

A Tribute to Ray Charles September 23, 1930 – June 10, 2004

By Christie Taylor



With the popularity of singing /reality TV contests, we have been indoctrinated into choosing "Idols" who may, or may not, become legends. Recently we have lost a man who is what these new stars hope they will become – a true legend. Ray Charles has entertained us, excited us and inspired us for six decades. His rare ability to mix his musical palette of the Blues, R&B, Country and Rock & Roll amazed many generations.

This Georgia native never let his blindness and the segregated South stop him from showing the world his dignity and unmatched talent. After his first crossover hit

in 1959, *What'd I Say*, he went on to garner many awards throughout his career. Just to name a few of his accomplishments, Ray Charles won 12 Grammy Awards, was one of the first inductees in the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 1986 and was awarded the highest honor the U.S. Government bestows on an artist in 1993: the National Medal of the Arts. Ray also gave back to those who needed

help the most. He was one of the many legendary artists in 1985 who joined together for the historical, *We Are The World*, project, participated in helping the American Foundation for the Blind and the NAACP and he established the Ray Charles Robinson Foundation for the hearing impaired.

Ray Charles' trademark smile, glasses and voice will be remembered whenever people turn on a television or pop in a DVD. Generations yet to come will get a kick out of Ray swaying side to side on his piano stool. They will get a warm feeling as his fingers

tickle the black and white keys. They will also be moved by the way he sings his greatest hits on some of television's greatest shows. How can *Moonlighting* fans forget the way Ray delivered his lines to David? How can we not laugh and enjoy the parody of his signature songs? Ray embodied the soul and spirit of David Addison, which made Ray the perfect choice to be David's conscience in *A Trip To The Moon*. And as television fans, how can we forget the unforgettable scene that occurred in the Huxtable family living room. Ray's *Night Time Is The Right Time*, was the right song that captured *The Cosby Show's* most endearing scene.

As we mourn, we also realize Ray Charles' music will never die. His songs are ingrained in American society. The moment we kick our enemies to the curb, *Hit The Road, Jack*, is the song we grab from our memory. When Georgia is on our minds, Ray is too, and *America, the Beautiful* isn't the same without Ray's passionate rendition. We all know none of us is immortal, but if God chooses Ray Charles as one of his singing angels, he's got the right one, baby. Uh-huh.