

AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMPOSERS

NBAF-ASO contest down to five finalists

By **Derrick Henry**
STAFF WRITER

Works by five young African-American composers, from four states and the District of Columbia, have been chosen as finalists in a competition sponsored jointly by the National Black Arts Festival (NBAF) and the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra.

These pieces will be presented at free open rehearsals in Symphony Hall July 27 (11 a.m.-1:30 p.m. and 2:50-4:50 p.m.). ASO music director Yoel Levi will conduct the orchestra.

The winning composition, to be determined after the rehearsals, will receive three performances by the ASO under Levi on July 29 and 30 as part of the orchestra's Summerfest series, and at a free concert in Grant Park on July 31.

Ages of the finalists range from 20 to 39. Their pieces were chosen from 34 submissions by Levi, ASO associate conductor Darryl One and NBAF music consultant Dwight Andrews.

"We wanted to find pieces



William C. Banfield of Bloomington, Ind., is a finalist.

that showed creative spark as well as skill in writing for orchestra," says Andrews, a composer based at Emory University. "We were not predisposed stylistically. Each of the five pieces is very different in terms of language and concept."

Andrews says he regards the

project as a beginning, not an end.

"We have tentatively made a commitment to having this as a biennial event for the National Black Arts Festival. So as we look to the 1996 Olympics and the turn of the century, we hope to build on this activity to discover and foster talent. We are trying to build bridges in a way that will answer questions about how the symphony as an institution fits into a community in a way that reaches far beyond the NBAF. I think that Yoel is very committed and serious about it."

The five finalists and the titles of their compositions:

► **William C. Banfield**, from Bloomington, Ind. "Symphony No. 5: Five Shades of a Woman in Black." Banfield's "Can we all get along" was premiered at the 1992 NBAF by the chamber ensemble *Thamyris*.

► **Jonathan Bailey Holland**, from Philadelphia. "Martha Waltz."

► **Jeffrey Mumford**, from Washington, D.C. "as the air softens in dusklight."

► **Gary Powell Nash**, from Lansing, Mich. "Heroes."

► **Kevin L. Scott**. Bronx, N.Y. "Lazy Lion."

This competition, modeled on the Detroit Symphony's 5-year-old *Unisys African-American Composers Forum*, was open to all composers of African-American origin. No monetary prizes will be awarded.

Andrews expressed disappointment that there were no female judges ("we tried diligently, but there were schedule conflicts," he says) or finalists ("overall quality was the sole criteria").

Judges for the winning composition will be Levi, Andrews, former ASO composer-in-residence *Alvin Singleton*, and two composers who will have works premiered by the ASO next season — *Anthony Davis* and *Michael Torke*.

Tickets to the Summerfest series, which also includes performances by African-American pianist *André Watts*, are \$18-\$40. Further information: 892-2414.