

WEDNESDAY 23RD SEPTEMBER

Ray Charles Robinson was born in Albany, Georgia on this day in 1930. He grew up in poverty with his mother and his younger brother. A local cafe owner helped his mother, sometimes watching the boys while his mother worked and the owner also taught 3-year-old Ray to play the upright piano in the cafe. When he was five his younger brother accidentally drowned in his mother's washtub. Ray started to lose his sight around the same age and was blind by seven.

His mother encouraged Ray to be independent and sent him to a deaf-blind school where he was taught to read music by **Braille** with one hand and learn classical piano pieces. When Ray's mother died at 14 he was alone and needed to work so began playing piano for bands in clubs and imitating other singers.

His breakthrough came when he created his own style by mixing sounds like Gospel with Blues and Jazz. Songs such as [I've Got a Woman](#) and [Mess Around](#) made Ray Charles a star in the 1950s and created the sound that became known as Soul Music. In the 1960s he had worldwide hits such as [Georgia On My Mind](#) and [Hit The Road Jack](#). Later he crossed more boundaries making Country music. He recorded for more than 50 years, winning 17 Grammy's before he died in 2004, the same year his life was the subject of the biopic Ray ([trailer](#)).



- What other challenges would Ray have had losing his sight?
- How does Ray's music make you feel?
- Who is mixing musical styles today?

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He combined Gospel and Jazz for his own unique style. Songs such as *I've Got a Woman* and *Mess Around* made Ray Charles a star in the 1950s and for decades after.

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