

Ray Charles remembered as an innovator, icon

BEVERLY HILLS, Calif. (AP) - Ray Charles is being remembered as a musical innovator who blended genres of music to create a new style. Charles died on Thursday of acute liver disease at age 73.

Ray Charles had a string of hits in the early 1960s, including "I Can't Stop Loving You," "Georgia On My Mind" and "Hit The Road Jack."

"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," said music producer Quincy Jones, who described Charles as a "brother in every sense of the word."

Charles died at his Beverly Hills home at 11:35 a.m., surrounded by family and friends, said spokesman Jerry Digney.

Blind since age 7 and an orphan at 15, the gifted pianist and saxophonist spent his life shattering any notion of musical categories and defying easy definition.

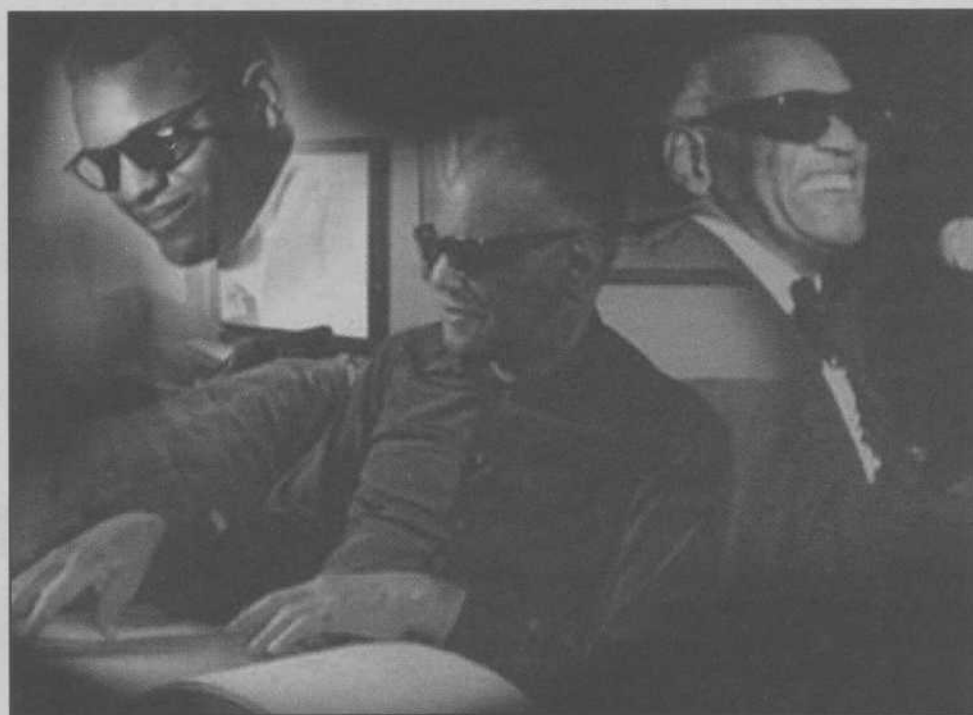
One of the first artists to record the "blasphemous idea of taking gospel songs and putting the devil's words to them," as legendary producer Jerry Wexler once said, Charles' music spanned soul, rock 'n' roll, R&B, country, jazz, big band and blues.

Over the course of a 58-year career, he put his stamp on it all with a deep, warm voice roughened by heartbreak from a hard-scrabble childhood in the segregated South. Smiling and swaying behind the piano, grunts and moans peppering his songs, Charles' appeal spanned generations.

Aretha Franklin called Charles "the voice of a lifetime."

"He was a fabulous man, full of humor and wit," she said in a statement. "A giant of an artist, and of course, he introduced the world to secular soul singing."

James Brown recalled, "He was just a sweet, gorgeous and wonderful person ... He was a role model for all



Ray Charles used the power of music to unite the masses. Reared on church tunes but made a cultural icon via secular songs, Charles sat at the intersection of American music.

people that got to know him and his music. I respected the genius ... What set him apart? He was Ray Charles — just that!"

Billy Joel, a fellow piano man, said he and others started out by imitating Charles. "Ray Charles was a true American original ... Ray Charles defined rhythm & blues, soul and authentic rock 'n' roll," Joel said Thursday.

Charles' health deteriorated rapidly over the past year, after he had hip replacement surgery and was diagnosed with a failing liver. But he kept on working on what would be his last CD, "Genius Loves Company."

"There were a couple of times where he would say, 'I'm not feeling well today but I'll take a stab at it ... I can come back to it later.' And he never had to come back to it later," said John Burk, who worked with Charles as producer of the upcoming duets album.

The Grammy winner's last public appearance was alongside Clint Eastwood on April 30, when the city of Los Angeles designated the singer's studios, built 40 years ago, as a historic landmark.

Charles won nine of his 12 Grammy Awards between 1960 and 1966, including the best R&B recording three

consecutive years ("Hit The Road Jack," "I Can't Stop Loving You" and "Busted").

His versions of other songs are also well known, including "Makin' Whoopee" and a stirring "America the Beautiful," which he sang for the late President Reagan at his 1985 inaugural ball.

"I was born with music inside me. That's the only explanation I know of," Charles said in his 1978 autobiography, "Brother Ray." "Music was one of my parts ... Like my blood. It was a force already with me when I arrived on the scene. It was a necessity for me, like food or water."

Charles considered Martin Luther King Jr. a friend and once refused to play to segregated audiences in South Africa. He was one of the legends receiving Kennedy Center Honors in 1986, cited as "one of the most respected singers of his generation ... the pioneer who broke down barriers between secular and sacred styles, between Black and White pop."

Charles was no angel. His womanizing was legendary, and he struggled with a heroin addiction for nearly 20 years before quitting cold turkey in 1965 after an arrest at the Boston airport.

Yet there was a sense of humor about even that - he released both "I Don't Need No Doctor" and "Let's Go Get Stoned" in 1966.

His ups and downs are chronicled in an upcoming biographical movie set for release in October, titled simply "Ray" and starring Jamie Foxx.

Charles, who was di-

forced twice was survived by 12 children, 20 grandchildren and five great-grandchildren. A memorial service will be held at Los Angeles' First AME Church, with burial afterward at Inglewood Cemetery.

Ray Charles Robinson was born Sept. 23, 1930, in Albany, Ga. (He later dropped his last name for the stage, in deference to boxer Sugar Ray Robinson.)

He lost his sight and was sent away from his impoverished family, heartbroken, to the state-supported St. Augustine School for the Deaf and the Blind. Glaucoma is often mentioned as a cause, though Charles said nothing was ever diagnosed.

Before that, he began dabbling in music at age 3, encouraged by a cafe owner who played the piano. The knowledge was basic, but his early influences and inspirations included the classics of Chopin, country and western stars he heard on the Grand Ole Opry, the powerhouse big bands of Duke Ellington and Count Basie, jazz greats Art Tatum and Artie Shaw.

By the time he was 15 his

parents were dead and Charles had graduated from St. Augustine. He wound up playing gigs in Black dance halls — the so-called chitlin' circuit — and exposed himself to a variety of music, including hillbilly (he learned to yodel) before moving to Seattle.

His first big hit was 1959's "What'd I Say," a song built off a simple piano riff with suggestive moaning from the Raeletts. Some U.S. radio stations banned the song, but Charles was on his way to stardom. He was called "The Genius" and was playing at Carnegie Hall and the Newport Jazz Festival.

His last Grammy came in 1993 for "A Song for You," but he never dropped out of the music scene until illness sidetracked him last summer.

"The way I see it, we're actors, but musical ones," he once told The Associated Press.

"We're doing it with notes, and lyrics with notes, telling a story. I can take an audience and get 'em into a frenzy so they'll almost riot, and yet I can sit there so you can almost hear a pin drop."

T-Boz

(Continued from Page 8)

band grabbed me around my neck and choked me," threatening to kill her, T-Boz said.

She said police officers had to help her and her daughter leave the home. Police reports on the incident weren't immediately available.

The violence continued, she said, when she told him in March 2003 that their marriage wasn't working. At that point, the affidavit states, Mack 10 threatened to have her

"erased."

The 32-year-old rapper has been ordered to appear in court June 22.

TLC, whose hits include "Waterfalls," "Creep" and "No Scrubs," is one of the best-selling female groups of all time and has won four Grammys.

T-Boz and Rozonda "Chilli" Thomas have not released any new material since Lisa "Left-Eye" Lopes, the group's third member, died in a car crash in Honduras in April 2002.

THE ROYAL STREET THEATRE PRESENTS

NOT TOWN

10 P.M. - 2 A.M. **Fridays**
in the Royal Street Theatre

Appearing in **JUNE**

FREE
with a two drink min.

THE EXPERIENCE

All Bands Subject To Change

JERRY'S NUGGET

1821 Las Vegas Blvd. N.
(702) 399-3000