

Eartha Kitt to be featured on HistoryMakers

by Earl Calloway
DEFENDER STAFF WRITER

Julienna Richardson, founder and president of The HistoryMakers, a digital biographer and archivist of

Blacks who influence history, announced that Eartha Kitt will be featured in *An Evening with Eartha Kitt* and will be interviewed by veteran journalist Gwen Ifill Saturday. The show will look at Kitt's career

as a versatile artist and her extraordinary accomplishments that span more than six decades.

Kitt made her professional dance debut with the Katherine Dunham Dance company, performing in such modern creations as *Blue Holiday*, *Bal Negre* and *Casbah*.

She was recognized as being among the finest of Dunham's dancers, along with Vanoye Aikens, Lucille Ellis, Linwood Morris and Jean Leon Destine.

Kitt's autobiography was classified with other prominent African American famous personalities including W. C. Handy's *Father of the Blues*, Taylor Gordan's *Born to Die*, Louis Armstrong's *Satchamo-My Life in New Orleans*, Ethel Water's *His Eye Is On The Sparrow*, Lena Horn's *Lena*, Sammy Davis' *Yes, I Can* and Billie Holiday's *Lady Sings the Blues*.

Kitt was one of the early African Americans to have had musicals created for them on Broadway. In fact, she performed the title role to *Mrs. Patterson* in 1953 that was written by Charles Sebree and the co-star was Greer Johnson.

Kitt was born January 17, 1927 and later discovered that her mother was mixed with Cherokee Indian and her father was white.

In an interview with the *Defender*, Kitt said she was an orphan who had little knowledge of her relatives until later in life.

She was eventually moved from South Carolina to New York where she attended elementary school and Metropolitan High School.

Before studying with Katherine Dunham and becoming a professional dancer, she supported herself with a job in Brooklyn.

Touring with Dunham, Kitt developed friends and ultimately traveled to Mexico, toured Europe, and danced in the Prince of Wales Theatre. Eventually the troupe reached Paris where many Negroes lived.

She told how they would meet on the sidewalk café's in Paris and share their food and discuss life as they also debated situations that affected them, mentioning such standout as James Baldwin, Richard Wright, Oscar Peterson, Sidney Bechet and others.

She returned to the United States

killed in New York, but the world-renowned entertainer returned to Europe to continue her career.

Crowds welcomed her in Europe. During her career Kitt was accused of insulting Lady Bird Johnson, wife of President Lyndon B. Johnson, and as a result, suffered professional problems.

She was refused performance opportunities because she made an anti-war statement, though Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. complimented Kitt for her frank comment.

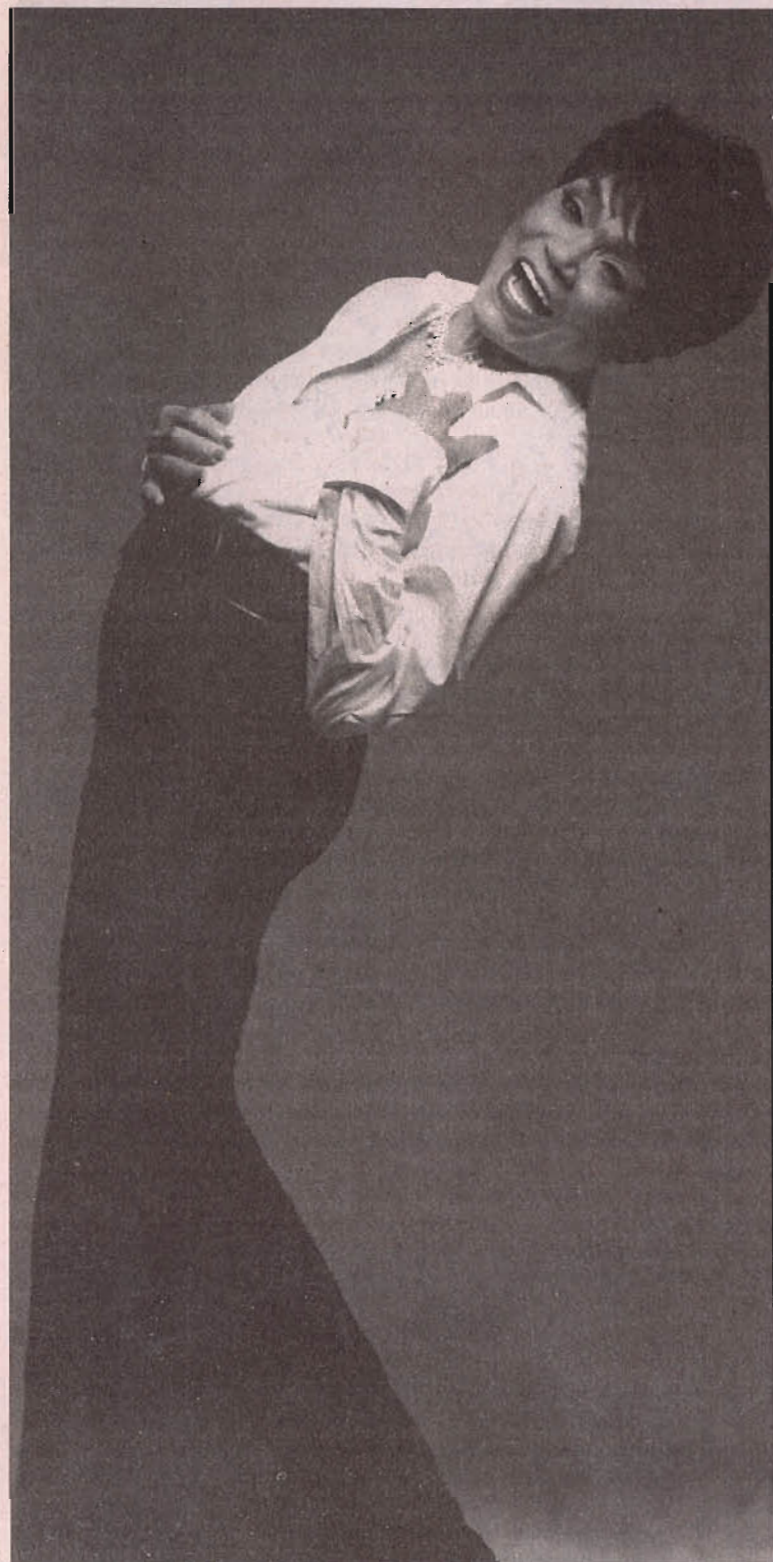
During the 1990s, Eartha Kitt was the voice in *The Jungle Book* and *The Wild Thronberrys*, and *The Emperor's New Groove* providing

the voice of the villainess Yzma, for Disney.

Kitt also starred as the fairy godmother in *Cinderella*, co-starred in the Broadway musical *The Wild Party*, played in *Anything But Love*, *Holes* and *Nine*, and is the voice in the song *Santa Baby*.

Kitt said, "I'm still busy in entertainment and I am featured annually at the Café Carlyle in New York where Bobby Short appeared for many, many years."

Earl Calloway can be reached at ecalloway@chicagodefender.com



Eartha Kitt

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Friends of La Rabida to salute Merri Dee at 'Big Top Ball'

The Grand Ballroom of Four Seasons Hotel will take on a circus atmosphere when Friends of La Rabida Children's Hospital hosts its annual fundraiser on Friday honoring **Merri Dee**, WGN-TV's retiring community relations director and its Children's Charities' manager. *The Big Top Ball* committee is co-chaired by **Joli Burrell** and **Bob Arthur**



Dee

and since the mid-80's, the group has raised millions of dollars for various clinics and service programs at La Rabida, the only hospital in the country solely dedicated to children with lifelong medical conditions or who have suffered abuse and neglect. Located on the southern shores of Lake Michigan (at 65th St.), La Rabida has been caring for children for 112 years, regardless of their ability to pay.



Burrell

Proceeds from the black tie dinner will support the Joli Burrell Children's Advocacy Centers (in Chicago and Park Forest), which serve kids with traumatic experiences, such as sexual abuse, physical abuse, burns, witnessing family violence and violent crimes.

Among planning committee members: **Linda Johnson Rice**, **Diane Dinkins Carr**, **Lyle Logan**, **Heather Morris**, **Jacqueline N'Namdi**, **Regina Daniels** and lots of others. ABC 7's **Cheryl Burton** is emcee; actor-author **Steve Schirripa** is host. The evening kicks-off with cocktails at 7 p.m. Individual \$500 tickets can be reserved by calling **La-Verne Mathews**, (773) 753-9602.

Newsy Names—"Highly hilarious" and "scrumptiously unscripted" is how **Yvette Moyo** describes Real Men Charities' second annual Roast & Toast on Dec. 13 at South Shore Cultural Center, celebrating **state Senate President Emil Jones**, soon to be retired . . . **Cong. Danny Davis** (7th), **Ill. Commerce Commissioner Lula Ford**, **Judge E. Kenneth Wright**, **Dr. Herbert C. Harris**, **Dr. Lewis Baskins**, **Atty. Thomas Vaughn** and **ShoreBank's Robert Nash** receive "Distinguished Alum-



Jones

ni" award. **Dr. Moyo** is a past president of the organization.

& Gold Scholarship Dinner-Dance on Sept. 27 at Chateau Bu-Sche (*location changed from Harabee House*). **Spearheads: Bobbie Dixon Heard**, chair; **Doris Odem**, president. For tickets, call (312) 842-4974 . . . **Hosea Sanders**, ABC 7's early morning (5-7 a.m.) news anchor, is MIA (missing in action), recovering for four-six weeks from hip replacement surgery. *Ouch!* . . . Happy b'day to **Marcus Alston** (Danielle Ashley Communications), **Monique Young** (*Defender* layout artist), **Ron Childs** (Flowers Communications) and **Valinda Jones** (Sixth Grace Presbyterian Church) . . . **Nemi Johnson** is recovering from surgery at Warren-Barr Pavilion.



Davis

Makin' History—**Eartha Kitt**, 81, (born **Eartha Mae Keith** in North, S.C.), an international show-biz legend indeed (stage, screen and recordings), will be saluted by **Julieanna Richardson** and *The HistoryMakers* on Saturday with a PBS-TV special, *An Evening with Eartha Kitt*, to air in February '09. The interview and performance (**Kitt** will sing several of her signature hits) will be video-taped before a live



Kitt

audience at Northwestern U's Thorne Auditorium. *Washington Week's* award-winning correspondent **Gwen Ifill** will conduct the interview and host the career retrospective; **Merri Dee** will emcee. *The HistoryMakers*, a national non-profit, is the world's largest African American archival collection.

A performer in the truest sense of the word, **Kitt's** career has spanned over six decades. She's an author, two-time Daytime Emmy winner who's raised over a million dollars to benefit African American schools and frequently gives benefit performances for HIV/AIDS organizations. In 1968, you remember, she encountered a professional setback when she made anti-war remarks at a White House luncheon, reportedly causing first lady **Lady Bird Johnson** to cry. Just last year, **Kitt** co-starred in an independent film, *And Then Came Love*, with **Vanessa Williams** and **Don Williams**.



Richardson

program in *The HistoryMakers'* PBS-TV series, which so far has raised in excess of \$7 million for the development of the priceless archive. Support for Saturday's event has come from McDonalds, Discover Financial Services, Coca-Cola, Aon, Best Portion Foundation, Allstate, Verizon, Walgreens, ITW, American Airlines, *Chicago Tribune*, Sprint and Palmer House Hilton. Call (312) 674-1900.

TV-OP Fest—**Milana L. Walter**, former NBC 5 exec, is the brains behind TV-OP 2008 International Television Festival this Friday and Saturday at Columbia College Chicago's Film Row, 1104 S. Wabash. The second annual two-day event, "Creating Program Diversity and Career Opportunities in TV and Broadband



Walter

Programming," will focus on opening doors of opportunity for professionals of color and women in the powerful medium of television, **Walter** says. "The only one of its kind, it was created to advocate diversity in front of and behind the cameras and connect entrepreneurial creators of viable, entertaining productions with global companies in need of quality content."

Newly christened TV-OP, the fest follows the successful soft introduction in 2007 at the Black Harvest Film Festival. Nielsen Media Research and TV One have returned to join Columbia College as the presenting sponsors of this effort to expose talented producers with their multicultural stories and varied viewpoints to key industry decision-makers.

In 2007, the festival awarded **Joseph L. Lewis II** and **Eugene Haynes**, co-creators of the animated pilot, *The Adventures of Teddy P. Brains*, an all-expense-paid trip to TV One headquarters to meet and pitch their executives. It also honored Emmy winner, **Barbara E. Allen**, with the first Chicago TV Excellence Award for her work on *Paper Trail: 100 Years of The Chicago Defender* and featured panel discussions and presentations by top execs such as **Johnathan Rodgers**, TV One's CEO; **Bruce DuMont**, Museum of Broadcast Communications' president; **Ken Smikle**, Target Market News' president; **Jenny Alonzo**, Lifetime Entertainment's former SVP.

Amy Hilliard, **Brenda Sexton** and **Abe Thompson** co-chair Saturday's Awards Ceremony which will induct **Nat King Cole** in TV-OP's Hall of Fame for his groundbreaking

program in *The HistoryMakers'* PBS-TV series, which so far has raised in excess of \$7 million for the development of the priceless archive. Support for Saturday's event has come from McDonalds, Discover Financial Services, Coca-Cola, Aon, Best Portion Foundation, Allstate, Verizon, Walgreens, ITW, American Airlines, *Chicago Tribune*, Sprint and Palmer House Hilton. Call (312) 674-1900.

Breakfast Bonus—ESPN columnist-commentator **Scoop Jackson** addresses the 111th Man-Boy Breakfast hosted by Concerned Christian Men on Saturday at Simeon Career Academy and **Prof. James Wilson** "unlocks the secrets to success in math." Spirited sports competition is on the agenda and always welcome at this monthly tradition are men 18 and over (\$5 donation) and young men 6-17 (*free*). Call **George Glenn**, CCM founder, (773) 401-0025; email stgdg@yahoo.com or visit www.concerned-christianmen.org. CCM is celebrating 13 years serving African American youngsters.



Jackson

Mardi Gras Fun—Wear a colorful mask and join ComEd's **Angel Perez** and *Citizen Group's* **Bill Garth** on Friday at Chatham Business Association's Annual Awards Gala & Mardi Gras Celebration at the Holiday Inn Mart Plaza. Other hosts include **Joseph Caldwell**, **Dr. Felicia Blasingame**, **Leonard Harris** and **Monica Thomas**. Call (773) 994-5006.

On Air—**Paul Lisnek**, Comcast CN100 anchor, has joined WVON's weekend lineup as host of his self-titled radio show that airs Sundays, 4-5 p.m., live on 1690 AM and streamed live on WVON.com, says **Melody Spann-Cooper**, president/GM. **Lisnek** also hosts *Political Update* on CN 100 (The Comcast Network), anchors *Newsmakers* on CNN Headline News, serves as a political analyst for WGN-TV and his analysis and commentary has been heard on NBC's *Today Show* and CNN's *Anderson Cooper 360*. For some he's been a regular guest on radio icon **Cliff Kelley's** show, discussing all things politics, law, entertainment and current events.

Sump'n Extra Online!—Besides Wednesday's weekly print version, be sure to check out ChicagoDefender.com online each Monday and Friday for noshable "Teesee's