

Exploring the life of ray charles music essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Ray Charles was born as Ray Charles Robinson on September 23, 1930 in Albany, Georgia and from the age of 17 he blessed us all with his gift of music for well over half a century. As one of the most influential musician to date, he blended together music from so many genres that never seemed to go together. He crossed genres of R&B, soul, rock and roll, blues, jazz, country and western, pop and gospel in a way that no other artist can claim to have achieved. This essay will attempt to take a stroll through the life of Brother Ray, aka The Genius and discover a number of his songs.

Although Ray was born in Georgia and lived most of his youth in Florida, he knew that all the big names in music were in big cities, and so at the young age of 17 he already saved up some money from playing in small local gigs to move to Seattle, Washington. It was there that he started the Maxim trio and signed up with Down Beat Records. They recorded the hit song “Confessin’ Blues” in the spring of 1949. During the next 16 years, Ray Charles would both find himself both making great music while at the same time struggling with a heroin addiction.

Over the next 3 years he produces another six singles, but they were all still very much in the softer mellow form of Charles Brown and Nat King Cole. It was at this point when Atlantic Records sees great potential in him and buys his contract from Swing Time Records for \$2, 500. It’s Atlantic Records’ intention to help Ray Charles find that something special and did they ever! It was at Atlantic where over the next seven years he recorded numerous hits such as “ Mess Around”, “ What’d I say” and the groundbreaking song “ I Got a Woman”.

In 1954, Ray Charles records " I Got a Woman" which blended gospel music with R&B. This caused a massive display of anger from some people claiming that he was singing devil music and that he was defiling God's music. Even that would not stop Ray and his music, " I Got a Woman" hit #2 on the charts. This song is commonly thought of as the very first song of the Soul genre with the rhythms and blues and the emotion of gospel blended perfectly together.

Not slowing down at all, Ray Charles makes yet another chart topping song with Atlantic Records called " Drown in My Own Tears". However, Ray Charles would not be limited to just R&B and started to add different elements to his songs. In 1957 he recorded " Swanee River Rock" which establish him as a crossover artist as it was in the Top 40 in both the R&B and Pop charts. Less than two years later he really starts to master his technique and hits the nail on the head with " What'd I say". That song hit the top spot in the R&B charts and hit #6 in the Pop charts. Looking to continue exploring musical options it is here when Ray Charles decides to leave Atlantic Records for ABC-Paramount. ABC-Paramount gives Ray Charles an extremely generous contract including owning the masters of his recordings, which at the time just did not happen.

Taking advantage of better equipment and resources at ABC-Paramount, Ray Charles records one of his most famous songs called " Georgia On My Mind". This hit the top in the Pop charts, #3 in the R&B charts and even scored on the charts in the UK. Even with all the songs already doing so well, Ray Charles, over the next few years will continue releasing hit songs that do well on multiple charts. It was at the end of 1960 when Ray Charles records an

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album that stays in the top ten called “ The Genius Hits the Road”. He would outperform this in just a few years.

In between the albums he has a number of Top 10 and Top 40 releases, “ Ruby”, “ One Mint Julep” and two absolutely amazing performances in “ Hit the Road Jack” which hit #1 in both the Pop and R&B charts and “ I Can’t Stop Loving You” which not only hit #1 in the Pop and R&B charts it also topped the UK charts.

Meanwhile, Ray Charles was also working on something utterly groundbreaking. The album was called “ Modern Sounds in Country and Western Music” (two volumes). This was the first album where he explores in depth the country and western genre. For almost four months, the album stays at the top spot. This type of success, the people really loved his work, inspired him to make the second volume under the same title “ Modern Sounds in Country and Western Music Volume Two” which stayed at the second spot in the charts.

Over the next four years, Ray Charles creates hit after hit after hit.

Unfortunately his heroin addiction is starting to take over. Even though he recorded songs like “ You Don’t Know Me”, “ You Are My Sunshine”, “ Take These Chains From My Heart”, and “ Busted” and all of them doing extremely well, the creativity and power behind the extremely large library of hits is about to take a turn for the worse and slow down. In 1966, Ray Charles’ heroin and marijuana addiction land him in trouble. Sentenced to a five year suspended sentence, Ray Charles finally gets help for his addiction.

From this point forward, most of his songs do not sell well. Many of them top out at the 100 or lower on the charts. While he does slow down and he stops creating the amazing hits that he once did, he does spend quite a bit of time on the nightclub circuit touring with other bands. While he may have stopped creating new classics at this point, it can not be underestimated the impact of all of his previous works. It is over the next twenty years that the public starts to officially recognize Ray Charles for the impact he had on not only the music industry, but on society as a whole with the passion of his music.

In 1979 Ray Charles was honored by the State of Georgia when they announced that his version of “ Georgia On My Mind” would be the official state song. In 1982 he was inducted into the Blues Foundation Hall of Fame and then in 1986 he was one of the first to be inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame by his long time friend Quincy Jones. Two years later in 1988 he receives a Lifetime Achievement Award. 1993 Billy Joel presents him with the Songwriters Hall of Fame Lifetime Achievement Award. Two years later he is awarded another Lifetime Achievement Award at the Rhythm & Blues Foundation. In 1994 he wins his 12th Grammy Award.

In the last ten years of his life he spends about eight months of the year performing at various places. He receives countless more awards in recognition of his contribution to music. He even performs for Ronald Regan at the White House which he felt was one of the brightest moments in his life.

In 2004, Ray Charles worked extensively with Jamie Fox to create the movie called Ray. The movie focuses on the 30 years of his life where he goes from

one label to the next and goes from one genre to the next and masterfully blends them together. They cover the ups and downs of his life, particularly his addiction to heroin and particularly how Ray Charles felt about his own addiction. One element that the movie touches on that this essay has not yet is his romantic life. In the movie, he has a wife and a romantic interest, but he actually had two wives over the same period and had quite a few additional love interests that produces at least twelve children. A self proclaimed ladies man and junkie who did drugs because it was his pleasure to do so does not quite fit what one would assume to be a recipe for major lifetime success on the level that Ray Charles has enjoyed. And while because of the racial inequalities during the period when he performed he earned significantly less than most other white performers. What is most ironic is that today, with so many popular artists going bankrupt and having to sell off homes and getting high dollar items repossessed, with all of that and him getting payed less, he still enjoyed an extremely comfortable lifestyle and more importantly as a testament to what kind of business man he was, he owned everything he had. He was not like the artists today that rent or lease multiple planes, no, he had a jet and he owned it outright. His houses and cars all paid for. All of his kids were taken care of and on top of that each one of his kids were given a one million dollar check and Ray Charles paid the taxes off each of the kids on top of that. Unlike many others, he had such a crystal clear grasp of things, which is hard to fathom given how artists live today and the drugs he was taking.

June 10, 2004 Ray Charles Robinson passed away from liver cancer. He knew he was going to die soon yet his passion kept him strong. During the last

years he continued his singing, and writing and recording. He was set to make an appearance at the grand opening of the movie Ray in a few months. He had an album that he was working on that was a compilation of duets with B. B. King, Van Morrison and his life long friend Willie Nelson amongst many others. They, and many many others came to pay final respects for the real “ father of soul”. And I as well, as somebody who never before listened to his music, have over the course of researching Ray Charles and his music come to respect and admire the works of Brother Ray.