

arts/entertainment



Ray Charles . . . plays to a small but appreciative crowd.

Photo by M. Billingsley

Charles plays to sparse audience

By Casey McCabe

His easy listening capabilities make Anne Murray and Eddie Rabbit appear diluted by comparison. He sings gospel with a fervor that would put the Oak Ridge Boys to shame, and country artists from Conway Twitty to Willie Nelson cannot deny his influence in their field.

attendance. He was quick to establish rapport with the crowd, though the opening numbers were marred by poor volume levels on the piano, and some distraction within the band that kept Charles from bringing his classic hit "Georgia" to a suitable climax.

THE SHOW really started rolling when Charles inserted his own funky jazz style into "Oh, What a Beautiful Morning."

He further explored the range of his repertoire with the bluesy "How Long Has This Been Going On?" and an up-tempo soul version of "Some Enchanted Evening."

In order to "help the old man finish the show," Charles then introduced The Raelettes, his four female back-up singers who were a tight, pleasing addition to the show.

Especially nice was Charles' rendition of "I Can't Stop Loving You," his massive 1962 hit that brought him fame in country and western circles.

HIS REMAKE of Johnny Nash's "I Can See Clearly Now" moved with less reggae and more gospel and jazz, while he broke up the song with spoken asides to the crowd. The show ended with hand-clapping music and an amusing audience sing-a-long.

Ray Charles never let the crowd down as he kept up an enthusiastic pace for the entire show. The crowd (the smallest one for this year's fair), rewarded him as best they could as their applause filled the many empty spaces of the Sports Center. Hopefully, the disappointing ticket response for Charles will not keep the State Fair from booking equally influential artists in the future.

concert review

Most importantly, Ray Charles added the element of jazz and soul otherwise missing from this year's State Fair entertainment.

So it might be expected that the legendary Charles would draw a crowd far and above that of his State Fair predecessors. But that's not the way it seems to work, though his performance did draw genuine appreciation from the sparse Saturday night crowd of 1,605 at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

Leading off were the comfortable jazz sounds of the 17-piece Ray Charles Orchestra. The generally unamplified nature of their music made for a pleasant diversion, as the big band sound boomed through the hall or hushed to pin-drop levels at the sweep of the conductor's hand.

"As the corn turns yellow, soul comes to Nebraska" was the introduction as Charles was led onstage amidst dedicated cheers and applause from the small numbers in

Red-headed stranger gives usual great performance

By Barb Richardson

"A red-headed stranger from Blue Rock, Montana rode into town one day," and sang his songs of life to about 7,600 people at the Bob Devaney Sports Complex Friday.

review

Willie Nelson, wearing canvas tennis shoes, blue jeans, T-shirt and his famous red bandana was deservedly welcomed to Nebraska's State Fair with hoots and hollers of appreciation from the audience.

His tradition of giving a good performance was not cast aside Friday night.

The format of Willie's show was basically the same—with the addition of a few new numbers from *One For the Road*, which he recorded with Leon Russell—as the last time he appeared in Lincoln in October 1978.

But Willie himself has aged considerably. His once red beard was gray as it was last October, but his red hair, nearly always in a pony tail, seems to have given way to more gray hair. For a man of 46, Willie's face of time lines ages him 15 more years.

Whenever and wherever Willie performs, a diverse crowd is likely to attend. Friday night was no exception. Old, young, executives, students, people in suits, blue jeans,

wearing cowboy hats and leather jackets gathered for one reason—to hear Willie play.

WILLIE RAN through "Whiskey River," "Ain't it Funny How Time Slips Away" and "Nightlife" at the beginning of the show without letting his quality performance drop.

Willie's harmonica player, Mickey Rapheo, should be credited for jazzing up a few numbers including "If You Got the Money, I Got the Time."

Willie seemed to overcome the distracting rotating stage in all of his numbers. He played to all the audience all of the time.

ALMOST EVERYONE'S favorite Nelson song was performed in the hour-and-a-half he was on stage, including "Blue Skies," "All of Me," "The Time of the Preacher," "Sweet Memories" and "Mama Don't Let Your Babies Grow up to Be Cowboys." Even Jimmy Carter's favorite, "Georgia," was part of Friday night's show.

Willie made sure to include his 1975 Grammy Award winner, "Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain," which no one can sing quite like Willie. "Blue eyes" got twice the round of applause that his other numbers did—a definite crowd pleaser.

Keeping with tradition, Willie included, "Amazing Grace" and "Will The Circle Be" toward the end of his performance.

After the concert, Willie continued to please his audience by signing autographs and taking pictures with fans backstage—a man who no doubt enjoys what he is doing.

WILLIE SAID in an interview after the concert that he has been playing and singing all his life. Friday night he played a guitar that he has used for 15 years. The

guitar hangs from his neck by a red, white and blue guitar strap which is almost as old as the guitar.

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Willie Nelson

Photo by M. Billingsley

Circus performers a close-knit family

By Mary Kay Waymah

Many people have dreamed at least once of running away to join a circus.

Circus stars performing last weekend at the State Fair International Circus say they could not think of any other life.

"Where else could you work for four minutes and get paid for it?" one asked, slightly tongue-in-cheek.

Far from being a group of runaway recruits, most circus performers are tightly knit families:

"It's an art form that's been on the decline. Fewer and fewer people are getting into it," said James Plunkett, of the Bounding Plunkett trampoline act.

Plunkett, also billed as Christopher James for his slack-wire act, is part of a family whose roots, however mobile, touch down in Nebraska. Plunkett's father was born in Dickens, Nebr., and his brother in O'Neill.

Another family, the Flying Gaona's are from Mexico. David, 10, and Julio, 11, are highlighted in the flying trapeze act.

Pedro Gaona said circus work is the most normal thing in the world for him.

"From my great-grandparents down, all were in the circus," he said. "Before I was born I was around the circus so I'm part of it and it's part of me."

HENRY CASTRO and his brother, George, from Colombia, walk the high wire. The half-inch wide wire strung 45 feet from the ground often is considered the most dangerous circus act since they work with no net.

The Castro Brothers leap-frog and dance on the wire. At one point George climbs on Henry's shoulders and they balance, with only one foot on the wire for support.

"I don't think about being afraid. I enjoy it," Henry said. He said the high-wire act he has performed for 15 years with no falls simply is "working."

Gaono spoke of his trapeze work with less simplicity and some reverence.

"You find out that you can get above yourself, do something that not many on earth can do," he said.

GAONO SAID HIS hands sweat when he watches others perform on the trapeze.

"I see it from here and say 'What the hell am I doing up there,'" he said.

But once he climbs the rope ladder and takes hold of the flybar he loves, he said he is a "fish in water up there."

Plunkett plays the clown in his difficult slack-wire act. Seemingly drunk, he takes to the wire with ease, drawing enthusiastic applause from the crowd.

He said he has been trampolining since he was "knee high to a duck" and working with the wire for ten years.