

Kitt's last show

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BY STELLA FOSTER Sun-Times Columnist

THE NEWS OF THE LEGENDARY entertainer and author **Eartha Kitt's** passing at age 81 in New York on Christmas Day due to colon cancer came as a shock to her many fans in Chicago, especially **Julieanna Richardson**, founder & executive director of the HistoryMakers organization.

The HistoryMakers honored Kitt on Sept. 20 at the Northwestern University Law School's Thorne Auditorium, where broadcaster/author **Gwen Ifill** interviewed her for a PBS special, "An Evening with Eartha Kitt," that will air during Black History Month in February. Regarding her death, Richardson said: "It is hard to believe, since she was so vibrant during our taping. We feel incredibly blessed to know that we have the last recording/appearance/interview with her. We want to thank all of you, including Columbia College and Northwestern, who worked with us on this special show and fund-raiser. For the past two months, I and others have been fast at work editing the show, and what a show it is!"

Right after the taping, a party was held for Kitt at the Palmer House. Before that, she asked the hotel's **Ken Price** if she could see the famous Empire Room, where she had played many times in the late 1950s, the 1960s and 1970s. She apparently wanted to revisit the elegant room because she wanted to do her act there once again.

She also was the first celeb to occupy the hotel's gorgeous 11-room, 3,700-square-foot penthouse. According to Price, "If she was ill, she certainly didn't show it. She looked just fabulous. And even at 81, Eartha Kitt's body would put some young women to shame."

She was known as a "sex kitten" because she could purrrrr like no other in her songs. She died on Christmas Day, and one of her most famous tunes was "Santa Baby." She will not be forgotten.