

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with John Andrew Ross

PERSON

Ross, John Andrew

Alternative Names: John Andrew Ross;

Life Dates: December 15, 1940-June 12, 2006

Place of Birth: Boston, Massachusetts, USA

Residence: Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts

Occupations: Music Director; Music Composer and Arranger

Biographical Note

Composer, arranger, organist, choral conductor, jazz musician and music educator, John Andrew Ross was born in Boston, Massachusetts, on December 15, 1940, to Olga Evelyn White and Melvin Everard Ross, a close friend of Langston Hughes. Ross knew Langston Hughes as “Uncle Langston” while growing up in Roxbury. Ross attended public schools, and in 1957, he enrolled in Boston University to study church music. He received degrees from the College of Liberal Arts in 1960 and the School of Fine and Applied Arts in 1964.

Beginning in 1970 as music director at the Elma Lewis School of Fine Arts (ELSFA), Ross has worked with the ELSFA and its parent organization, the National Center of Afro-American Artists (NCAAA) and leads two music ensembles, the Voices of Black Persuasion and the Contra-Band. Ross has also served each Christmas season since 1970 as the musical director of the gospel play Black Nativity by Langston Hughes, which recasts the story of the birth of Jesus against a backdrop of African American culture.

In addition, Ross served the congregation of the First Parish Church in Brookline, Massachusetts, as minister of music. For nine years prior to his 1995 ordination, he was the church’s music director. Active as a member of the American Guild of Organists and also as an arranger, Ross released the recording, Comin' up Shouting: Gospel Songs and Spirituals Newly Arranged. Together with folklorist John Langstaff, Ross arranged the music that accompanies two books, Climbing Jacob's Ladder: Heroes of the Bible in African-American Spirituals and What a Morning: The Christmas Story in Black Spiritual.

Ross won the Coretta Scott King Book Award as well as a regional Emmy in 1981 with

Billy Wilson for "Blues and Gone," part of the series Say Brother produced by Boston's PBS station, WGBH. He was also nominated numerous times for other regional Emmys. In 1990, Ross won Boston's Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. Musical Achievement Award, and in 2000, he won the New England Conservatory's Anna Bobbit Gardener Lifetime Achievement Award.

Ross passed away on Monday, June 12, 2006.

Related Entries

David A. Ellis Elementary School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Roxbury Memorial High School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

diploma

Boston University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

B.A. in music

Tweeds [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1969 to 1970]

Manager

Elma Lewis School of Fine Arts [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1970 to 1990]

Director of Music

National Center of Afro-American Artists [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1970 to ?]

Director of Music

First Parish in Brookline (Unitarian Universalist Church) [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1997 to ?]

Minister of Music