

ASO celebrates King's life, ideas in music

By Derrick Henry
CLASSICAL MUSIC CRITIC

Music and the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. share common ground. Both transcend barriers of race and speak to emotions that affect all people.

"My husband loved music because of its power as a universal language to bring people together," says his widow, Coretta Scott King, who met King while she was a music student at the New England Conservatory in Boston.

That's why it's appropriate to find a musician from Israel conducting music by two African-American composers and one from Czechoslovakia at the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra's King tribute Saturday.

It's a concert in which jazz mingles with rap and spirituals with classical. King's words will also occupy a prominent place, spoken by actor-musician Avery Brooks, artistic director of the National Black Arts Festival.

"This program honors our commitment that a cultural institution should reflect its community," says ASO president Allison Spigamore.

The concert, designed as a radio show, will be broadcast over National Public Radio's "Performance Today" on Monday (at



Actor Avery Brooks will read from the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s works.



Martin Goldsmith will add commentary to the concert for its broadcast on "Performance Today."

noon on Atlanta's WABE-FM [FM 90] and at 1 p.m. on the Peach State Public Radio network covering the rest of Georgia).

Martin Goldsmith, host of "Performance Today," will sit on stage with the musicians, introducing the pieces and interviewing performers.

"On the day of Dr. King's 65th birthday," Goldsmith says, "the center of the musical universe is Atlanta. So why not celebrate with the symphony orchestra of his hometown with his alma mater taking part?"

The glee club of King's alma mater, Morehouse College, will sing spirituals with the Spelman College glee club. Among the selections: "Great Day," "I Have a Dream" and a Henry Burleigh arrangement of "Don't Be a Weary Traveler."

Burleigh, an African American, was a student of Czech composer Antonín Dvorák in New

York in the 1890s. Burleigh introduced Dvorák to spirituals, inspiring Dvorák to write his "New World" Symphony in 1893. That work's slow movement, with a melody that has been mistaken for an authentic spiritual, will be performed at this concert.

The largest work on the program is "New Morning of the World," in which King's speeches (narrated by Brooks) are set against music by Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Joseph Schwantner.

"It's a very powerful, wonderfully strong piece," says Levi, an Israeli American. "Coming from a part of the world where people have a long history of struggling for freedom . . . I am very well aware of what [King] symbolizes and how special he is."

The great African-American composer William Grant Still (1895-1978) will be represented

MUSIC PREVIEW

"A King Celebration: Tribute to Martin Luther King Jr."

8 p.m. Saturday. \$11-\$26.50. Yoel Levi conducts the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra with the Morehouse and Spelman College Glee Clubs and narrator Avery Brooks. The program will be broadcast at noon Monday on WABE-FM (FM 90). Symphony Hall, 128 Peachtree St. N.E. 892-2414.

by his lyrical "Romance" for saxophone and orchestra. Following Dvorák's model, Still looked to his heritage for inspiration.

Anthony Kelley, a doctoral student at the University of California at Berkeley, goes even further in his "Crosscurrents" for string orchestra. "It's a combination of Stravinsky, Bartók, Schoenberg, rap music and jazz," Levi says. The rhythms come from a rap song by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five.

The King concert should be viewed as just a beginning, cautions Dwight Andrews, a prominent African-American composer and Emory professor. "My dream," he says, "would be that this become another marker along the way of [the ASO] taking a real leadership role, developing a new audience and . . . becoming a true instrument of its community."