

Andraé Crouch's 'colorblind evangelism' focus of new book

April 1, 2025

(RNS)—Gospel composer Andraé Crouch sang, played the piano and preached for decades—often all at once.

Ten years after his death, a new biography aims to capture both the genre-defying range of Crouch's music, as well as his ability to build bridges through his evangelistic ministry.

Co-authored by a white former *Billboard* gospel music editor and a Black gospel musician, the book chronicles how Crouch's music, rooted in the historically Black Church of God in Christ denomination, became popular among white evangelical audiences.

Soon and Very Soon: The Transformative Music and Ministry of Andraé Crouch, by Robert F. Darden and Stephen Michael Newby, is a 400-page narrative of the life of Crouch, who died in 2015 at the age of 72, that reviews more than a dozen of his albums, with popular selections such as "Jesus Is the Answer" and "Take Me Back." 

"We didn't figure we could understand the man without doing a deep dive into the music, and we couldn't understand the music 'til we did a deep dive into the man," said Darden, emeritus journalism professor at Baylor University and founder of its Black Gospel Music Preservation Program, in a joint interview with Newby.

"He is so part of his music, more than anybody I've ever experienced through a lot of interviews."

The authors detail the wide range of musicians the Grammy winner

welcomed into his home—the place where, his twin sister and collaborator, Sandra Crouch, informed them, her brother had some 1,500 of his unheard songs on cassette tapes.

Newby, music professor and ambassador for Black gospel music preservation at Baylor in Waco, said they hoped the book would be not just be a resource for readers, “but hopefully they would still be curious and listen to this guy’s music.”

Newby, 63, a member of the National Missionary Baptist Convention of America, and Darden, 71, affiliated with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, talked with RNS about Crouch’s legacy, how he once hoped to marry another gospel music star and examples of secular artists who influenced his music.

The interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Can you describe Andraé Crouch’s performances and how they seemed to be about music, but also were what you call ‘colorblind evangelism’?

Darden: Andraé could have gone the standard route of wonderful Black quartets and essentially sang to the choir, or he could roll the dice, take a chance and go out and penetrate a market, not just with the evangelical message, which is at his core, but that in Christ, there is no Black or white, Christian, Jew, male, female, slave, free. And it was one of the three driving forces, in our opinion, of his career: ecumenicalism, evangelism and eschatology.

Why do you call Andraé Crouch ‘the most musically adventuresome artist in gospel or contemporary Christian music’?

Newby: He had a theological imagination that was otherworldly. He

refused to succumb himself to the ways of the world, to the standard norms and boxes that people wanted to put him in, and he decided that at the end of the day, my family looks like the family of God—diverse.

And his innovation is second to none. Everything we hear in contemporary gospel music today, we find its rootedness musically, theologically, and all of this performativity back to Andraé Crouch.

You talked about how he would secularize his gospel music in order to appeal to a wider audience. Can you give an example of a particular song that achieves that effect?



Stephen Michael Newby holds The Lev H. Prichard III Endowed Chair in the Study of Black Worship and Professor of Music and serves as Ambassador for The Black Gospel Music Preservation Program at Baylor University. (Baylor University Photo)

Newby (occasionally vocalizing to illustrate): If you listen to the “This Is Another Day” album. You listen to “Perfect Peace.” It’s a funk groove. There’s Clavinet (electric clavichord). You listen to it on the “Live in London” version—the tempo, it sounds like Sly and the Family Stone, it sounds like Earth, Wind & Fire.

Yet, it is the voice of God speaking directly to all creation: “I will keep you in perfect peace if you keep your mind stayed on me.” It’s an amazing theological text. It comes right out of Scripture. You hear the popping on two and four. You hear the horn lines. Nobody was doing that in church,

because the Clavinet D6 as an instrument didn't exist in the church of that day.

How successful were those efforts to do that amalgamation?



Robert Darden, professor emeritus of journalism at Baylor University, founded Baylor's Black Gospel Music Restoration Project. (Photo/Baylor Marketing and Communications)

Darden: As long as he was doing it for all markets, his album sold well. He toured. He had Black and white audiences. He did venues that Christian artists—Black or white—had never done. And then he gets a chance to record for Warner Bros., a secular label, and take the music much wider from a distribution standpoint, and it flops.

The previous albums usually came out of live performance. He would stay up all night composing something and then he would introduce it to the band 30 minutes before the show. They would play part of it, and he would judge the audience response, and then go back and perfect it. And he did that for years.

He was criticized by conservative elements of the church—both Black and white. What were their main concerns?

Darden: The churches, by their nature, are traditional, conservative. And here was a young man with different musicians—male, female, Black, white—coming in giving the same message. Ain't no difference between his

lyrics, until later, than any other gospel artist, but he was playing it with instruments they weren't used to. He was playing in keys and time signatures they were not used to.

Newby: We know with the "Don't Give Up" album how he came in like a bulldozer, speaking about male prostitution, abortion and all of this other stuff in his music, and the church just didn't want to deal with that. Some white people would say, "It's too Black for me." Some Black people would say, "It's too white." But, he felt like, "Well, what God is saying: It's not about Black and white. It's what is right."

There's this idea of the harmony is greater than the dissonance. It was so in Andraé's DNA to think about the idea that God so loved the world—everybody.

The book describes how Andraé Crouch had fallen in love with Tramaine Davis, who had been singing with him in the group the Disciples, and was devastated when she announced she was leaving and marrying Walter Hawkins. How did that change him and his music?

Darden: He never married. I'm not sure he ever got over it. Frankly, "Through It All" is an extraordinary hymn, but it's also, when you know the context, a really painful love-lost song.

You cite many collaborators and fellow musicians in your book, but you focus on his twin sister, Sandra, a percussionist.

Darden: Sandra was the prototypical big sister. She was Andraé's bodyguard, personal manager. Andraé, by all accounts, struggled in daily conversation. He said he got over his stutter, but as you listen to tapes

later, he expressed himself better in song and sermon, and so Sandra shielded him from a lot of things through a good portion of their lives.

Her work with Motown very early, when she became a legitimate Motown session player, enabled him to bring in Motown musicians and producers much earlier than probably he would have, and she had a level of professionalism that she brought with that.

You note in your conclusion that Crouch was considered both the founder of contemporary gospel music and the popularizer of praise and worship music. Do those two subgenres of gospel music reflect a divide that remains?

Darden: Andraé, maybe alone, has been able to bridge that. The two things that he helped create were really different facets of the same thing, and other people go one way or the other.

Newby: Andraé never allowed the technology to hinder his creativity. But when you strip all that away and you look at the text, the melody, the harmony and the theology, I think those things make a great song.

And great songs geographically build bridges everywhere. From the north to the south to the east to the west, it forms the cross.

Crouch was always in the epicenter of what really mattered. And for Andraé, everything was so centralized at the core. Jesus Christ was at the core.