

Ray Charles

1930-2004

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Introduction

The 1950's proved to be a breeding ground for new musical genres, as many of the past merged together to form new types of music. With a voice filled with passion and emotion, Ray Charles integrated diverse genres such as jazz, country, rhythm and blues, and gospel into songs that would contribute to the creation of "soul". Often referred to as "the father of soul", his innovative music changed the music industry and has had a profound influence on countless existing artists today.



Biography



Ray Charles was born on September 23rd, 1930 in Albany Georgia.

His mother was a sharecropper and his father was a mechanic. (Ray Charles, 2012)

Ray Charles was blind by the age of seven.

He attended school for the blind and deaf in St. Augustine

He learned how to read, arrange, and write music, as well as how to play instruments in school. (Ray Charles, 2012)

Biography

When Ray Charles was 15, his mother died. At about the same time he developed a heroin addiction. (Ray Charles, 2012)

He moved to Seattle thereafter and recorded his first album. (Ray Charles: Biography, 2012)

In Seattle, he met Quincy Jones, who would become a lifelong friend and collaborator.

(Ray Charles: Biography, 2012)

He was signed to Atlantic records, and in 1953

created his first hit song "Mess Around." (Ray Charles, 2012)



Biography

In 1954 his "I Got a Woman" album was number one on the R&B charts.

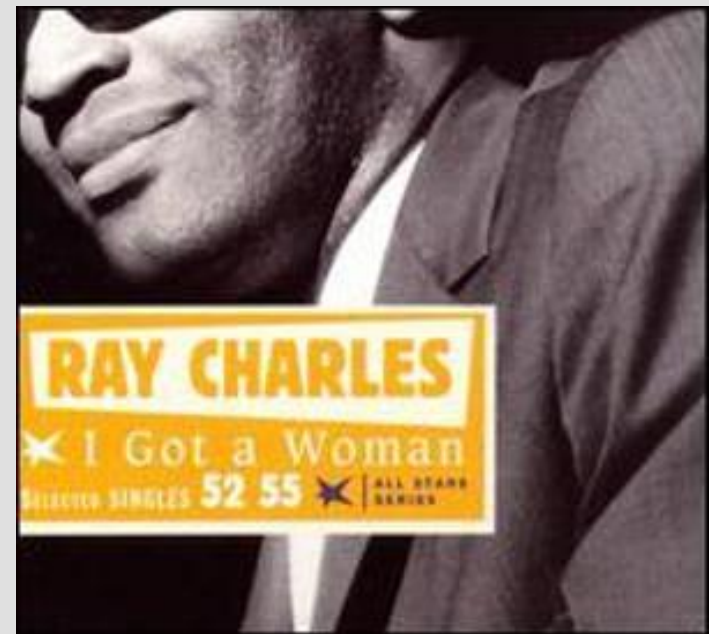
(Ray Charles, 2012)

In 1960 Ray Charles received his first Grammy Award for "Georgia on My Mind".

In 1965 he was arrested for possession of heroin.

Charles married twice and fathered 12 children with nine different women. (Ray Charles, 2012)

He died on June 10th 2004 from lung cancer.



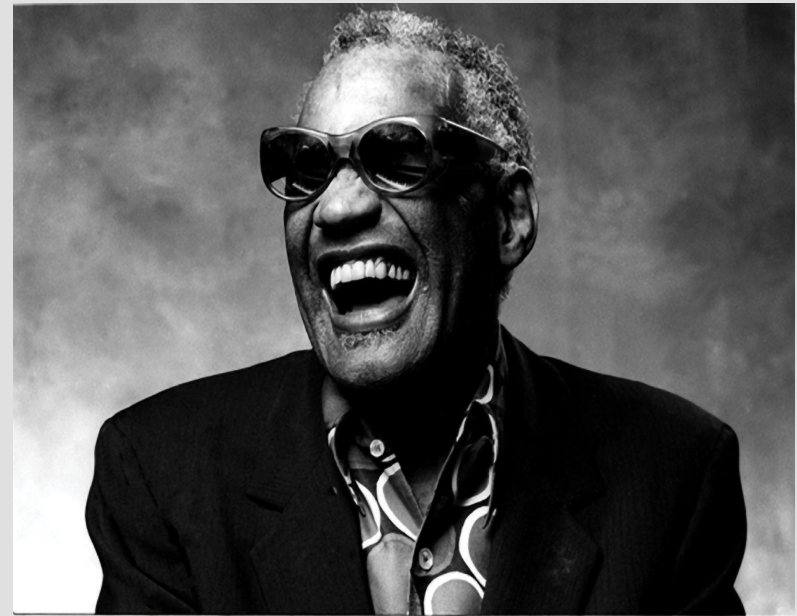
Musical Style

- Fused together rhythm & blues, gospel, jazz, country & western and blues
- Broke down barriers between sacred and secular music (Thirteen, 2006)



Unique Musical Style

- Had a powerful, rough-hewn voice
- Energetic outbursts which included vocal screams, wails and moans
- Passionate style of playing the piano
- Always played in dark glasses which became his trademark (Tom, 1997)



Musical Style Evolution

- Developed today what is referred to as soul music
- Influenced the crossover and blending of different styles
- Respected in many genres (Thirteen, 2006)



Musical Influences

Ray Charles' style was derived from a number of musical elements including:



- >50's R&B
- >Contemporary Jazz, Blues, and Country
- >Gospel-powered vocals
- >Piano dominated songs
- >Improvisation in vocals and instrumentation

>All of these elements combined took on the soulful music that Ray Charles mixed together and pioneered



Musical Influences

- > Nat "King" Cole influenced stylistic aspects of Ray Charles' musical presence
- > Charles' emulated Nat's low growling voice in "Mona Lisa" but made it his own by turning the deep growl into singing.

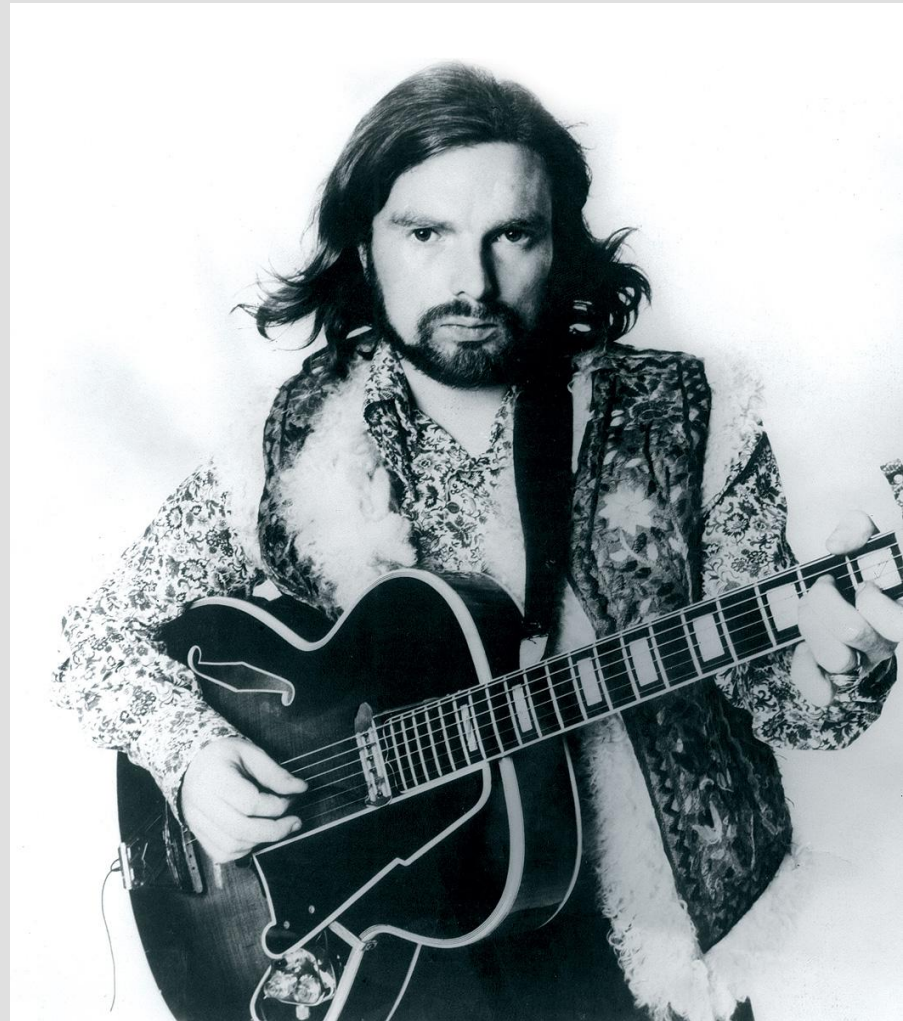


Nat "King" Cole

Musically Influenced

Ray Charles influenced many artists with his iconic style and his elements are seen in:

- > Phrasing in Van Morrison
- > Style with Joe Cocker and Steve Winwood
- > Blues and Gospel vocalizations with Elvis Presley and Aretha Franklin



Van Morrison

Other Influences

Nat King Cole

- Heavily influenced by and patterned himself after Nat King Cole
- Sought to maintain the similar smooth sound
- Emphasis on the vocal dynamics of the singer
- Upbeat tempo and popular 'acceptable' lyrics



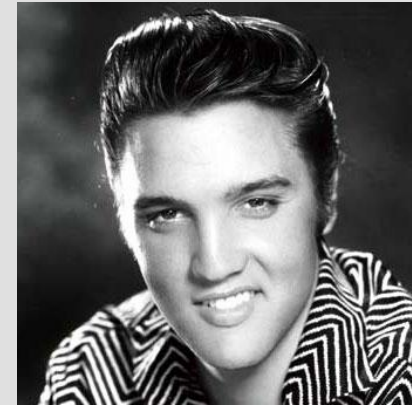
Charles Brown

- Blues singer and pianist whose jazz-club style significantly influenced the development of the blues in the 40s and 50s
- Slower paced, slower tempo, less reliance on a 'gospel-like' or 'preacher' tone being adopted by contemporaries
- Singing was lighter and worked in conjunction with a band or musical combo
- Smooth vocals, piano, sax, lead to the jazz piano style of Ray Charles

Louis Armstrong

- Aka 'Satchmo,' raspy singing voice, heavy trumpet, strong stage personality
- Contributed to the jazz soloist, offered that one man could do it all
- His vocal and musical skill helped transform the jazz genre, direct impact on the style of Ray Charles
- Showed impressive range vocally, able to work several genres, perhaps encouraged Charles movements between R&B and C&W

Contemporaries



- James Brown
 - Magnanimous onstage, strong vocal timbre, simple arrangements
 - Like Charles, came from and built upon a gospel background, sought to merge the two genres
 - Found popularity in a similar audience that was beginning to appreciate the evolving tones of the R&B turned Rock and Roll
 - Both were hounded by drug abuse for much of their careers
- Aretha Franklin
 - A voice to bring the house down, displayed remarkable range and dexterity in what was perhaps perfect control of voice
 - Like Charles, emphasis largely on the vocal performance, come from a gospel background that directly led to the ‘preacher-like’ oration of her tunes and others
 - Her sound brought a soul that is similar to Charles, and less like Brown, while still powerful, there exists an emotional range that reaches out from her tracks
- Elvis Presley
 - Like Charles in his attempts to genre-bend, switch between them and still achieve success, although Charles is largely seen as having been more successful in that regard
 - Unlike Charles in that his stage presence/persona helped to build upon a natural talent
 - Both came from a poorer background, both sought out music as a means of escape
- Fats Domino
 - The Fat Man’s sound harkened back to jailhouse blues and the grand preaching sound of other contemporaries
 - Emphasis placed on instrumentation, typical blues/jazz band formation
 - Like Charles in the heavy emphasis placed on the piano within their music

Historical Context

- The evolving palate of the American audience
 - Large bands supported by white corporations for white audiences began to change
 - R&B meets C&W and a wide variety of artists begin to escape their previously racially and socially allocated audiences
 - Technological innovation as a catalyst to this change, with greater exposure came greater blending of genres, and greater effort on the part of the artist to meet this evolving concept
- The racial tensions of the 50s and 60s
 - While Ray Charles is not as widely recognized for his efforts at championing the Black cause as contemporaries Aretha Franklin and James Brown, still important for his success as a Black Musician coming from the south
 - The heavy influence of R&B on the social tensions



Historical Context Continued

- Exposure as a means of understanding
 - Music served as a medium that could bridge some race, social, and location differences
 - Early R&B and R&R still could not escape its racial connotation, but was fueled by an audience largely swept up in the differing sounds being produced
- Other Factors
 - As previously mentioned, Ray Charles developed blindness at an early age, but it merits further recognition
 - Not just seen as a black musician, but a man that is overcoming great adversity
 - Success of black musicians forced white corporate music to bend a knee to a different clientele, also led to an increase in smaller indie labels
 - Music offered one of the few ways for social ascension for the black community
 - As with all superstars, with great success came the opportunity for drug and alcohol abuse, of which Ray Charles struggled throughout his career



Conclusion

Ray Charles's soulful singing and genius integration of different genres was revolutionary of its time and is still used for which many musicians gauge their work. As noted earlier, Charles's music had an impact on 1960's artists such as Joe Cocker, Steve Windwood, Van Morrison, and he has influenced countless modern-day artists such as Norah Jones. Producer Quincy Jones said, "There will never be another musician who did as much to break down the perceived walls of musical genres as much as Ray Charles did".



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