A Tribute to
When Ray Charles married sacred and secular music, for some, it was the musical equivalent of miscegenation. To countless others, it was the birth of a new sound sired by pure musical genius.

As his career scaled the heights of musical success, Ray proved to be the consummate mingler. He stirred soul into country/westerns. And even poured his emollient vocals on the music of a full orchestra to effectively turn “America” and “Georgia On My Mind” into classics that don’t fall neatly into any one category. His profound success at mixing and blending, mingling and marrying music earned him the title “Genius.”

When Morehouse paid tribute to Charles, there were countless instances of nontraditional mingling. Perhaps it was Ray’s spirit that smiled upon the College as it ventured West for the first time because, by all accounts, the evening was a resounding success.

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Celebrated actors rubbed elbows with college administrators. Soul stirrers like James Ingram and Gerald Levert shared a stage with country crooners Travis Tritt and Ronnie Milsap. And singing with the Crenshaw Elite High School Choir of Los Angeles were adult chaperones who long ago decided that, rather than sit on the sidelines and watch, they would instead get into the spirit and sing with the students.

The Beginning of a Beautiful Friendship

The match up between three great institutions—Morehouse, William “Bill” Cosby and Ray Charles—first occurred back in Atlanta in January 1997. The College invited Charles to an impromptu jazz concert with the Morehouse Jazz Ensemble, and, on the recommendation of his friend and business manager, Joe Adams, Charles accepted. So did Bill Cosby when he was called to emcee the concert.

“The energy of that evening was electric; the synergy, tangible,” said President Walter E. Massey ’58, telling the full house in the Beverly Hilton Hotel in Beverly Hills about the evening in 1997 that had led to the evening at hand.

The event that paired Hollywood hoopla with a small Southern college launched a fund-raising campaign for the Ray Charles Performing Arts Center, the centerpiece of the larger Morehouse College Center for the Arts (see sidebar on page 50), and raised $670,000 in table and ticket sales and corporate sponsorships. An additional $12 million is needed before construction can begin in spring 2006.

But, as Kathleen Johnson, Tribute Planning Committee chairperson, explained, the benefits of the Tribute came in terms other than financial.
"We wanted to increase public awareness of Morehouse on the West Coast and within the entertainment industry," she said. "Based on the tremendous media coverage of the event, participation of nine nationally known artists, including Stevie Wonder, attendance by numerous celebrities and support from many additional individuals and companies in the entertainment business, I can say unequivocally that we achieved our objectives, which we hope will lead to an expanded base of financial support from the West Coast.

"In fund raising, you don't often get the opportunity to leverage a legacy gift," said Johnson, referring to two $1-million gifts Charles gave the College in 2001 that sealed his commitment to help find, educate and inspire the next generation of music pioneers. "That is what made our tribute to Ray Charles unique. This event, unlike any other that we have had, certainly outside of Atlanta, allowed us to build on Mr. Charles' gift and legacy and begin to cultivate new supporters of the College. Morehouse was very fortunate to have had this opportunity," said Johnson.

The Tribute attracted some of the biggest names in entertainment. Besides Wonder, also performing for the evening were James Ingram, Brian McKnight, Michael McDonald, Billy Preston, Patti Austin, Gerald Levert, Travis Tritt and Ronnie Millisap. Jamie Foxx and Regina

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Above: The Tribute to Ray Charles attracted more than 800 guests to honor the legendary singer. Left: Phillip Howard '87, vice president for Institutional Advancement introduces guests to the Ray Charles Performing Arts Center.

The Maestro Behind The Meeting

It is safe to say that, without Joe Adams, the Tribute to Ray Charles that kicked off the fund-raising campaign for the Ray Charles Performing Arts Center would never have occurred. That's because the meeting that paired Charles and Morehouse back in 1997 would not have happened. And the vision to find and educate future generations of music pioneers would not have been conceptualized.

Adams is a lot like one of the famous maestros – although he may not create the music, he masterfully orchestrates the blend.

Back in January 1997, Adams, who was Charles' longtime friend and business manager, recommended that Charles come to Morehouse to perform with a talented group of young musicians – the Morehouse Jazz Ensemble – who weren't even born when Charles began his outstanding career. In 2001, Adams accompanied Charles when he gave two $1-million gifts to the College.

However, Adams and his wife, Emma, were already strong supporters of the College. In 1995, they established the Emma and Joe Adams Scholars Program at Morehouse, which helps to support students who balance academic excellence with a commitment to community service. To date, the Adamses have given a total of $1 million toward student scholarships in support of the program. In 1998, they contributed an additional $1 million for the construction of the Leadership Center, which—when completed in fall 2005—will house the Emma and Joe Adams Public Service Institute.

As stated in its mission, the Institute "endeavors to perpetuate a culture of service by which the College will realize its mission of developing men with disciplined minds who will lead lives of leadership, service and self-realization." Each year, Adams Scholars must volunteer at least 350 hours to community outreach activities.

Because of the Institute, more great things are happening in the lives of the young men who serve their community and in the lives of the people they aid. Joe and Emma Adams's friendship to the College is nothing short of wonderful.
King, stars of “Ray,” the movie that chronicles Charles’ life, were in attendance along with a constellation of other stars, including Mekhi Phifer of “ER,” Golden Brooks of “Girlfriends,” LisaRaye McCoy of “All of Us,” Hill Harper of “CSI: NY,” Chris Tucker of “Rush Hour” fame, and TV’s Judge Glenda Hatchett.

Della Reese sauntered into the lobby and made her way through a gaggle of photographers shouting over each other to get her to peer into their cameras. Reese, looking as radiant in a white, trailing gown as the angel she once played in “Touched by an Angel,” happily obliged.

LaRissa Santos, a visitor from Brazil, said that she had just come in from a day of shopping and was told famous people would be coming through the lobby. “We’re just trying to see some American stars,” she said, then paused as a man wearing a pony tail and a brown Chinese top created a frenzy among the photographers. She grinned widely and whispered breathily: “My husband loves Steven Seagal.”

During the ceremony, Samuel L. Jackson ’72, a Morehouse alum who has made a name for himself on the big screen, introduced his alma mater to the mostly California crowd. When he announced that Morehouse had been chosen for the third consecutive time as Black Enterprise magazine’s college of choice for African American students, Hollywood applauded.

Not everyone in attendance, however, was drawn to the Tribute for its star factor. Morehouse had an impressive fan base, as well.

“I come to as many events as possible to support the school,” said Harun Abdur-Rahman ’02, who traveled from Atlanta, where he works at Aetna Pharmacy Management. “We have to give back, so I do whatever I can to contribute.”
Dale Jones ’82, a managing partner of Heidrick & Struggles’ Southeast Region office, added: “This is a monumental occasion for Morehouse to honor one of its best supporters. This was Ray Charles’ cabbage patch, and it’s appropriate that we honor him where he practiced his craft. The ‘House’ had to come to his home.”

But there was another compelling reason for Morehouse to throw such a lavish shindig in California. Said Morehouse trustee Willie “Flash” Davis ’56, a founding partner at Davis, Robinson & White, LLP of Boston: “In addition to the resources in Hollywood, let me call your attention to the fact that the state of California provides Morehouse with the largest number of students—second only to Georgia. So it’s very appropriate that we’re here tonight.”

**Remembering Ray**

In the end, however, the evening’s main draw was not the celebrities or the College—but the man who inspired the Tribute: Ray Charles. Music mogul Quincy Jones, who shared memories of his lifelong friend, said he knew Charles was special when he met him as a teenager 53 years ago.

“He hit [Seattle] like a nuclear weapon—a weapon of mass seduction,” said Jones. “This man was revolutionary, and you could tell it

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right away. I never met a man who I wanted to be more like... Without Ray, I never would have been [what I am]."

As the mood fell a shade reflective and melancholic, Jones admonished the audience: "There will be no pity party for Ray Charles. That man lived more lives than 900 of you here."

Taking up the thread on Charles' legendary lust for life, Joe Adams, Charles' longtime business manager, said: "Things were supposed to slow down when I stepped in [Ray Charles'] shoes. Ray had some big feet—huge, huge feet." He added: "We are going to continue Ray Charles Enterprises," referring to Charles' music companies, studio and foundation.

Commenting on the evening's flair, Adams added: "Ray would be fussing profusely to me "What is this? I didn't come here to eat, I came here to play. But deep inside, he would think, 'This is wonderful.'"

Cosby, another one of Charles' close personal friends, sported a maroon Morehouse sweatshirt and dress slacks in a room of tuxedoed gents and gowned divas. He told a story of how, when introducing Ray at a performance long ago, a spinning theater rotated to reveal an all-white band. He recalled how he discreetly approached Charles about it: "Ray, your band is all white. Ray said, 'That's funny... They don't sound white.'"

Classic Ray. Here was a man who was blind to the things that separate us, but could visualize the world as it should be, mixing and matching music, people, ideas... all in the pursuit of excellence.

It's a good thing that he chose to mix it up with Morehouse.
When Morehouse College decided to honor the legendary Ray Charles in Beverly Hills, Calif., on September 29, 2004, we were extremely fortunate that Dr. William H. Cosby Jr., already an active supporter of the College, agreed to serve as the event’s co-host. Who better than Cosby, a man who has achieved phenomenal success in both education and entertainment, could provide the perfect bridge between the “House” and Hollywood. Indeed, Cosby is a rare breed—an entertainer as well known for his pioneering efforts on the small screen and hilarious, family-friendly stand-up comedy, as he is for his staunch commitment to education.

The relationship between Cosby, Ray Charles and the College began back in 1996, when Ray Charles was invited to perform with the Morehouse Jazz Ensemble and Cosby opened the performance. Last year, when Cosby heard about the vision for the Center—and about the College’s decision to name the Center for Ray Charles—he immediately joined Morehouse in making plans for the tribute. Cosby was determined to honor his good friend by helping Charles and Morehouse realize their commitment to find, educate and inspire the next generation of music pioneers.

The College’s friendship with Cosby, however, goes further back. In 1988, Cosby handpicked Morehouse for his only son, Ennis, who graduated in 1992. Serving as the College’s Commencement speaker in May 2004, Cosby explained to the 500 graduates why it was important that his son have something he didn’t get at Temple University: “I’ve never seen the friendship and camaraderie for African Americans and Africans like I have at Morehouse,” he said.

Morehouse College is proud to recognize the immeasurable influence, enthusiasm and support Bill Cosby has given to the College over the years as a parent, member of the Board of Trustees and impassioned advocate for education. However, we are particularly pleased to acknowledge Cosby’s leading role in launching the fund-raising campaign for the Ray Charles Performing Arts Center—an edifice that will honor the music and legacy of our mutual dear friend, the incomparable Ray Charles.
Yvette Victoria, Robert Crews, Regina King, Deborah Crews, Alvin and Valerie Spiller, Geraldine and Joseph Thornton and Brenda and William Galloway.

Calvin Grimes ’??, dean, division of Humanities and Social Sciences with guest Lamell McMorris ’95 with mother and brother

Actress Della Reese with husband Franklin Thomas Lett

Donald Long ’64 and Scott A. Harris ’96

Faye and Robert Davidson ’67, Tribute dinner co-chairs

Actor Chris Tucker with entertainment mogul Clarence Avant
Karla and C.D. Moody Jr. ’78, host committee members

First Lady Shirley Massey, actress LaTanya Richardson and Judge Glenda Hatchett

Herbert Charles, director, Department of Telecommunications; artist Samella Lewis and husband Paul and Darlene Charles, associate professor of psychology

Morehouse Board of Trustess, from left: John Wallace, Otis Moss Jr. ’56, Robert Davidson, Bill Cosby, Herman Cain ’67, Willie "Flash" Davis ’56, Dr. Artis White ’51, Walter E. Massey ’58 and Billye Aaron (seated)

"ER" actor Mekhi Phifer and guest

Raphael Tisdale, dinner co-chair; Flash Wiley; Kathleen Johnson, Tribute planning committee chairperson; and Chester Davenport ’67, dinner co-chair

Carol and John Wilson ’79
The Ray Charles Performing Arts Center is a 575-seat performance hall featuring celestial lighting, a U-shaped parterre and loose-chair seating in the wings. The $20-million Center will be equipped for both musical and theatrical performances. It is slated for construction in 2006.

The Performing Arts Center will be the centerpiece of a larger complex, the Morehouse College Center for the Arts. This 40,000-square-foot complex will provide additional performance, rehearsal, instructional and office space for the music department, as well as gallery/exhibition space for the College's art collection. The Center for the Arts will be located at the edge of the historic West End of Atlanta at the corner of Joseph P. Lowery Blvd. and West End Ave.

NAMING OPPORTUNITIES

House Seating
House Foyers (2)
Stage (Performance Platform)
Backstage (Off Platform Left-Right)
Balcony
Balcony Foyers (2)
Green Room
Chorus Dressing Rooms (3)
Star Dressing Rooms (2)
Control Room
ADDITIONAL NAMING OPPORTUNITIES:

THE MUSEUM
OUTDOOR SPACES
- Formal Terrace
- Music Department Terrace (Along West Avenue)
- Music Walk (Outdoors)
- Arts Walk of Fame
- Performance Lawn
- Jazz Garden

PUBLIC SPACES
- Performance Hall Lobby
- Upper Lobby
- Bridge Connector
- Terrace Balcony
- Music Walk (Indoors)
- Music School Lobby

THE MUSIC DEPARTMENT
- Choral Rehearsal Hall
- Choral Rehearsal Hall Overlook
- Instrumental Rehearsal Hall
- Midi Studio (Computer Lab)
- Classrooms (3)
- Chairs' Studio
- Faculty Studios (9)
- Dual Piano Faculty Studio (2)
- Organ Faculty Studio
- Performance Library
- Listen Station Reading Room
- Percussion Practice Room
- Small Practice Rooms (5)
- Medium Practice Rooms (3)
- Large Practice Room
- Faculty Lounge
- Student Lounge
- Student Organization Office (2)
- Conference
- Reception
- Workroom
- Lighting/Archival Materials Storage

For more information on how to support The Ray Charles Performing Arts Center and The Morehouse College Center for the Arts, please contact the Office of Institutional Advancement, 404-215-2660