest of his life trying to regain his place in the spotlight, but he was never successful. She briefly revived her dance career with her performance in it's raining men music video, and in 1988 she received positive reviews for her portrayal as Billie in Carrie's British stage production. However, he failed both in his attempt to set up a European dance tour and then opened a Fame-style dance school in Milan, where he shared an apartment with a actress. In 1992, when the effects of alcohol became out of control, Ray stole a bottle of wine from a Milan supermarket and used it to attack two men who taunted him. He was arrested, although the charges were later dropped. After squandering his fortune to fuel his drug addiction, Ray was unemployed and rumours spread that he was sleeping on benches in Milan. In 1995, there were also rumors that Ray had died of AIDS. Ray was trying to regain control of his life again. In 1995, she appeared in the film Out of Sync, co-produced by Debbie Allen. The following year, he briefly starred in Eddle, starring Whoopi Goldberg. In 1996, Ray tested HIV-positive. The high toxicity of the drug was then necessary to make him weak, although he did not appear dr. Pepper and Diet Coke ads during the late 1990s. His mother, who just got out of prison, helped take care of him. When Ray was interviewed by the British Broadcasting Association in the early 2000s, as part of the Fame reunion special, he seemed thin and weak. In June 2003, he suffered a stroke and was given a stroke on June 15, 2003. Ray, who brushed aside questions about his sexuality, never got married. Selected Works Films Fame, 1980. Synchronised, 1995. Eddie, 1996. Television fame, 1982-87. Daily Telegraph (London), 2003. Express (London), 2003. Independent (London), 2003. Jet, 11 July 1983, 19 March 1984, 23 April 1984, 39 April 1994, 8 December 2003 National Post (Ontario), November 21, 2004, p. S7. New Republic, 1980. Statesman, 1980. New York Times, 2003. Scottish Daily Record, December 17, 2002, 126ff. Times (London), 2003. First impressions are all about show business, and Gene Anthony Ray knew how to make it indelible. In his introductory scene as Leroy Johnson, a street smart, rebellious dance prodigy from Fame, Alan Parker's gritty Oscar-winning 1980 musical for students at a performing arts school, Ray effortlessly stole the focus of a female friend he was helping audition for. Dressed in barely-there satin shorts and a sleeveless shirt pulled behind his head to accentuate his flawless torso, Ray electrified an audience for his sultry dance. What's his name? a teacher asks the instructor played by Debbie Allen as they take off Leroy's suggestive moves. Allen, not siomous on the dance floor himself, instinctively replied: Wicked! Viewers couldn't help but agree. The time has come for a man like Gene Anthony Ray to take his place in the spotlight. It was the spring of 1980 when Fame was released in theaters. Disco was dead. MTV hasn't even been born yet. Off The Wall, Michael Jackson smash R&T; Album B, still dominated the music charts. A series of films, such as Saturday Night Fever, Grease and All That Jazz, which showed dazzling dance tracks, were a surprise hit at the box office. The audience is now ready for something to unite the edgier and smooth elements. They wanted someone with some evil street strut in their footsteps. 17-year-old Ray easily filled the bill. Although Ray often claim that he wasn't a real-life Leroy (insisting that he wasn't as antisocial nor illiterate as his character - I like to read! he sometimes exhorts during interviews), both used for his incredible charisma, raw talent and innate dance ability to escape a troubled family life in Harlem. Ray honed his fancy footwork at parties in the neighborhood. He claimed to win every race he entered as a child, and he entered every contest he could find - even winning the award as the best male disco dancer in New York's famous Roseland Ballroom.As a young teen, Ray also attended the real-life performing arts school depicted in the film, although he was disqualified during his first year. In a 2003 interview, he confessed that he was fired because of his mouth and poor attitude toward official data. In the same interview Allen, who had developed an almost family relationship with Ray while making the film, described him as an amazing ball of energy and fire who was sweet and sour at the same time. He also claimed that Ray slapped one of his teachers at the school. Still, rebelism often translates the screen well, and Ray turned it into a relatable character for legions of impressionable youth Along with Allen and two other actors in the film, Ray was asked to re-star in the TV series in 1982. Although it struggled with ratings in the U.S., the small-screen version of Fame became a bona fide phenomenon in Europe and was produced for six seasons, and the cast performed concerts with adoring, screaming crowds. Ray not only appeared as a sex symbol of fame, but his face became synonymous with the show. His appeal was so strong that he was forced to hire two secretaries to handle the bulky fan letters he received - reportedly 17,000 letters a day at one point. With his doleful eyes, photogenic features and chiseled, Adonis-like physique, Ray is of course a popular topic in fan magazines to read primarily about women, but has always hijacked issues of sexual orientation. In the 1980s, when the AIDS epidemic was written in terms of fits for a horror movie, it was a more challenging time to get out to the general public, of course. It was a real career suicide. Among friends, however, Ray spoke completely openly about his sexuality. During interviews conducted at this time, Ray seemed guarded in some ways by his personal life and often butched up in front of the camera. Later, his sense of camp became more obvious, his gestures became more flamboyant, he rolled his eyes more often, and he always seemed to be looking for a quick joke to demean the tension. At the height of his career, when asked about his love life, Ray always claimed that because of his exhaustive work schedule, he only had time for one woman - his mother, Jean.Az's mother, proving to be a catalyst in both her life and her career. In 1983, a house he bought for his family in a predominantly Caucasian neighborhood in rural New York was set on fire four times while Ray was away, believed to be racially motivated arson. That same year, it was widely reported that Jean, along with her own mother, was arrested in a drug operation for selling cocaine and heroin - even on the set of Fame, although Ray was not involved. The relationship between his son and his mother was impeccable. Despite the humiliation, Ray remained loyal and attended Jean's court hearings until he was finally sentenced to 15 years in prison. Another woman she was close to was Marguerite Derricks, a seductive, energetic blonde who joined Fame as a dance student in season two. He and Ray were fast friends, and as he remembers, he immediately protected her from petty jealousy when she first made the show. The dancers were quite spiteful when I first joined because they were very similar to a real high school, and I was my new kid. Derricks, now an award-winning choreographer for films like Showgirls and the 2009 remake of Fame, said Queerty. They whispered behind my back: you need it. Gene Anthony walked into the room and immediately saw what was going on and put his arm around me. She said: You're just some tired bitches! We've become very good friends. Later, I became friends with all the dancers, but he was always my protector. He was louder than anyone else, but he had the biggest heart in the world. It was really amazing. Derricks also admired the close relationship Ray had with Debbie Allen. He and Debbie got on the dance floor and it was magical, she says. Their relationship was magical. They loved each other very much. He took care of her like a nurse, loved her and protected her. He really looked up to her. In an interview after his death, Allen recalled Ray's naughty, sometimes temperamental nature, when he grabbed his ass while singing. After scolding him, he was so injured, he destroyed a locker room. Not only was Ray able to dance more easily than air (Fame choreographer Louis Falco compared Ray to a young Fred Astaire) and kicked higher than most female dancers, but he was also able to party out his other characters and friends. Huge reputation comes at a price, especially if you're young and make money beyond your wildest dreams and the whole world is kissing your ass and buying one more round of cocktails or offering another bump in coke. Although he appeared in all six seasons of Fame, Ray's drinking and drug use intensified and he was eventually suspended for a while after not being on set for nearly 100 days. Derricks makes it clear that when Ray was on set, he was 100% present and working hard. When he walked into a room, not only was the light shining, but the room was shaking, she recalls. I've never met such a charismatic man. That was natural. Everyone wanted to be around him. He was funnier than anyone else. Sometimes he raps songs. He was quick-witted. She was a natural dancer. Of course, he was good at everything. I trained hard to do what I do. All Gene could do was look at something and do it better than anyone else. But it wasn't always easy to identify with Leroy Johnson like that. Following the show's resignation in 1987, Ray's professional life became a long series of failed opportunities. Appearing in the music video for Weather Girls didn't lead to much. He also played John Travolta in the 1976 film. Unfortunately, the show became notorious as one of the theater's most notorious short-lived flops. He even performed on cruise ships. He got a role in an occasional TV commercial or aired a cameo in a film, but the significant employment proved elusive. During this period, ray's challenge He gave a performance at The Glam Slam, a Prince-owned Los Angeles nightclub, went on a European dance tour and unsuccessfully tried to launch a Fame-style dance trot in Milan, Italy. However, the partying continued unbroke and he spent his savings. In Milan, Ray was arrested for stealing a bottle of wine from a supermarket to attack some of the men who harassed him, although the charges were dropped. It was even reported that he sometimes slept on the park benches. Friends who knew Ray when he lived in Los Angeles in the early 90s, but who asked to remain anonymous in this article, shared wildly different opinions about him. A man who knew him in West Hollywood bars remembered that he was friendly and always offered a smile, but was rarely sober. Another man, who knew Ray on an intimate basis, noted that he could become arrogant if he was drunk or on drugs and was mostly unpleasant during getting to know the two men. Like Debbie Allen said, Ray was both a sweet and sour mix. In 1993 the British press ran a series of sensational newspaper headlines saying that Ray was dying of AIDS, although he did test positive for HIV until later. In a 1994 interview, Ray admitted the rumors hurt, especially when old friends told him they were shocked to learn he was still alive. Ray said he was concerned about denying the stories in honor of friends who actually suffer from HIV/AIDS. When he tested positive in 1996, Derricks was the first one Ray called. We called for hours, we just cried, she recalls. The next day, however, he called her again to tell her that the diagnosis was a mistake. Not sure of the exact reason, Derricks stops short of speculating that Ray didn't want to be an emotional burden. We've seen so many of our friends die since then, he adds. It was a very, very difficult time. It felt like we were going to the hospital every other week to visit our friends. The camera crew entertainment channel E! caught up with Ray in Italy in 2002 as he posted flyers for a male stripper review that was headlining under the stage name Leroy Johnson. This is a very disturbing interview. He seemed gloved, aimless, and almost unrecognizable, claiming that someone was just fisting him in the face. Even in an on-camera interview conducted the following year, Ray looked healthier and more robust and noted the whimsy of fame. As fast as it was, you can go and it's more damaging than it's ever been before. In an interview for additional material for fame's DVD release in 2002, Ray acknowledged that it affects a generation of musical theater performers. If the work you've done has inspired someone to do well and something positive in this crazy world today, it's worth it, he said. I'll do it. Again. Unfortunately, he would be dead within a year at the age of 41. Like many friends Derricks was surprised when Ray died following what were reported complications from his stroke. He reveals that Ray got sick enough from time to time, but he seemed to be recovering all the time. He was at a hospice and he was very, very sick and I visited him every day and then he was fine,' she recalls. It always bounced back. Allen was also given a snot in Ray's young death. She wiped away tears when she remembered a phone call she received from her mother, who was released from prison in 1999, telling her it was her last chance to talk to her boyfriend that she probably wouldn't make it through the night. She soon finds herself rushing to New York to attend her funeral in November 2003. Although Ray never found another project that showcased his talents the way Fame did, it's not hard to see his influence in series like Glee and a generation of musical performers who followed him. Borrowing a lyric from the film's Oscar-winning theme song, as long as the movie remains, we'll still remember his name. To learn more about Ray and Fame, go here. Here.

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