



*Highly Acclaimed Jazz Composer & Musician At Emory*

# DWIGHT ANDREWS SETTING POEMS OF MAYA ANGELOU TO MUSIC

by Paula Vitaris

When he was a music major in college, Dwight Andrews recalled, he would wear dark glasses and assume a false name to play jazz. "In those days, you were very much discouraged from playing jazz as a classical player. I remember my teachers scolding me because I was going to ruin my chops and my tone."

There is no need for disguises now. Andrews, an assistant professor in Emory University's music department and winner of the 1994 Emory Williams Award for Distinguished Teaching in the Humanities, teaches History of Jazz as well as classes in music theory and analysis, and his compositions for small orchestra have "all been influenced by the language of improvisation."

Andrews' most well-known work is the jazz-inflected music he has written to accompany the plays of August Wilson, including the Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Piano Lesson*.

A "product of the public school system" in Detroit, where he attended Cass Tech, that city's performing arts high school, Andrews received Bachelors and Masters degrees in music from the University of Michigan.

As graduation drew near, he decided he would like to study for the ministry. "I had really been

fascinated with the role of the church in different community groups in terms of social activism and had been watching people like Andrew Young and Jesse Jackson and Martin Luther King during the marches," he said. He fell in love with Yale during a trip there, and enrolled in the Yale Divinity School.

But music beckoned once again, thanks to the mentorship of Yale music professor and composer Maury Yeston. After obtaining his Masters of Divinity degree, with Yeston's encouragement Andrews enrolled in Yale's School of Music for a Ph.D. In 1987 he joined the Emory Music Department faculty.

Andrews' current project is a musical tentatively called *Jubilee*. "It's about the Fisk Jubilee Singers," he said. "Regina Taylor, the fabulous actress and writer, is writing the book. I'm very excited about it! I've never written



*Dwight Andrews remembers a time when serious musicians were discouraged from jazz.*

a musical before."

Andrews is also setting the poems of Maya Angelou to music, an undertaking that seems to sum up his career. "I'm very interested in linking arts across disciplines. My work with theater, and now my chance to work with great poetry will create, I hope, a kind of tapestry in which we've reconnected these arts in a formal way."