# Ray Charles' son to fulfill wish—eulogize his dad

By Mary Bleier Sentinel-Voice

Before he died, legendary gospel and blues singer Ray Charles, who added soul to his interpretation of patriotic songs, made sure his son would preach at his funeral.

That request came true after Charles, born Ray Charles Robinson, died June 10 at age 73. His son, the Rev. Robert Robinson Sr., led two funeral services for his dad last week in Los Angeles. One was the public service on Wednesday and the other was a private ceremony for family on Friday, June 18.

In a sermon paying tribute to his father, the Rev. Robinson will preach at Las Vegas' Greater St. James Baptist Church, 316 Madison Ave. on Sunday, June 27, where longtime family friend, the Rev. Gary Hunter, is pastor. One of 12 children, Robinson, 43, said he remembers his father as a man who inspired him and gave him the tools to become the man he is today.

"He wouldn't preach at me. He would live (what he believed) it," Robinson said. "When I was young, it was Greater Faith Ministries of

more of his example and looking at his life that inspired me. After looking at a blind man who grew up in the South, lost both parents at a young age and then made it in the music industry, I knew I could do anything."

Those incentives, and his father's encouragement led Robinson down the path to ministry. Robinson didn't know right away that he was going to become a preacher. After he graduated high school, the then 17-year-old went on tour with his dad for about four years. That was until Robinson had a son born in California and decided to move back to Los Angeles to take care of him.

Those were trying times in his life and Robinson leaned on his father's advice. "God has a special plan for you," Charles said. It was something that stuck with Robinson, who held various jobs until he got a calling into ministry in 1988.

"God gives us talents and what we do with them is a blessing," said Robinson. "I have a God-given talent to be an orator." Ordained in 1988, Robinson became pastor of



Robert Robinson Sr., one of recently deceased music icon Ray Charles' 12 children, delivers a sermon on Friday. Robinson, pastor at Greater Faith Ministries in Los Angeles, fulfilled his father's wish, preaching at his funeral.

Los Angeles in August 2003.

Thinking back over his life, as son of a celebrity, Robinson chuckled, remembering just how humble his father was. "I'm just like you" was something Charles often told his fans when they met him. Robinson said his father met many prominent people, such as the Queen of England and several U.S. presidents, but always reminded his children that those people put on their pants the same way everyone else does.

Robinson added, "My lifestyle is similar to my dad's when it comes to humility. I learned it from him by watching his actions.'

An example of humility was the millions of dollars he secretly gave to various charities. "He didn't want or need for people or the media to know how much money he was giving out," Robinson

During the first funeral service, a woman came up to Robinson and hugged him, telling him that without his dad's donation to a medical organization, she wouldn't have been able to afford an operation that ultimately saved her life. Even today, Robinson doesn't know all the charities and organizations that have benefited from his father's generosity.

While all of Charles' children learned valuable lessons from him, only a few have followed in his footsteps in the music industry. Several of the Robinsons have ventured into gospel music and are working on signing with various record labels. Music, however, was something that was almost mandatory in their household.

"We were all required to do something in music, whether it was playing an instrument or singing," said Robinson, adding his brothers and sisters and mother, Stella, all had a hand in his dad's lifelong music career.

# Praise event stirs controversy

By Lés Pierres Streater Sentinel-Voice

Nowadays, Randall Cunningham, formerly with the University of Nevada Las Vegas, and those halcyon years in Philadelphia and Minnesota, is quarterbacking for the Lord.

The spirit was alive and resounding in glory as a congregation of thousands gathered in the Cox Pavilion on Saturday, June 12. Scores of musicians ministered through the Word and song. Praise of the Lord swept throughout the pavilion, offering encouragement and support.

Worshipers raised their hands acknowledging the message.

The third annual Unity Day was sponsored by Cunningham and attracted people from all denomina-

"Unity Day 2004 has been a blessing for us as about 3,000 people came out today to support our event and give thanks to the Lord," Cunningham said. "It's so beautiful to see a group of people willing to take time out of their busy schedules to come together and praise all the good things that the Lord is doing and has done for



Sentinel-Voice photo by Lés Pierres Streate

Gospel music star Kirk Franklin headlined Unity Day on Saturday at the Thomas & Mack Center. Put on by former NFL star Randall Cunningham, the focus was on praise.

them. This ministry is about sharing the love of God, worshipping the Lord and giving people the opportunity to be together as one in fellowship with one another."

was a cameo appearance by Kirk Franklin.

"My relationship with Randall Cunningham, you know, he's like a brother to me and I was here today because of the love I have for him and the things that he's doing," said Franklin. "My job is to promote the love of God and I am grateful for having the chance to do this and support one of my brothers in worshipping the Lord.

The greatest job for anyone is to serve the Lord. For people who didn't get a chance to be here today, remember that Godhasn't forgotten you, that God sees you in the crowd A highlight of the event even if you're not here and He's always there for you. Our greatest love should always be him and not what we do but who we are in him."

The last 90 minutes of the event proved to be the most controversial part of the day. Originally scheduled to be a climactic finish to a reverent festival of worshipping the Lord through praise and music, the end of the program featured a number of donated

(See Unity Day, Page 5)



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