



ROLAND HAYES: SINGER

by Tayra Escotto

Singer and composer Roland Hayes was born in Curryville, Georgia, on June 3, 1887 and lived in Brookline for nearly fifty years. His parents, William and Fanny Hayes, were former slaves who worked as tenant farmers to raise their seven children. Hayes became involved in music after spending time in the church choir and attended Fisk University to continue his studies. At Fisk, Hayes joined a singing group that brought him to Brookline and began touring in the US and internationally in the late 1910s and early 1920s. For his performances, he received enthusiastic praise and won the NAACP Spingarn Medal for outstanding achievement by an African American in 1924.

Hayes spent most of the next two decades giving vocal recitals and performing with orchestras throughout the United States and Europe. His performances with the Boston Symphony Orchestra and Aeolian Hall in London were instrumental in breaking the color barrier in the music community. In 1948, Hayes published a collection of spirituals known as *My Songs; Aframerican Religious Folk Songs Arranged and Interpreted*. He continued to perform until the age of 85 when he gave his last concert at the Longy School of Music in Cambridge.

Did You Know? In addition to performing folk songs, Hayes also sang in German, French, and Italian.

