

## “I Ain’t Lyin’!”...The Unexpurgated Truth about Rudy Ray Moore (Updated and Revised)

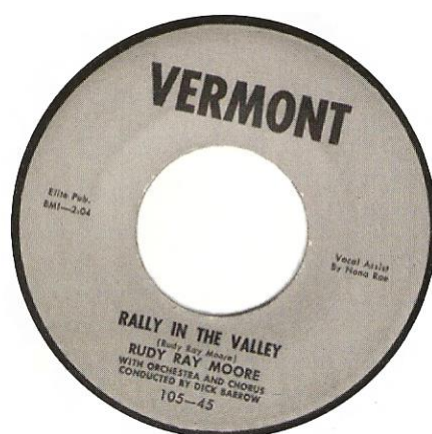
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Originally published in *Living Blues*, Issue 157, Volume 32, No. 3....Pages 12-24.

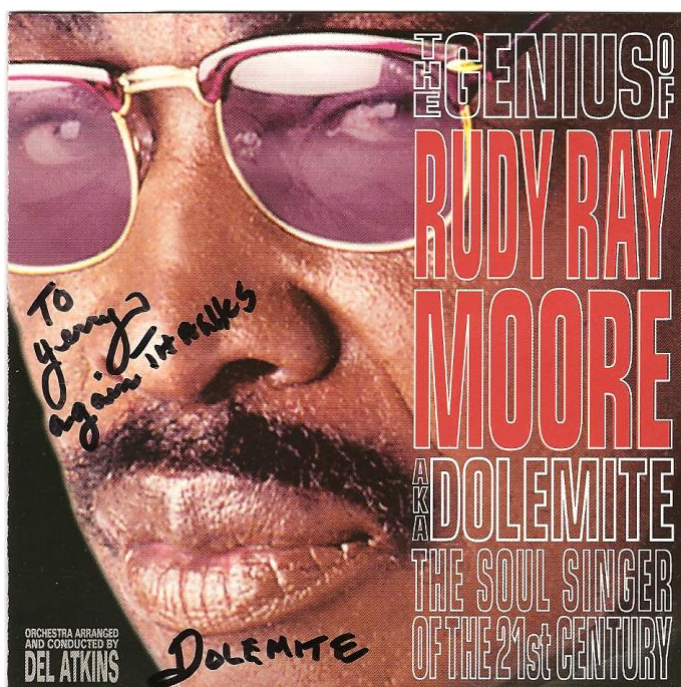
### Prologue

Rudy Ray Moore, a.k.a. “Dolemite,” the “Godfather of Rap,” the “World’s Greatest X-Rated Comedian,” and “Blaxploitation” filmmaker, passed away at age 81 in October, 2008.

I had the good fortune to know Mr. Moore, our paths crossing initially when I wrote about his musical side for the roots music magazine *Living Blues*. That assignment led to a series of phone conversations that moved beyond interview to something slightly more personal, especially following the article’s publication in 2001. Rudy was ecstatic. The article had sparked interest in him as a musician, a lesser known aspect of his early career when he wrote and recorded R&B back in the 1950s. Rudy told me that he credited the article along with a Norton label CD release of his early R&B recordings - *Hully Gully Fever* (2000) - for resurrecting him as an R&B singer.



Over the next few years, Rudy called intermittently. It always took me a moment to realize who it was because he came on in character and a put-on voice...but then I'd figure it out and we'd go from there. Mostly, he talked about projects...a future Dolemite film, plans to write his biography, but usually CDs of newly recorded music and invitations to write liner notes, which I always accepted. Only one of those CDs saw release with my liner notes (as "Dr. Jive"), Rudy Ray glowering off the cover, the title audaciously over the top - *The Genius of Rudy Ray Moore, aka Dolemite, the Soul Singer of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Generation International 02, 2002).



My last contact with Rudy Ray Moore was in the mid-2000s. Letters to his Las Vegas address were returned; phone numbers no longer in service. Only in his 2008 obituary did I learn that Rudy had died in a nursing home in Akron, Ohio far from the show business centers he loved but close to where he first developed his stage skills in the 1940s.

The following, culled from my conversations with Rudy Ray Moore, tells of his determined and enduring efforts on a variety of artistic fronts to break through to widespread recognition and lucrative income. He never became a mainstream draw, but

through the effort carved a bright and original path, the true measure of his success the comedians, actors, and hip-hop artists who in following incorporated something of Rudy Ray Moore into their own spheres of performance.

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On September 23, 2000, Rudy Ray Moore appeared at the progressive New York City music club, the Wetlands. It was the first time in more than thirty years that he had fronted a band as a lead singer. What fame he had was built on his fictional cast of bodacious street characters, the best known, “Dolemite,” Rudy’s primary alter-ego at the heart of both his raunchy X-rated comedy act and his no-budget parodies of “Blaxploitation” action movies.

Over 600 people came out to the Wetlands to see Rudy Ray. He took the stage in wide-brimmed white hat, sunglasses, and a gold-sequined jacket with Black satin lapels. His band, the Dolemite Explosion along with the Raytones, three alluring women, was a throwback to 1950s R&B style. After the show, he confessed to being nervous having not sung in years, but that it all evaporated in the heat of enthusiastic audience response. “It was great to know,” said Rudy, “that I could really be accepted after all this period of time and I didn’t lose what I had in that time—I still had my voice. I was very delighted.” (Phone Interview)

In the broad sweep of Rudy Ray Moore’s career as an entertainer, “golden age R&B recording artist” is only a fleeting moment. Over the decades, he’s been a turbaned shake dancer, R&B show emcee, storefront disk jockey, songwriter, record promoter, “blue” comedian, movie actor, and moviemaker, all richly steeped in African American urban culture.

### **The Signifier**

What made Rudy most famous and influential were the unexpurgated comic rhymes and recitations he performed in Los Angeles nightclubs and on long-playing records back in the 1960s and 1970s. He represented a bold transition from post-war

behind-closed-doors “suggestive” humor to a younger inner-city African American generation ready to say anything and reveal all.

The raps Rudy laid down and the folk-based characters he brought to life — “Dolemite,” the “Human Tornado,” “Stack-A-Lee,” “Pimpin’ Roc,” “Peetie Wheatstraw,” the “Devil’s-Son-In-Law” — were foundational to hip-hop, influencing the artistic direction of a generation of Black performers who in retrospect hailed him as the “Godfather of Rap.” Moore has described his work back then as the “art of ghetto expression.”

His groundbreaking performances played out in small South Central Los Angeles nightspots, rooms hazy with smoke, crowded. A small combo – drums, bass, guitar or organ – supplied a musical backdrop. Rudy Ray Moore would step into the spotlight, take the mike and kick off by growling to the audience, “I ain’t lyin’! Yes, this is me— Rudy Ray Moore!” And with that his signifying began.

*You know they call me Dolemite,  
They call me the human tornado,  
They call me Peetie Wheatstraw, the Devil’s Son-In-Law  
I have a lot of aliases  
But the one I like the best is  
The Human Tornado,  
Because I’ve been known to rise up,  
But I cool down later,  
I’m the bad motor scooter, known as the human tornado.  
This is me—Rudy Ray Moore—Dolemite!*

The intensity built as Rudy and the crowd got into it. The “sleaze” factor mounted as Moore, the self-proclaimed “street braggin’ man” trod territory few others would dare or care to explore.

*I am the player, the pussy surveyor,  
I’m the slider, the glider,  
Never fucked a woman ‘less I satisfied her.  
I’m the bed shaker, the slat breaker, the baby-maker,  
Imp the Stimp, the women’s pimp, hula dula, the whole house ruler...  
I was born in the North, and raised in the South,...  
And if anybody asks you what’s my name, tell ‘em its Dolemite,  
The ba-a-a-dest pimpin’ hustlin’ motherfucker that ever played the game!*

Depending on perspective, his words provoked laughter, anger, edgy nervousness, embarrassment, and in some circles, disgust. But Rudy made no apologies. Stay or go. It was what it was, unadulterated unfiltered urban street talk, rhyming tales rooted in African American tradition, public utterance of hardcore truths hardwired, some would say, in the male psyche. Rudy Ray Moore voiced the unspeakable, shocked audiences with the audacity of it. His was the sort of content one heard in clustered groups among friends, but not on public nightclub stages where even the “dirtiest” comedians dared not go beyond words like “ass,” “shit,” and “damn.” Rudy entertained with a brand of vulgarity that played on the raw extremes of macho self-proclamation and elevation.

*At the age of one I entered a fuckin' contest,  
Fucked ninety-nine bitches 'til they gave out of breath,  
And when that was over, my dick was still hard,  
So I beat my meat in my daddy's back yard,...  
Cause I'm a sly witty guy, maintain a natural high,  
Every night I sign my own autograph book,  
And never pass a mirror without taking a second look,...  
I'm worth a South Sea Island of pearls  
A billion tons of tea, the stars the sun the moon  
Refuse to shine without first consulting me.*

Rudy Ray Moore did not create what he was saying from whole cloth, but instead put his own spin on a dimension of African American performance tradition that had existed for more than a century, glimpsed occasionally in early 20<sup>th</sup> Century blues and jazz recordings...in versions of “the Dirty Dozens,” for example, where “your sister is your cousin, your mama does the...laawdy lawd,” Jelly Roll Morton’s oral history recording of it as unexpurgated as anything Rudy ever offered. Or, double entendre titles such as “Need a Little Sugar in My Bowl,” “Banana in Your Fruit Basket,” “Don’t Mash My Digger So Deep,” “The Boy in the Boat,” and “Dirty Mother Fuyer.” Evidenced also in suggestive stage names such as the “Honeydripper,” “Doc Dasher,” and “Bumble Bee Slim.”

Rudy Ray Moore was totally cognizant of these traditions. “All of them have been somewhat old folklore tales,” he explained, his mission, to give them fresh voice

and new life. As an item of folklore, perhaps the oldest and best known of Moore's recitations is "The Signifying Monkey." Rooted in the tradition of African folk tales, the story – Moore's version excerpted here – tells how the victimized monkey outwits the mean old lion. In the context of period American racism, the tale moves beyond literal to function as a parable of comeuppance in the face of social oppression.

*Now, the monkey lived in the jungle in an old oak tree,  
Bullshitting the lion every day of the week,*

*And everyday before the sun go down,  
The lion would kick his ass all through jungle town.*

*But the monkey got wise and started using his wit,  
Said, "I'm gon' put a stop to this old ass-kicking shit!"*

*So he ran up on the lion the very next day,  
Said, Oh Mr. Lion, there's a big bad motherfucker comin' your way...*

*Baby, he talked about your people in a hell of a way,  
He talked about your people till my hair turned gray...*

*He said your daddy is a freak and your mama's a whore,  
Said he spotted you running through the jungle,  
Selling assholes door to door*

The insults fly and then the monkey tricks the lion, telling him the elephant is the one whose been saying these things. The lion goes after the elephant and...

*They fought all that night and all the next day,  
And somehow the lion managed to get away,*

*He drug his ass back to the jungle more dead than alive,  
Just to run into that little monkey,  
With some more of his signifying jive!*

These signifying tales were in attitude and form what early rap artists found influential in Rudy Ray Moore's comedy work as they heard it on stage or through long-playing record albums issued in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Hip-hop artists who

have credited Moore as an early influence include Big Daddy Kane, Snoop Doggie Dog, Ice-T, Doctor Dre, 2-Live Crew, Eazy E, and the Beastie Boys.

In the 1990s, Rudy Ray Moore made a rare network television appearance on *The Arsenio Hall Show*. Moore performed a “network-friendly” version of Dolemite in which he saluted his hip-hop protégés in playful dig.

*Dolemite is my name and rappin' and tappin' is my game,  
I'm the one that whipped Monday,  
Killed Tuesday and put Wednesday in the hospital,  
Called up Thursday to tell Friday not to bury Saturday on Sunday!  
Stuck my finger in the ground and turned the whole wo-o-orld around,  
I took the day and brought back yesterday,  
Took the 4<sup>th</sup> of July and put it in June,  
And made leap year jump over the moon...,*

*I ain't lyin' baby!...  
You all have heard me rap with Big Daddy Kane,  
You heard me do these nuts on Dr. Dre's album,  
But let me tell you, all those young men are rappin' good,  
But when it comes down to rappin',  
I was through with it before they learned what to do with it.  
Yes, I'm the godfather of rap and the king of the party record,  
And I'd like to leave you with this:  
I've been known to rise up but I'll cool down later,  
I'm the bad motorscooter. I'm the human tornado,  
Dolemite is my name, and I'm out of this mother (bleeped) game!*

### **Prince Dumarr and the Hully Gully Papa**

Rudy Ray Moore was born in Fort Smith, Arkansas in 1927. His divorced mother kept the family on the move. In Fort Smith, Moore spent his school years in the care of his godmother, Katherine Johnson. She taught him to be enterprising and self-sufficient. Fort Smith was where Rudy Ray first recognized his potential as an entertainer. “I always thought I could sing in my early years in school and in church. I performed in school plays but by no means with sights on becoming a popular entertainer.” That changed when he moved away to strike out on his own.

Katherine Johnson's oldest son, Fred, lived in Cleveland, Ohio. Rudy Ray and Shorty, her youngest son, decided to visit him there. "We sold peanuts to the service men out of Fort Chaffee, Arkansas who would come into Fort Smith and line up to take the bus back to the camp. We'd stand there and sell them bags of peanuts. And we made money. Enough to hightail it out, and we hit Cleveland and stayed with Fred. Shorty ended up going back home. I stayed and started waiting tables at the big hotels. That's how Cleveland came to be my second home."

In Cleveland, Rudy Ray Moore met Billy Nightingale, a dancer who taught him stage craft. Nightingale wore a turban and soon the two of them were wearing turbans everywhere they went. "We'd put on our turbans and people would follow us around like we were foreign dignitaries." The turban would become a trademark for R&B singer Chuck Willis, whose string of hits on the Atlantic label included his take on Ma Rainey's blues classic, "C.C.Rider." According to Moore, Willis got the turban idea from him. At the time, Moore was emceeing Cleveland R&B stage shows and wore a turban as part of his "look." "He wanted to know where I got it from," says Rudy Ray, "and I carried him by the lady's house that made the turban for me and she made Chuck one...He wore the turban until he died."



Rudy Ray Moore, meantime, wanted to do more than emcee and so worked on his dancing skills and auditioned for shows and revues around Cleveland. He and a female partner dressed exotically and performed torrid dances to the beat of African drums. Moore also started singing, billing himself as "the Harlem Hillbilly" because he performed country ballads infused with an R&B feel.



Over time, Moore developed a stage persona as Prince DuMarr, a “turbanated” (sic) dancer in Neil Stepp’s traveling revue. Moore chose the name “DuMarr” as a tribute to Hollywood glamour queen Hedy Lamar. “Stepp carried shake dancers. He carried blues singers. He carried tap dancers, flash dancers, comedians, and that’s what his variety show was all about. He carried me...when I was no more than seventeen. It was a show he took on the road. We called it ‘barnstorming’ then. We’d go to Akron, Ohio, Youngstown, Ohio, Sharon, Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, maybe a couple hundred miles from Cleveland. The Stepp’s Revue even went all the way to Montgomery, Alabama and Birmingham, Alabama with our show and appeared with Roy Brown and Chubby Newsom with the *Hip Shakin’ Mama* at the Birmingham Theater in 1946. On the side of the bus we rented it said ‘For Colored Only.’ ”

Rudy Ray barnstormed as Prince DuMarr until 1950 when he was drafted into the army and sent to Fort Campbell, Kentucky, eventually serving in Korea and Berlin. In the service he discovered his gift for making people laugh. “I got into comedy when I was in the army by putting on shows in the service clubs. I used to sing. I used to dance. And I emceed the shows. And one day, one of the acts wasn’t ready. So somebody hollered out, ‘Rudy. Tell a joke!’” He thought back to Caldonia Young, a close friend from Cleveland who did a comedy act. “...I knew her...act by heart. I went on the stage and did it, and from that day on I’ve been doing comedy.” One of those early jokes:

*...These missionaries went across the jungle to convert some natives. And one of these missionaries was walking across the desert and a lion started chasing him. One of them man eating lions. I ain’t lyin’!*

*Man started running. He found out he couldn’t outrun the lion. He got down on his knees and started praying. “Lord have mercy on my soul. Help me Lord.”*

*The lion caught up with him and got down beside him and said, “Looord, I wanna thank you...”*

*And the missionary said, “Lord, I wanna thank you. I didn’t know that lions prayed!”*

*The Lion said, “Reverend, you’re praying. I’m saying grace because I’m getting ready to eat your Black ass!”*

Discharged in 1953, Rudy Ray Moore left the military an experienced emcee, singer, dancer, and comedian. At the time, the world of popular entertainment was

transforming. Old school swing and jump blues were being displaced by electrified blues, rhythm & blues, and rock 'n' roll. Returning to Cleveland, Moore took up residence in the Majestic Hotel, "the end of hotels for all the big groups of that period. Segregation was very strong...We couldn't stay in the white hotels, so we had our own hotel." The Majestic was the stopover in Cleveland for the popular African American acts of the day. "Ruth Brown, Lavern Baker, Ray Charles, Fats Domino, the Five Keys, Clyde McPhatter and the Drifters. It would be B.B.King and big entertainers of that type that would stay at the Majestic...It was a joyous time and a joyous place."

Working with many of them, Rudy singled out Big Maybelle, Wynonie Harris, and Junior Parker. "I promoted a show on Junior Parker and I didn't have all of his money. He didn't take money unless I had it all, which I couldn't come up with, so I skipped out the back door with all the money. Junior looked high and low for me, but I was gone. He died without seeing me again in life."

In that period of the late 1950s, Rudy saw success all around him, rubbed shoulders with the stars, but hard as he tried, couldn't break through to the big time. He moved to Seattle, Washington, once again performing as "Prince" DuMarr in a revue headlined by sax legend Big Jay McNeely. McNeely recorded for the Cincinnati-based King/Federal labels and steered Rudy to record producer Ralph Bass. Between 1955 and 1956, Moore recorded eight sides for Federal with a band led by Big Jay's brother, saxophonist Bobby McNeely, and featuring guitarist Jimmy Nolan, who had worked with Johnny Otis and James Brown. The tunes, written by Moore, some with collaborators like his friend Billy Nightingale, ran the gamut from bluesy ballads to rockers. "Robbie Dobbie" echoed Little Richard's "Tutti Frutti." Moore wrote and recorded "I'm Mad with You," and though it did not sell well for him, scored in a cover version on King by rocking country pianist Moon Mullican. "Step It Up and Go," the most successful of Rudy's releases, was a rocking version of the old blues tune recorded by Blind Boy Fuller and others. "I was the prince of blues," says Moore.

His association with King/Federal over, Rudy would record independently in 1957 in Texas with Carl Otis and his Castle Rockers. The hot side, co-written by Moore, was a ballad, "Hurts Me to My Heart. Rudy took it to John Dolphin of Los Angeles-based Dolphin Records. "He put it out on his Cash label even though we never did have a

contract...Dolphin died on me before the record was out two months. I never did get money to send back to the band and the boys were not happy.”

Rudy would later record with the Raytones and again with the Seniors, a vocal quartet on the Ball label, but still no breakthrough. As a singer, Rudy had evolved a style somewhere between Louis Jordan and Little Richard...rocking rhythm, honking sax, a bit wilder than Jordan, but controlled, not as manic as Little Richard. While success eluded Rudy Ray Moore in name, his earlier ballad, “Hurts Me to My Heart,” became a minor hit on the Fire label as recorded by Bobby Marchan of the New Orleans-based Huey “Piano” Smith and the Clowns.

Rudy traveled with Marchan and the Clowns in 1958 when they toured nationwide in support of their hit, “Rockin’ Pneumonia and the Boogie Woogie Flu.” “The way Bobby picked me up,” Rudy explained, “was he was from Youngstown and he came to Cleveland with the Clowns. They asked me to travel with them because nobody in the band could drive that well and I could *drive*, so I followed them anyway. When somebody in the Clowns couldn’t perform, I would perform in their place.” Moore claims he had a hand in writing the Clowns’ follow-up hit “Don’t You Just Know It,” for which he was not credited.

Moore remembered his days on the road with the Clowns as carefree and outrageous. Wild crowds, flowing money, and sexual misadventures. Like the time Rudy came off stage and opened the “wrong” door to find Screaming Jay Hawkins having his way with a willing female fan. Or in Baltimore when one of the Clowns dabbled with a young lady, provoking her brothers to hunt the group down. “They wanted to try to jack him up,” Rudy recalls. “He would not get in the station wagon and ride with us. The boys run us down, pulled us over, looking for him. Bobby Marchan, who was gay, said, ‘He is not in here.’ And so they started talking about getting their sister. Bobby says, ‘I do not want your sister—but I wi-i-i-ll take you!’ “

In 1959, hoping to capitalize on teen dance crazes and his association with Huey Smith and the Clowns, Rudy returned to the recording studio. His “Hully Gully Fever and the Flu Bug Too” was released on the Bihari brothers’ Kent label. When that failed to hit, he came back with “Hully Gully Papa” on Case, an independent label out of Gardena, California. “The Case label had Gene and Eunice with ‘Ko Ko Mo’ when the rock ‘n’ roll

was really getting strong... 'Hully Gully Papa' was a fabulous record. The Hully Gully and the Coffee Grind were the hot dances at that time and I picked up another alias, the 'Hully Gully Papa.' Boy, I love that guitar behind it."

Moore was doing everything he could to make it. "I tried very hard to get through. I used my own money. That's the way I built my career, the way I did business. I recorded myself...I made many of these recordings at two studios. Ted Brinson's and Austin McCoy's in Los Angeles. Two tracks was all we had. It was fifteen dollars an hour so I did the best I could because usually I had fifty or seventy-five dollars for each particular session...During those years I may not have had the money I needed to do what I wanted, but I did the best I could under the circumstances." Rudy had a winning sound, but he could not break through onto the charts. "I was buried and I didn't get a hit. I think I stood in the shadows of Pat Boone and the white boys that was doing rock 'n' roll."

There would be a few other records, including "Rally in the Valley" on his own label, Vermont, named for an avenue near his home in Los Angeles. By the dawn of the 1960s, though, Rudy Ray Moore was poised to re-invent himself as a comedy star, first on records, then in nightclubs. Like everything he'd ever done before, Moore personally bankrolled this project as well.

## **Dolemite**

Rudy Ray Moore was drawn to Southern California by the show business possibilities. Los Angeles was home to record labels and performance venues. Though he wasn't having the degree of success he wanted, Rudy was able to remain in the public eye emceeing rhythm & blues shows, generating enough income to pay the bills and underwrite recording projects. As the house emcee at the California Club, he worked with the Drifters, the 5 Keys, Hank "The Twist" Ballard and the Midnighters, Bobby "Blue" Bland, Etta "Miss Peaches" James, Bobby "Rockin' Robin" Day, and Ike and Tina Turner. "Tina oughtta adore me because I would introduce her as 'the hardest working woman in show business. Tina Turner! Let's bring her on and show her some love!'" In between acts, Rudy trotted out his own special brands of entertainment. He'd

sing, dance, and tell jokes. "I had a lot of finesse in putting on a show. I was known as Mr. Wiggles and I worked with a girl named Mrs. Wiggles. We'd stand on our heads on a chair, do a contortionist dance and do a split wide open."

One of the regulars at the California Club was Dootsie Williams, former big band leader and owner of Dootone Records. Williams had released sides on some of the great Los Angeles doo-wop groups, Don Julian and the Meadowlarks, the Medallions, and the classic "Earth Angel" by the Penguins. Williams had started his label, though, by recording so-called "blue" comedy, stand-ups like Bobby Mitchell, Slappy White, Hattie Noel, and most notably Redd Foxx. Williams invited Rudy Ray to record on a project with Redd Foxx. "The late and great Redd Foxx did humor years before me, but that was what we called in that period 'risque'...I did two comedy records for Dootone. Dootsie Williams...asked me to do an album. I had nothing going on at the time and much to my regret, I said yes. I never got a dime."

In 1962, one of Rudy Ray's comedy recordings caught the attention of Los Angeles radio station KGFJ. "I made a comedy album...called *The Beatnick Scene* when beatniks were going strong that almost saw success. A disc jockey by the name of Rudy Harvey on KGFJ had a program called 'Weather With a Beat.' They played that beat music behind him announcing what was going on, so they pushed my record as 'Weather with a Beatnick.' "

Rudy still fell short of a major breakthrough, but the exposure did land him a spot on the station. "I was playing records on KGFJ broadcasting remote control out of Dolphin's Record Shop...I had retired Prince DuMarr and Dolemite was not yet born so I was Rudy Ray Moore...When I worked at Dolphin's, *the* record store in Los Angeles,...we broadcast from the window. I was not one of the main DJs. I was the Record of the Hour man. The disc jockey would call me in. 'Now here's Rudy Ray Moore with the Record of the Hour,' and I would put a special record on...I made 'Papa-Oom-Mow-Mow' by the Rivingtons pick of the week. The label man brought the record down to the store...I put it on the air and it never turned back...I got a gold record award for helping the Rivingtons record come through." Rudy's press towards broader fame inched ever forward, his luck finally changing with the next phase of his career, the emergence of Dolemite.

The word “Dolemite” conjures up associations with mineral rock, which the dictionary says it is...if spelled “dolomite.” But Rudy spelled it his own way and described it as a mineral potion, “a powder you swallow to gain power...And since I am powerful,” he says, “I am Dolemite!”

Like all of his comedy creations, the character Dolemite was literally drawn from street culture. Moore first heard of Dolemite around 1970 in a recitation by a down-and-out acquaintance named Rico, a frequent walk-in at Dolphin’s Record Shop. “My very dear friend Rico—he’s late now, he got hit, run over by a Greyhound bus—would come in there. He had all of his teeth knocked out from messin’ with people so much. He was sort of a bully, a wolfman. So Rico didn’t have any teeth and as a result of having no teeth he used to always want to try get some food to eat. So he said, ‘Rudy if you get me some money for food, I’m gonna recite Dolemite for you.’ And I let him recite it before all the people that was in the store. They just fell out laughing at Rico doing Dolemite. And it finally come to my thoughts of saying, ‘if he can get people to laugh like this and not being professional, me as a professional could beat him. I should be able to get this to work.’ “ So, Rudy took over Dolemite and made the character his own.

*Some folks think that Willy Green  
Was the baaadest mother fucker the world ever seen.  
But I want you to light up a joint, take a real good shit,  
And screw your wig on tight,  
And let me tell you about the little baaad motherfucker called Dolemite.*

The rise Dolemite got out of people gave Rudy Ray Moore the incentive to make a record, a vinyl LP. “So when I did my own record, I went to these places and got my labels, got my stampers and so forth, made up the record, carried it to the record store, stuck the needle to it...When I found out it was a hit, I carried it to the record distributors on record row, we called it. And one of the men in there, he was a white fellow, made fun of me. He said, ‘Rudy, you have gone mad. What do you expect to do with this piece a shit!’ I said, ‘Sell It.’ Two days later the man called me up and wanted me to bring him 2000 copies of the album and said ‘Rudy, I’m so sorry, and I’m so proud for you, but I didn’t know what you had.’ I said, ‘Thank you very much, but right now I don’t need your good wishes. Just give me the money.’ “

The LP, titled “Eat Out More Often,” was originally released on Rudy’s own label, C.I.E., Comedian International Enterprise. As sales picked up, staffers at Kent Records where Rudy Ray had it pressed told label owners the Bihari brothers that the record was hot. “Jules Bihari said, ‘Rudy, what kind of record is this?’ And he became totally interested. I had gone out to Laff Records, Johnny Otis’ label with LeRoy and Skillet, to try to lease it to them, but they didn’t take the record. So Jules said, ‘Come back here immediately!’ I went back. He made me a deal and gave me twenty-five thousand dollars and said, ‘You can keep the record on your label in the state of California. I’ll distribute it nationally on the Kent label.’

The cover of Rudy Ray Moore’s album, “Eat Out More Often,” was a jolting pastiche of images and grungy furnishings, Egyptian lutes and lyres, fruits and Greek statues framing an amateur-looking stag film style photo. In the photo was a bust of an ancient pharaoh, a Victorian fainting couch in front of it, splayed on the couch a naked woman, her breasts strategically draped, a Mexican serape on the floor, Rudy Ray down on his knees behind the couch, naked from the waist up, the two of them locked in lascivious eye-contact. A narrow Black bar cut diagonally across the image, hiding private parts and within it the words “Rated XX For Strictly Mature Audience.” On August 29, 1970, “Eat Out More Often” reached #24 on the *Billboard* Charts. Rudy Ray had a hit at last.



Certainly there had been “dirty” comedy records before, but Moore took it as far as it could go. “I was the world’s first comedian on the face of this earth to put four letter words on a record.”

*This young lady was in the room with her boyfriend. Baby, he fucked, he fucked, he fucked. He knewed he had done the job. He backed up off the pussy and looked at her and said, "I know this dick is good." She said, "No, mother fucker, your dick ain't no god damn good." Then he said, "I want you to get up out of this bed and fix me some food." She went in the kitchen and brought him a carrot and a head of lettuce. He said, "Bitch, why you bring me this carrot and head of lettuce?" She said, "Motherfucker! You fuck like a rabbit. You might as well eat like one!"*

Of course, Redd Foxx had been doing comedy long before Rudy Ray. But Redd trafficked in the risqué, not the explicit. "Redd Foxx never told jokes [at least for public sale] with four letter words in them...Redd Foxx's albums were...all double meanings with words like 'jackass' and 'pussywillow.' He never said, 'My dick is in the ass of a pussy.' He'd say, 'My Dick,' like it was the name of a racehorse, 'is running and it got a slight edge on Pussywillow and Pussywillow is leading by a hair' and people would go 'oh!' These were risqué jokes, much tamer than the hard four letter words which I would do...I broke it through and from Richard Pryor on down to Eddie Murphy, they all copied me."

As to selling product, "We took the records across country in the trunk of our car, not having one inch radio play because it was too explicit for the air." "Eat Out More Often" was the first in a series of comedy LPs and in short time, Rudy Ray became known as—here comes another one of those titles—the undisputed 'King of Party Records.' "These were records," says rapper Ice-T, "that white people ain't never gonna see. You'd see these records and there'd be a whole bunch of butt naked women and Rudy Ray Moore in bed with a wig on doing some crazy stuff."

*I ain't lyin! All that white fellas got, a hundred pounds of nuts, but no dick!...A woman's legs are her best friends, but sometimes best friends has got to part! I like women with a lot of ass. Now this is what I call a lot of ass, baby. If this place would catch on fire and they'd tell everybody to haul ass, you'd have to make ten trips.*

## **The Filmmaker**

For the next few years, Rudy Ray plied the comedy trade touring, working nightclubs, and making new records. With each new album, his reputation and, to some



extent, his bankroll grew. By 1975, he was ready to take the next logical step—making movies. “So, due to the fact that *Dolemite* was such a big record, I decided to have *Dolemite* created into a screen play. And Jerry Jones was my writer. He wrote *Dolemite*, a fabulous script.”

At the time, so-called “Blaxploitation” action films were very big. *Shaft*. *Superfly*. Movies that were a cross between James Bond and tough cop stories, but with a Black perspective and Black actors in all the starring roles.

Rudy Ray had mixed feelings about the genre’s name. “‘Black exploitation’ is a bunch of bullshit. The reason why I say that is because the system has made pictures through the years where the Indian was on the screen, and the Indian always got shot down by the white man. *Godfather*, the picture that was made about the mafia. Now, we didn’t call that Italian exploitation. We didn’t call the pictures that they made Indian exploitation. Why call a picture, when we come out **not** being beat upside the head and whipped across the ass ‘Black exploitation?’ We were only doing something that made ourselves in the dominant role which we as Black people needed at that time...Butterfly McQueen. I went to see *Gone with the Wind* when Vivian Leigh ask her if she could deliver a baby and she said yes, she could deliver it. And when the time come for the baby to be delivered, she said, ‘don’t know how to deliver a baby.’ And Vivian Leigh slapped her. Knocked the shit out of her on the screen. Well, we as Black people had to sit there and watch this. Although we didn’t like it, it was what we had to do in those years in order to get a break in film. So if that had to be done and they were gonna make themselves stars, I say right on to our film stars of the past. Like the great Stepin Fetchit, he done what he had to do in order to be a star.”

Rudy did what he had to make it in movies. Same as his music, he bankrolled his first *Dolemite* film project, even distributed it himself. He also understood that he’d have to publicize the film on his own with a minimal budget. “When I did the films, I’d have to be like I appeared on records—bold, daring, sensational, and ‘sex-ational.’”

*Dolemite* came across as a low-budget parody of Blaxploitation films, packed with sex, action, and special effects. The critics almost universally panned *Dolemite*. “My very dear friend Earl Calloway, I got to give him a lot of credit. Earl Calloway did so much for that film. He wrote in the *Chicago Defender* - I still got the article - ‘*Dolemite* is

not fit for a blind dog to see. He's coarse, bold, crude, and rude.' And this made people say, "we're going to see how crude and how rude this *Dolemite* is!'"...*Dolemite* opened in Chicago...the great Wood Theater, one of the great theaters that would use so-called Black exploitation product. *Dolemite* broke a record there that was set by an old James Bond movie. We come in there at a \$3.00 admission and we did \$17,000 opening day."

Rudy Ray Moore starred as the title character in *Dolemite*, and in every film he ever made. As an actor, he drew on everything he'd ever learned or done in show business. He did karate moves, used four letter words, and staged steamy sex scenes. Money was so short that sound tracks were sometimes out of synch with lip movements and special effects obvious and cheesy, though no less a wonder to behold. "...Special effects I done would have cost thousands of dollars for the big motion picture companies, but only costed us a few dollars to do. In low budget filming, you've got to think. You gotta use your mind, soul, and body and your brain in order to use the little money that you have in the most effective ways."

Underlying the face value fighting, joking, and sex, there was a message. Rudy Ray Moore's *Dolemite* was a ghetto hero, a figure not unlike the signifying monkey who baited, cajoled, sometimes took a beating, did what he had to do to get over on the oppressors. "Yes, I beat up a lot of white people in my picture, not that I was trying to be derogatory against whites, but I just felt that we'd been beat upside the head so much in films, that I might as well reverse the action."

*Dolemite* was a hit for Rudy Ray Moore, not in the sense that he became wealthy - though he did make money - but rather that he earned broad respect for his statement and his uncompromising resolve in gaining a toe hold in a system otherwise closed off to him.

Through the 1970s, Moore's films and comedy records won adulation among those of the first hip-hop generation. About them he said, "these young men are trying to get a piece of the rock in show business, which sometimes is very difficult in the straight way, the clean way as some people may call it. And I don't endorse the style that they all use, but I endorse the effort. And due to the fact that they are my children, I say 'Right on, brothers and sisters.' "

He looks back on his career with mixed emotions. “The hard years up until now. The crying years. I am not often that tickled about reminiscing over my past because I did not make it work. I spent a lot of money recording myself. I recorded all them records, paid for them, produced them. I’ve become slightly hurt because I did not have the airplay and promotion I should have had. I couldn’t hit and I wanted to hit so bad in them days.”

There is more than a hint of bitterness in his looking back, but then his good nature and resiliency kick in. “I should be living up there in the Hills of Hollywood reminiscing over things that should have been. I should be living up here in a mansion someplace, but due to the fact I was ripped off by the industry...I’ve been cheated and beaten out of all the revenues I should have received. Now today I have one thing going for me...I am great on the stage. I am the world’s greatest stand-up X-rated explicit language comedian. When I say I am the world’s greatest, I’m not conceited. I’m merely convinced of my greatness. So therefore I have that going for me. So when I go out, I have the people to come out to watch me. That has kept me going through the years. So I say the power belong to the people.”

Rudy jokingly fantasized about what he would do as the President, never imagining that the first African American President was alive in Rudy’s own lifetime. “Put me in the White House,” proclaimed Rudy. “I’m taking the President’s job! I’m takin’ it, yes! Vote right. Vote Dolemite. And I ain’t lyin! When I get in the White House, you know what I’m gonna do? I’m gonna move on my first act. I’m gonna get me two thousand painters to paint the mother fucking White House Black. And I ain’t lying. If I get to be President and we take over, I’m **not** gonna kill all the whites. You know why? We will need workers!”

In terms of business acumen, Rudy Ray Moore had the wherewithal to keep all the masters of his early R&B recordings. Owning those masters is ultimately what led to renewed interest in his recording career in the 2000s. “Norton records knew of me and all the old masters that I had in my storage room for years as I moved from place to place. At one time I almost started to dump ‘em and throw ‘em out. But some kind of way I kept them. Then one day a young man told me a company in New York would like to purchase my old masters. And I said, ‘Oh! Go ‘head on take ‘em.’ I didn’t think there

was no action and no value because they're 45 years old. So I give 'em the records and the interest picked up out of New York. And I came out and did a stellar show at the Wetlands. Then I did another one out here in Los Angeles."

Rudy Ray Moore passed away in October 2008. In his final years, he continued to work, recording CDs of newly recorded music and comedy routines and making personal appearances that combined both singing and comedy. Rudy's goal as always was, as he put it, "to present myself controversially, like I did as a comedian, doing something that people did not really expect from me."

Rudy also had a new film in the works. "And it is hot," he said. "I have the sex scenes in it like I did years ago. And I have the hard language and talking to people in a hard dramatic tone. Real strong, and it should bust through the theatres!" With an intended release date in 2001 and the working title *The Return of Dolemite*, the film finally saw release in 2004 as *The Dolemite Explosion*.

Rudy was more at peace of late with the arc of his career. "I was bitter for a long time. At one point, I even had an idea of doing a video called *Video Banging*, in other words like gang banging, coming out with a video and discuss and talk about so many people in the industry that had given me problems. But I decided not to do it." The reasons were clear. Wronged or not, in the end Rudy took pleasure in knowing he had influenced a generation. He enjoyed his life and he lived comfortably. "I made enough money to do that. I didn't have the brand new cars and things, nothing I could really call my own like a lot of stars like Eddie Murphy and them have managed to come up with. But I had an act strong enough to go on the road and work. I worked from city to city on the chittlin' circuit making around \$400 a night. And I lived fairly well out of it."

As Rudy Ray Moore liked to say, "We're gonna give the world more than they'll ever come to see. I ain't lyin'! I was through with it before the others learned what to do with it!"

As for the "others," hip-hop artist Snoop Dogg said, "Without Rudy Ray Moore, there would be no Snoop Dogg." And from Luther Campbell of 2 Live Crew, "People think of black comedy and think of Eddie Murphy...They don't realize [Moore] was the first, the biggest underground comedian of them all. I listened to him and patterned myself after him."

Rudy Ray Moore was an uncompromising performer. He played to the urban Black experience and stayed true to his domain. While Rudy may have shot for broader fame and richer reward, his ultimate legacy is the memorable and indelible mark he left on 20<sup>th</sup> Century African American performance art.

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#### Sources:

Liner Notes, *Hully Gully Fever*, Norton CED 276, 2000.  
 Moore, Rudy Ray (Phone Interviews, 2-2001)  
*Rudy Ray Moore, The "Godfather of Rap" in The Legend of Dolemite!* Xenon Home Video, 1994.

### Discography and Filmography

#### R&B Singles

1955

|                    |               |
|--------------------|---------------|
| "The Buggy Ride"   | Federal 12259 |
| "Ring A Ling Dong" | " "           |
| "I'm Mad With You" | Federal 12253 |
| "My Little Angel"  | " "           |

1956

|                                             |               |
|---------------------------------------------|---------------|
| "Let Me Come Home"                          | Federal 12276 |
| "I'll Be Home to See<br>You Tomorrow Night" | Federal 12280 |
| "Step It Up and Go"                         | Federal 12276 |
| "Robbie Dobbie"                             | Federal 12280 |

1957

As Rudy Ray Moore with Carl Otis & His Castle Rockers

|                        |           |
|------------------------|-----------|
| "Hurts Me To My Heart" | Cash 1058 |
| "Josephine"            | " "       |

As Rudy Ray Moore with the Raytones

|                           |                     |
|---------------------------|---------------------|
| "Until You're In My Arms" | Cash 1059, Ball 502 |
| "Ready Willing and Able"  | " " " "             |
| "I'm Ready"               | Cash 1060           |

|                             |                 |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| "So Good To Me"             | " "             |
| "Angels On Earth"           | Ball 1002, 1007 |
| "Takes Two to Tango"        | " " "           |
| "Easy Easy Baby"            | Ball 1005       |
| "Miss Wonderful"            | " "             |
| "Don't Go No Farther"       | Ball 1007       |
| "The Beatnick Scene Part 1" | Ball 1008       |
| "The Beatnick Scene Part 2" | " "             |

With Jeanie Marie Anderson

|                                  |           |
|----------------------------------|-----------|
| "What'cha Gonna Do"              | Ball 1009 |
| "The Ballad of a Boy and a Girl" | " "       |

1958-1959

With the Ray Tones

|                                                         |                         |
|---------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| "Skitter Skatter Pitter Patter<br>(Pitter Patter Heart) | Ball 500, 505, Kent 342 |
| "Dear Ruth (Don't Deceive Me)"                          | " " " , Case 1006       |
| "My Baby Part 1"                                        | Ball 503                |
| "My Baby Part 2"                                        | " "                     |
| "My Country Gal"                                        | Ball 504                |
| "Your Tender Touch"                                     | " "                     |

As the Seniors

|                                            |          |
|--------------------------------------------|----------|
| "My Soul"                                  | Ball 001 |
| "Hully Gully Fever and the<br>Flu Bug Too" | Kent 342 |

As Rudy Ray Moore

|                                  |             |
|----------------------------------|-------------|
| "Hully Gully Papa"               | Case 1006   |
| "Take a Little Time to Do Right" | Vermont 105 |
| "Rally in the Valley"            | " "         |

1961

|                  |          |
|------------------|----------|
| "Driveway Blues" | Kent 363 |
| "Easy Easy Baby" | " "      |

1964

“Four O’Clock in the Morning” Imperial 66022  
 “Baby That’s Why I’m Your Fool” “ “

With the Fillmore Street Soul Rebellion

“Easy Easy Baby” Generation 1, Cherry Red 4501  
 “Put Your Weight On It” “ “

2000

*Hully Gully Fever* Norton Records CED276  
*Rudy Ray Moore is Dolemite!*  
*Scratch My Back* Generation International 1400XX

2001

*Rudy Ray Moore/Raw, Rude,  
 and Real* The Right Stuff

2002

*The Genius of Rudy Ray Moore/  
 Aka Dolemite/The Soul  
 Singer of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* Generation International 02

#### Selected Comedy Albums [With release dates when known]

*Below the Belt* Dooto Records  
*Let’s All Come Together* Dooto Records  
*Eat Out More Often* Kent 001/Comedian Enterprise International (1970)  
*The Return of Dolemite* Kent/Comedian Enterprise International  
*I Can’t Believe I Ate  
 the Whole Thing* Kent/Comedian Enterprise International  
*Rudy Ray Moore’s Greatest Hits* Right Stuff/Capital Records  
*This Ain’t No White Christmas* Right Stuff/Capital Records

#### Selected Films [With release dates when known]

*Dolemite* (1975)  
*The Human Tornado* (1976)  
*Petey Wheatstraw-The Devil’s-Son-In-Law* (1977)  
*Disco Godfather* (1979)

*Rude (1983)*

*House Party*

*The Legend of Dolemite (1994)*

*The Great White Hype*

*Big Money Hustlas*

*The Dolemite Explosion (2004)*