

... and the Beat Goes On

**Young Preacher
combines
Music Career
with Pastoral Duties**



REV. DWIGHT ANDREWS

It seems like a vast distance between the Straight Narrow way and the great "Broadway". But for one dynamic and talented young pastor, these seemingly contradictory paths are just two lanes on the same Highway to Heaven.

By RENEE ALLEN

Native Detroit, Dwight Andrews is Senior Pastor of the Black Church at Yale (University) and Associate Chaplain at Christ Chapel in New Haven, Connecticut. He is also the music director for the Broadway show, "*Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*" which opened to rave reviews in October.

Before Andrews, the Black Church at Yale was pastored by Nicholas Hood III, son of the Detroit clergyman and city councilman. In fact, Rev. Hood, Sr. is responsible for influencing Andrews both spiritually and educationally. In a recent interview with Kelly Tice for *The New Journal*, Andrews stated, "Probably one of the most important persons in my life is . . . Nick Hood Sr. His church helped rebuild the community." It was Rev. Hood who encouraged Andrews to attend Yale Divinity School.

But Dwight's interests were not confined to the pulpit. The 33 year-old Ph.D. candidate attended Cass Technical High School and then completed undergraduate and master's work at the University of Michigan. Andrews plays flute, clarinet, soprano and alto saxophone. He studied classical music under Detroit Symphony clarinetist Vince Melidon and played in the Detroit Community Orchestra. Andrews also studied jazz under great local talents like Marcus Belgrave and Kenny Cox.

During his student days at Yale, he would frequently jam session with Nat Adderly, Jr. son of the famous jazz performer). He is the music director of the Yale Repertory Theatre; and an instructor of sacred music. He is the first person to teach a scholarly course on jazz music at the prestigious college. Andrews completed his doctoral dissertation on "*An Analytical Model of Pitch and Rhythm in the Early Music of Igor Stravinsky.*"

Amazingly, to some, it is in the church where this wealth of musical talent comes together. In his church at Yale, Andrews has used different instruments including a rhythm section; he's also done some of the sacred music composed and arranged by Duke Ellington. It is not uncommon for Pastor Andrews to open Sunday morning service playing his saxophone. He says, "There was a time when people, because they didn't know how to bracket me were really on edge. I used to play these clubs downtown and then would be setting church up on Sunday. It was very hard for people to understand how the two related or what made this guy tick. They wonder how that guy who plays the saxophone can be into church . . . I'm not limited by the traditional way that people see the church."

But Rev. Andrews' musical accomplishments expand beyond the church. He has recorded a jazz album of original compositions called "*Mmotia*". Andrews has worked with many of today's most noted and innovative jazz composers, touring the U.S. and abroad.

On October 11, 1984, Dwight Andrews made Broadway as musical director for the hit play "*Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*". It is a play about the famous blues singer who mentored Bessie Smith. It is also a political commentary on racism in the Roaring 20's. "*Ma Rainey's*" was put together by another Detroit, Lloyd Richards who directed the Broadway debut of "*A Raisin in the Sun*", 25 years ago. It was Richards who drafted Andrews for the challenging task of teaching the four actors portraying Rainey's back-up band to actually play the necessary instruments.

In addition to his theatrical achievements, Andrews had his own band playing at clubs in and around New York. About halfway through a set, Rev. Andrews will stop to share an inspirational message with the audience, then continue playing the soulful jazz. How does Andrews feel about his unorthodox practices as a member of the clergy? "The black preacher is elevated on a pedestal as a kind of junior Jesus. I think that's an outmoded model and it really is not helpful."

Caroline Jackson, director of the Afro-American Cultural Center is an example of how people respond to Andrews combination of his music and his ministry, She says, "His attempts to fulfill needs, talents and gifts emanate from the same spiritual source. I can understand God and I can understand Dwight's spirituality from his attitude that he can always do a little bit more."

Andrew's sermons have been described as being more like lectures, in that he does not use the rhythmic tone and gestures black preachers are traditionally known for. His topics are religious political. Rev. Andrews states, "The black church is a good example of where black people can be self-empowering. It is still the only kind of independent institution that blacks in North America have and it is a very powerful institution. Unfortunately it has been misunderstood and misused both from within and without. It is the only place where black people who are generally powerless are empowered by one another."

Dwight Andrews is a product of the black movements of the 60's and the musical heritage of centuries. He is one of the "New" Black preachers taking their position at the head of the new and broader black church. His blending of his faith into every area of his life is symbolic of a generation that refuses to confine Christ to stained-glass and Sunday afternoon teas. "People must begin to see themselves as a whole—as a sum of all their parts . . . We have to learn to live to our fullest. I want to be involved in making black people whole."