

Music to help bring the voices of the Delta to life

Whether expressing jubilation or singing the blues, African-American music has always been a rich vehicle for sharing the joy and trials of being human. Holland's script calls heavily upon blues and gospel songs to help tell the story of her life on the Delta. It is composer Dwight Andrews's job to weave that music seamlessly in and out of Holland's written text.

"In a way my job is easy, because with African American plays, the music always grows out of real experience," says Andrews, who worked with August Wilson on his first four

plays. "When the men all start singing at the table in *The Piano Lesson*, its because that's what men used to do. Women really were singing while they did their work. It's not a segue, it's not something that's pasted in to get from 'point a' to 'point b.' It's just a matter of reconfirming and recapturing what's already there."

Andrews plans to use female vocals with little or no instrumentation to convey the sense of *Delta* as a woman's story. "I want to literally let the women's voices resonate to make the music," says Andrews. "I plan to

use short song excerpts in an earthy, 'Sweet Honey in the Rock' kind of fashion."

He also plans to incorporate the African American tradition of using voices as percussion and other instruments. "The voices will create the whole sonic complex from which we extract different parts."

"There are times when I'm going to try to actually interweave different traditional songs that perhaps have different meanings," says Andrews, whose plans for *Delta* were only be-

ginning to take shape at the time of this interview. "For example, you might hear 'Trouble in Mind,' but I might set it against a hymn like 'Precious Lord' as a sort of counterpoint."

"I don't want to overpaint the role of music," says Andrews modestly. "I see it as a kind of ground upon which the play will float."

"What I'm trying to do is simply what we all do with music—to sing our song as a commentary on where we are in life."