

Because Ray Charles has such long legs, they jacked up the piano legs two inches. Someone forgot, however, to tighten up the foot pedals (which hung down from the body of the piano). So, when Brother Ray began to pound down on the pedals, they worked loose. They, in fact, fell off. Ray Charles explained to his audience of some 2,000 people his problem, and then swung into "Born to Lose" without the benefit of pedals to control the tone of his piano. The man is truly a genius, because even without pedals the song worked!

Ray Charles sang for an adulatory crowd such favourites as "Georgia on My Mind", "I'm Busted", "Crying Time Again" and "You are My Sunshine".

The Ray Charles orchestra played fire numbers, ranging from a gutsy, spirited opening through deep, bluesy sounds to a final fast, rhythmical number which culminated in a drum solo.

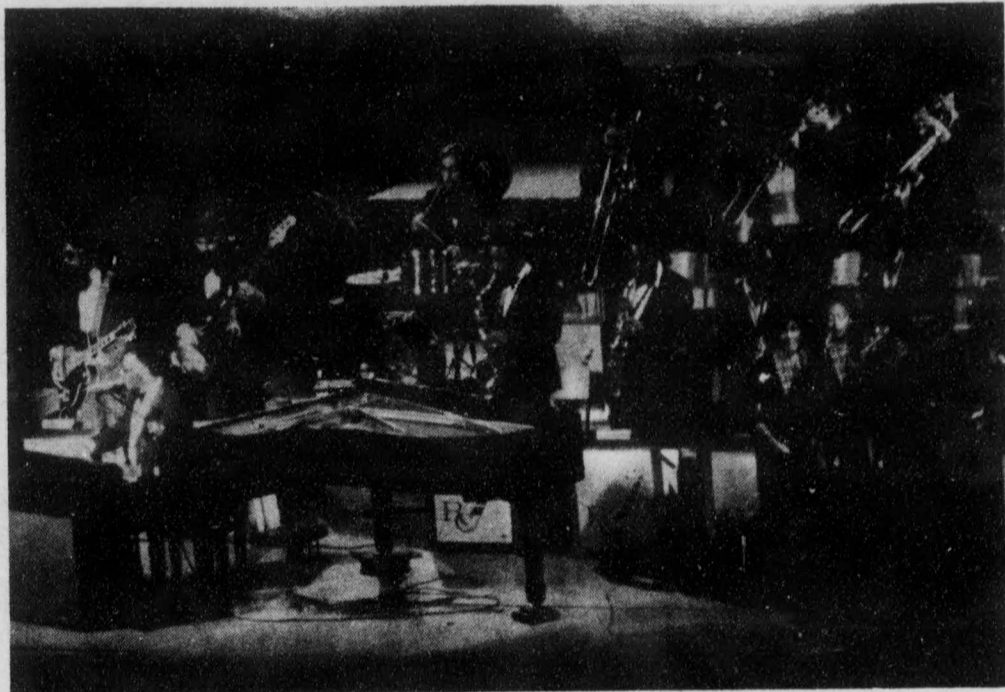
Then the fun began. A member of the band prepared to do a flourishing trumpet solo. After two or three false starts, with much raucous encouragement from fellow band members, he completed his flourish - the lights dimmed - on came Eric Bently and Freddie.

Freddie was only four foot high and suffered a problem - Eric Bently wouldn't take his hand out of his back. Freddie was, in his own words, "a dummy, not a fool." Freddie sang "Boogie Woogie Blues" to the delight of the audience. The pair kept up a fast paced dialogue, commenting on, amongst other things, the temperature of the Aitken Centre (cold) and the unlikelihood of playing in Fredericton after having appeared in such places as London, Rome, Paris and New York. The audience was highly appreciative of most of his jokes. (It is perhaps a sign of the healthy nature of the audience that they could savour jokes directed at Fredericton and the Aitken Centre, yet were less enthusiastic over the stock jokes aimed at ugly women, wives in particular.)

After Eric Bently had stuffed Freddie into a suitcase and made his exit, the lights came up, and Ray Charles was led onto the stage.

Story - Rosemarie Hopps

Photos by Debbie Sharpe



Cold floor but
a warm audience
for
"BROTHER RAY"

The entire crowd rose to its feet, applauding thunderously, as he entered.

Immediately a crowd of photographers gathered around the stage. Ray Charles started his show, but stopped after the first number to request that photographers move away. The sounds of cameras clicking were an annoyance to him. When the photographers left, he resumed playing.

Lighting for the show was incredibly well synchronized with the mood of the music. Shades of blues, reds and yellows played across the stage, making the performance a visual as well as aural experience.

Adding to the visual experience were the Raelettes, a group of female singers, who provided back-up to Ray Charles. Normally, the group consists of five women, however, one was sick for the performance. Brother Ray (his own terminology) expressed the hope that we would not be disappointed with only four girls. We were not. The Raelettes were with Ray Charles for the concluding four or five numbers of the show.

When Ray Charles attempted to leave the stage, the audience gave him a standing ovation, which persuaded him to stay. He played another number, which was well received. As a finale, in advice to the people who had endured the cold of the Aitken Centre to hear his show, he played a song which sounded suspiciously like an incitation to go out and get stoned.

Finally, to his third standing ovation, Ray Charles was led off-stage.

The tone of the evening was informal. Musicians encouraged each other, clapped rhythms for each other's performances, and joined in the applause. Audience members applauded when they recognized a song, and joined with the band members in clapping rhythms.

The impression one is left with is of a tuneful, boisterous, happy evening, spent watching and hearing a man who is indeed a genius. The show was undoubtedly a success.

