

# Renaissance Guy

MUSICIAN, COMPOSER,

TEACHER AND MINISTER,

DWIGHT ANDREWS PREACHES

THE GOSPEL OF JAZZ

By Steve Dollar  
STAFF WRITER

Class is in session, Dwight Andrews is in motion, and an epiphany is just around the corner.

"Open up those ears," the composer and Emory University professor tells his crowded jazz history audience, a sweat-shirted sea of predominantly white, middle-class science and pre-law students. "This is going to radically change your life. You're gonna be a different human being."

In an instant, a scratchy recording of Louis Armstrong's 1926 performance of "Big Butter and Egg Man" fills the air, and the solidly built teacher is gently but enthusiastically working the room. Equal parts drill instructor, cheerleader and musical missionary, he leads his students in a sing-along to Satchmo's revolutionary cornet line — the dawn of solo jazz improvisation.

"Pretend you're a trumpet," he implores, "and do it."

Before the hour is done, Mr. Andrews has a swelling orches-

tra of swinging underclassmen on his hands, hands that never seem to be juggling less than a dozen tasks at once.

Yet, for this soft-spoken Detroit native, all the tangents of life are a single endeavor. A Renaissance Guy for the multicultural '90s, Mr. Andrews, 41, has a niche for every hour in his day: teaching, preaching, composing, playing and writing.

"I didn't have a particular model for a minister who's also a jazz musician who also works in the theater, who also teaches and writes about culture," Mr. Andrews says, peppering his conversation with hep jargon like "man" and "cat" without once sounding pretentious. "I did have some wonderful models for the specific areas, so my challenge was just to try and figure out how to live a life that allowed me to integrate them for myself."

Before coming to Emory in 1988, he began a fertile creative partnership with playwright August Wilson, whom he met while teaching jazz and working as the musical director of Yale Repertory in the early 1980s. "Every time I sit down to write a play, I



ANN YOUNGLING

## CONCERT PREVIEW

### The Dwight Andrews Quintet

8:15 p.m. Friday, Glenn Memorial Auditorium, 1652 North Decatur Road N.E. \$8.50. 727-6187.

think of music and I think of Dwight," says Mr. Wilson, who used the composer's period scores for his blues-rich dramas "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom," "Fences," "The Piano Lesson"

and "Joe Turner's Come and Gone." "I couldn't have done any of the plays without him."

But Mr. Andrews also is the Rev. Andrews, recently installed as associate minister at Atlanta's First Congregational Church. And a saxophonist whose creative roots wind from Motown's funky '60s scene to the flowering of an avant-garde jazz community in New Haven, Conn., and New York City in the '70s and '80s. He

makes his Atlanta debut as a leader Friday when he performs with a powerhouse ensemble of jazz musicians — including pianist Geri Allen and drummer Pheeroan akLaff — at Emory's Glenn Memorial Auditorium.

Mr. Andrews is propelled by a need to unify not only the threads of his various careers but the whole of African-American culture also, using all the

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Thursday, Oct. 15, 1992



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# A little night music: Hot musicians, cool jazz

By Steve Dollar  
STAFF WRITER

Dwight Andrews assembles his dream team Friday night.

The saxophonist and composer has rounded up a jazz ensemble of longtime friends who are also among the most creative musicians working in any genre.

"I think this will be a very provocative chemistry," says Mr. Andrews, who will join vibraphonist Jay Hoggard, bassist Mark Helias, drummer Pheeroan akLaff and pianist Geri Allen for a concert at Emory Universi-

ty's Glenn Memorial Auditorium. Most of the compositions will be Mr. Andrews's own, with additional music by jazz giants Eric Dolphy and Thelonious Monk, as well as Ms. Allen and Anthony Davis.

The emphasis, however, will be on feeding the flames of improvisation.

"If you're not careful as a composer, you forget the wonderful physicality of making a horn do what you want it to do," the composer explains, "and the wonderful risks that are involved in that. The challenge of getting

it to do it, and if it doesn't do it, [then] making what came out of what's right. That kind of living on the edge is what I'm anxious to get back to."

The performance-oriented pieces were written to be in sync with each musician's gifts, Mr. Andrews says. "There is Jay's sense about improvising, his bravura, as well as Geri's masterful sensibility about what's possible with the beat. There is Mark's ability to traverse all these various styles, and Pheeroan, who always finds something I didn't hear and has a unique voice as a

drummer."

Dedicated to the memory of master drummer Ed Blackwell — who died Oct. 8 — with whom Mr. Andrews recorded a Dolphy tribute album this summer, the concert will expose more accessible concepts from a musician who vigorously pursued new avenues in the 1970s.

"It's not nearly as avant-garde. ... The mainstream is also part of who I am," Mr. Andrews says. "I want to record my middle stuff, but it is middle stuff in which the band is playing its ass off."

## Jazzman: Andrews uses music for a higher purpose

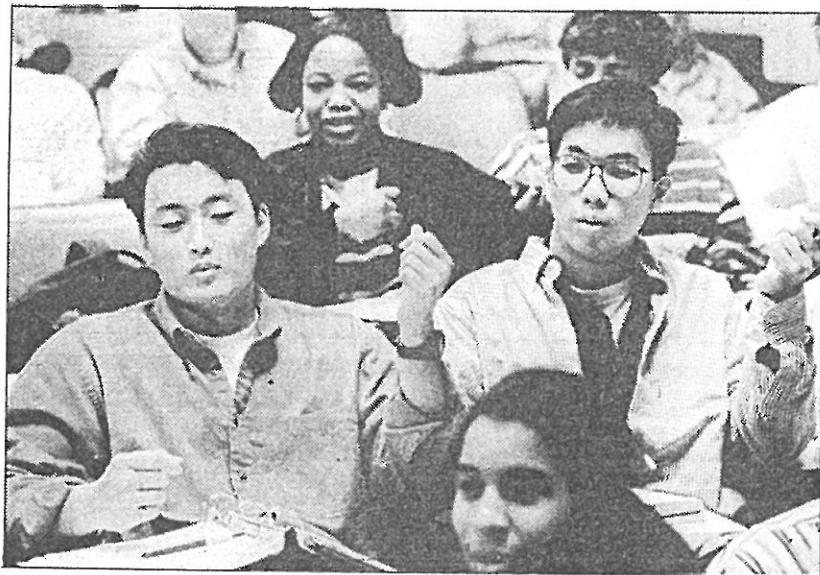
► Continued from C1

means at his disposal. The journey he's taken, however, is ultimately spiritual.

"When I finished my masters in clarinet at [the University of] Michigan, I decided I really needed to see if this ministry thing was the right thing," Mr. Andrews says, reflecting on the path that plopped him in an Emory office amid stacks of books and audio gear, keyboards, computers and theater posters. "So I went to Yale Divinity School. I had to work to make a living, so that's how I got to do the theater stuff. I actually had to pay for this unbelievable tuition!

"I also hooked up with the musicians in New York trying to pay for my fare," he continues, alluding to a hothouse period when much of what was new in jazz was happening in Manhattan lofts and self-produced concerts — not in the world of mass-market fusion music. "It was really an interesting life, because I'm studying New Testament Greek in the daytime, then in the evening I'm running out and hanging out with [playwright and poet] Ntozake Shange, who is literally the antithesis of sound Christian whatever and who was very much challenged by the idea of 'What is a guy in this day going to seminary for?'"

The reasons go back to the



Emory students Ken Park (left) and Eugene Rhee bop to an early jazz recording in Dwight Andrews's jazz history class.

civil rights era, when the evening news would bring glimpses of "Jesse [Jackson] and Andy [Young] in overalls, traveling through Alabama," says Mr. Andrews. "I was saying: Gosh, that's what I need to do. I need to be out there like these guys, who have this big picture of social responsibility and Christian commitment."

He came full circle when Mr. Young spoke at his installment service two weeks ago. The message was clear.

"I have just encouraged Dwight to realize that the Lord

called him through music," says Mr. Young, who came to know Mr. Andrews through their common spiritual mentor, the Rev. Nicholas Hood of Detroit. "And it wasn't sacred music; it was secular music. I don't know how it will develop in his life, but you shouldn't limit the movement of the spirit."

The classroom is a clear focal point for that movement. Here is where Mr. Andrews can carry a message about the essence of great black music — from the spiritual he arranged for Branford Marsalis's recent blues al-

bum to the far-reaching sounds he'll shoot for on Friday night.

"We really challenge the people to look at the hard questions about the music and the culture," Mr. Andrews says. "Like, how do we put race in the matrix of looking at jazz? ... It's a critical, theoretical approach that looks at the question of, if there is an African-American aesthetic out of which this music comes — and, of course, I think there is — what do we think is beautiful and why?"

His classroom style gets high ratings from students, who must scramble to sign up for the course because of high demand.

"He's very clear, and he's not a boring lecturer," says Maressa Pollan, a classics major. "He's excited about what he's doing."

As soon as he wraps up his Yale doctoral thesis on Stravinsky, Mr. Andrews plans to devote more time to performance and recording. "I'm gonna shed and write through early spring," he says, and refers to his plans to invest more energy into the developing Atlanta jazz scene and to concerts around the country.

"You've got to take the risk to feel something," he says. "And show it musically, and try and make it connect with other people. ... It's an exciting time," he says. "What's the expression? Damn the torpedoes."



Photos by NICK ARROYO/Staff

The composer Dwight Andrews wrote the scores for the dramas of playwright and friend August Wilson.

### DWIGHT ANDREWS

► **Birthdate:** Sept. 24, 1951, in Detroit, Mich.

► **Married:** For four years to Desiree Peddescleaux, a political science professor at Spelman College.

► **Home:** North Druid Hills.

► **Education:** University of Michigan, bachelor's and master's degrees in music; Yale Divinity School, master's of divinity; Yale music doctorate pending.

► **Theater work:** Musical director of Yale Repertory, 1979-1986; composer for August Wilson's "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom," "The Piano Lesson," "Fences" and "Joe Turner's Come and Gone." Directed Alliance Theatre's 1991 production of "Ma Rainey."

► **Ministry:** Associate minister of First Congregational Church in downtown Atlanta. Associate chaplain at Yale for six years, developing ministry for minority students and faculty.

► **Forthcoming album:** "In the Spirit" (Muse), with leader Jay Hoggard on vibes, bassist Mark Helias, flutist James Newton and drummer Ed Blackwell.

► **Celebrity endorsement:** "Dwight hooked me up, man!" — Branford Marsalis, who employed Mr. Andrews's arranging skills on his new album, "I Heard You Twice the First Time."

— Steve Dollar