

Jesus Music Movement Singer Mourns Reveals Personal Side of Andraé Crouch

I am heartbroken at the news of the passing of my dear family friend, Andraé Crouch. I hardly remember a time when he was not part of my family's life. When I was about 12 years old, my father, Jimmy Owens, met Andraé through a preacher and songwriter named Audrey Mieir ("His Name is Wonderful.")

Andraé was a charismatic, funny, easy-going, passionate follower of Jesus ... and such a talent! Dad produced the first Andraé Crouch and the Disciples album, *Take the Message Everywhere*, released in 1969. They became lifelong friends and comrades in pioneering new music for the church and beyond—music that touched a generation, my generation, and opened doors for entire new genres to follow—Jesus Music, CCM, Modern Gospel and Modern Worship.

The influence of Andraé's music is impossible to calculate. Worldwide, his songs are loved and sung by millions, touching lives and touching heaven. Beyond his own songs, albums and performances, Andraé inspired and even mentored countless other musicians, songwriters and music ministers to share their gifts with the world to the glory of God.

I see now what a privilege I had as a young teen of the late '60s. Our home was often full of "Disciples" and friends of Andraé's. His twin sister, Sandra, Sherman Andrus, Bili Thedford, Perry Morgan, Bill Maxwell, Danniebelle Hall, Tramaine Hawkins, the McCrary family and many others were all talented musicians whom Andraé believed in and wanted to include in his increasing success. The atmosphere was full of music and praise, creativity and collaboration. It was a wonderland for me. I couldn't wait to get home from school to

see who was at my house.

One afternoon, Andraé came by our house with Danniebelle Hall and Tramaine Hawkins (then Davis.) Listening to them harmonize at the piano was an inspiration to a young singer-in-hiding like me. When it was time for them to leave, my mother, Carol Owens, noticed our very white, very uptight next-door neighbor peeking suspiciously out the window at our visitors. My mother grabbed Andraé and they began a tango around the front yard, then waved at the neighbor. (Oh yes, she did!)

Inspired and encouraged by Andraé and the other amazing musical and spiritual influences surrounding me, I began my own journey as a traveling, recording singer/songwriter when I was 17, becoming a label mate with Andraé and my parents at Light Records. When I would cross paths with Andraé on the road at various concerts, festivals or seminars over the years, he was always like a big brother, checking in to encourage me and make sure I was behaving myself. I was always proud he was my friend.

In 1976, when my fiance, Dan Collins, and I were looking for a place to tie the knot, Andraé offered his backyard. He even insisted on planting rose bushes along the path I would walk down. Such a kindness. (When Ralph Carmichael, the president of Light Records, found out Barry McGuire, Debby Boone and Terry Talbot were all singing at my wedding at Andraé's house, he wanted to sell tickets!)

Andraé's house, in fact, became home to many of his friends at times when they were "in-between places." He often hired guys to "work" for him just because they needed the work; there was always something that needed doing. Andraé was generous ... to a fault sometimes, but he gave many people a second chance through his kindness.

Anyone who ever listened to an Andraé Crouch record or attended one of his concerts probably knows that he constantly

featured other singers and musicians. This was just a small glimpse of Andraé's generous, humble, pastoring heart. He loved opening doors for people he believed in. Although his music has touched the world, Andraé's biggest investment was always in people and community.

Andraé grew up in a loving home and church family. When he was 11 years old, his father laid hands on him and asked God to give him the "gift of music" so the church could have accompaniment to their singing during worship. One day he had never touched a piano; the next day, without a single lesson, in front of the whole church, he started playing ... with both hands!

Andraé always recognized that his ability was a true gift and not for himself, but for others to the glory of God. I think that understanding is what kept him humble and grounded. When Andraé's parents and then his older brother, who had pastored Christ Memorial Church of God in Christ, passed away, Andraé and his sister, Sandra, decided to share the pastoral oversight of the church. They had both been "pastoring" people and nurturing the community for years without the title, so they were highly qualified for the official position.

Over and over this last week since his passing, I have heard stories from friends who credit Andraé as the one who first opened doors for their music ministries. To name a few, the Archers, Nancy Honeytree, Andrew Culverwell, Sherman Andrus and Carmen (who also first received Christ at an Andraé concert) have all shared lovely stories this week on social media of Andraé's direct introductions for them to audiences and record labels that jump started their public ministries.

Others who have gone on to have wonderful careers in both Gospel and mainstream music have shared the impact Andraé's mentoring and encouragement had on the rest of their lives. As his former band member, Fletch Wiley (Grammy and Dove award-winning arranger and producer) said, "What can I say? There

was life before Andrae Crouch, and then our lives after we met him.”

As I look back on those early days in my family’s home, I see the seeds of what I most admire about Andraé. He was a genuine, fervent worshipper. His life was always marked by kindness, humor, generosity and humility. He took genuine delight in the potential of those around him, constantly encouraging, promoting, and opening doors for others. I am so grateful to have known him.

My heart and prayers go out for his angel of a sister, Sandra, his nephews, Kenneth and Kevin, his long-time producer and dear brother in Christ, Bill Maxwell, and all of those in his church and music families. His legacy of music is a gift to the whole world, but his investment in our lives is eternal. This was his great treasure. We miss you, dear friend. To God be the glory!

“For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matt. 6:21).

Jamie Owens-Collins was part of her parents’, Jimmy and Carol Owens, music ministry during the Jesus Movement. Her first album, *Laughter in Your Soul*, was a best-selling album in 1975 in Britain. She co-wrote a musical, *Firewind* with the Talbot Brothers and two albums for Sparrow Records in 1978 and 1980. Jamie and her husband performed with the Maranatha Praise Band from 1989-1995 during crusades hosted by Franklin Graham and Greg Laurie.