

**Etta James & Ray Charles – Lives, Times & Music**  
**Pamela Rose, instructor**

Few singers touch our souls as deeply as Etta James and Ray Charles. They took our breath away with naked emotional truth, whether crooning tenderly or smoking 'em down. But each also transcended typical music labels, straddling jazz, blues, country, R & B, gospel, by creating their own unique soulful sound that was bigger than any genre.

All the more extraordinary in light of the fact that each of these artists managed not only to survive their difficult early years, fighting Jim Crow laws on the road, they stood up for themselves as they carved out a unique place in music that we now call 'soul'.

With in-depth biographical detail, archival footage, sing-a-longs and some live performance, we will explore the lives, times and music of these two Soul Masters.

**Week by Week Outline**

---

**Etta James - Early Years**

Left in a boarding house by her 14 year old mother, young Etta became a child gospel star at 6, was discovered in San Francisco by Johnny Otis and put on the road at age 15. We'll learn how her years at Chess Records in Chicago made her a genuine recording star, giving us songs like 'At Last' which never grow old. Despite all that success, a growing drug habit took her down hard.

**Etta James – Up from the Ashes**

Crawling out from a lifetime of pain and addiction, Etta managed to resurrect her life and her career, while developing a stage presence that was mesmerizing to behold. We'll learn how she defied pop, rock, country, R & B and jazz classifications to make her own indelible sound. We will be joined by pianist John R. Burr for some live performance of her biggest hits.

**Ray Charles – Early Years**

Learning to boogie woogie at age 3, blinded at age 4, orphaned at 14, young Ray learned to navigate the world on his own through his music. Learning the music business on the road, he soaked up jazz, country, gospel and blues becoming a highly sought-after accompanist and arranger. We'll explore the evolution of his sound and his early recordings, and his explosive entry into the Billboard Top Ten with his signing with Atlantic Records.

**Ray Charles – Breaking All the Rules**

In the 1960's, Ray began to chafe at his being labelled as an R & B artist and went back to his roots – country, gospel and jazz, all the while earning the nickname his fellow musicians called him: 'Genius'. We'll learn about how he handled his addictions, ('heroin, cigarettes and women' according to Ray) while battling legal troubles and taking part in the Civil Rights movement – till he finally became one of the most recognizable voices of our generation. Pianist John R. Burr will join us for some live performance.

**Suggested Reading:**

**Rage to Survive: The Etta James Story**  
**By David Ritz and Etta James**

**Brother Ray: Ray Charles' Own Story**  
**By David Ritz and Ray Charles**

**Rhythm and the Blues**  
**Jerry Wexler and David Ritz**

**Suggested Movies:**

**Ray**

**Cadillac Records**

**Suggested Listening:**

**Ray Charles**  
**Genius + Soul = Jazz**  
**Modern Sounds in Country and Western**  
**The Best of Ray Charles: The Atlantic Years**

**Etta James**  
**At Last**  
**Tell Mama**  
**Seven Year Itch**  
**Mystery Lady: Songs of Billie Holiday**