

Pair of profs pen Pulitzer Prize play's piano parts

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Two Emory professors recently created the music for a Broadway play—a play which, at its opening last week, had already won the Pulitzer Prize for drama.

Dwight Andrews, an ethnomusicologist in Emory's Music and Afro-American and African Studies departments, composed and directed the score for playwright August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson*. Dr. William Ransom, head of Emory's piano department, performed and recorded Andrews' music for the play.

Plans are in the works for the team of Wilson and Andrews to produce a workshop of a full-scale musical at Emory in 1991. "It's very involved," Andrews said. "Because he is such an important writer, [there are] various pulls on his time." Andrews said he hopes to "use Emory as a kind of testing ground, to give us a chance to look at it before we've gone into expensive production budgets."

The Piano Lesson is the tale of a black family who must decide whether to sell a piano, a family heirloom of enormous sentimental performance, for money to buy the farm on which their ancestors were slaves. The family struggle is complicated by the appearance of a piano-playing ghost, with music provided (via tape) by Ransom and key movement provided by a complex computerized player piano. Before opening on Broadway, the play had engagements in Washing-

ton, D.C., Los Angeles and off-Broadway.

The music itself is "taken from the 1920s and 30s. It's African-American...folk music," according to Andrews, that "ultimately becomes part of the blues and early jazz traditions on piano. There are also examples of a prison work song, which really has its roots in the African-American slave community. The third type of music—there's not very much music, but it's widely varied—is music that represents the ghost...kind of European-influenced parlor music of the 1930s. Part of the challenge was to contrast Sutter's ghost's music with the music of the black family."

Andrews is a composer, saxophonist, and musical historian whose Music 115, "Jazz: Its Evolution and Essence" ranks among the most consistently popular courses on campus. Ransom has been hailed by critics as "one of the greatest of the new generation of pianists," and has toured throughout the U.S. and Europe.

Andrews' association with Wilson began while the former was musical director of the Yale Repertory Theatre, where Wilson has launched all of his plays. Their collaboration began with 1983's *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, and continued through *Fences* (1985) and *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* (1986). The latter two plays have been performed at Atlanta's Alliance Theatre to rave reviews, and Andrews hopes to be involved when *Ma Rainey* is produced at the Alliance next year.