

Profile

by Dana Caprina

Eartha Kitt

Eartha Kitt is an international star who gives new meaning to the word versatile. Miss Kitt has been nominated for a Tony (three times), the Grammy (twice) and an Emmy Award (twice). With her distinctive voice, she is entertaining a new generation of fans as Yzma, the villainess in Disney's *The Emperor's New Groove*. Kitt received a 2007 and 2008 Emmy Award for Outstanding Performer in an Animated Program.

Eartha Mae Kitt was ostracized at an early age because of her mixed-race heritage. At eight years old, she was given away by her mother and sent from the South Carolina cotton fields to live with an aunt in Harlem. On a friend's dare, the shy teen auditioned for the Katherine Dunham Dance Troupe. Kitt won a spot as a featured dancer and vocalist, and before the age of 20, toured worldwide with the company.

Back in New York, Miss Kitt was booked at *The Village Vanguard* and was spotted by a Broadway producer who put her in "New Faces of 1952." "New Faces" ran for a year which led to a national tour and a 20th Century Fox film version.

Broadway stardom led to a recording contract and a string of best-selling records including *Love for Sale*, *I Want to*

Be Evil, *Santa Baby* and *Folk Tales of the Tribes of Africa* which earned her a Grammy nomination.

Kitt returned to Broadway in the dramatic play, "Mrs. Patterson," and received her first Tony nomination. Films include *The Mark of the Hawk* with Sidney Poitier, *Anna Lucasta* with Sammy Davis Jr. and *St. Louis Blues* with Nat King Cole. In 1967, she made her mark on pop culture as the original Catwoman in the television series *Batman*.

Singing in 10 different languages, Kitt has

she will be interviewed and entertaining at Chicago's *The History Makers*, "An Evening With Eartha Kitt," which will take place at Northwestern University Law School's Thorne Auditorium, 357 E.Chicago.

GAY CHICAGO: I was reading about you and I was shocked that you were a shy teenager.

EARTHA KITT: Still am. Really?

Very much so.

That just shocks me.

Why?

I think of you as this sexy, sassy woman.

[Laughing] Maybe you think Eartha Kitt is but that is on stage, but Eartha Mae is a terribly shy person. When Eartha Kitt comes off the stage and takes all the paraphernalia off, she goes back to being that South Carolinian urchin who everybody abused and accused of being an ugly duckling. My mother gave me away. When I came up to New York, the woman who raised me and who was supposed to have been her sister, said she was my mother. I have been confused all my life. Maybe that's what made me who I am.

I have met you twice, once when you did a benefit after a performance of "Cinderella" and at the press party of "Lady Day." You looked at me and said, "You look like you have a question." I was stumbling on my words and you just purrrrrrd and I was so very happy!

[Laughing] I thought that play was very good but it was in the wrong place.

So much has been written over the years about you. You spoke up against the Vietnam war and were blacklisted and it almost feels that we are in an era again, that if you stood up against our current president and the current war he has gotten us into, that you would also be blacklisted. Does that

performed in more than 100 countries

and, in 1960, was honored with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. In 1968, Miss Kitt's career took a sudden turn when, at a White House luncheon hosted by First Lady

Lady Bird Johnson, she spoke out against the Vietnam War. For years afterward, Kitt was blacklisted in the U.S. and was forced to work abroad where her status remained undiminished.

In December 2006, she returned to Washington to light the National Christmas Tree, alongside President and Mrs. George W. Bush.

The reason we are talking to legend Eartha Kitt is that on September 20,



bother you?

Sometimes I think about that. First of all, I don't believe in war, but the Vietnamese War was a different war than this war is. The Vietnamese war was to contain communism and we have no business telling people how to live the way they want to live, within

reason of course. The whole world doesn't want to be democratic. I do find that, if the world is democratic, they don't fight each other or fight in general. Iraq is about oil, and we know that. The bottom line is oil.

You are a woman of a certain age, and a woman of color. What did you

think when Barack Obama was made the Democratic nominee for the President of the United States?

I think look how far we have gone. I am very proud of the American people, that the people are putting this man in the position that he is in with the possibility that he might become the next President of the United States. I am not going to vote because he is black, white, pink or green. I want someone in there who is going to put his foot down and say we want change. He will have to explain what these changes are and how we are going to get there, what changes anyone is talking about, no matter what party they are in, but the fact that he might be the one who gets through that door and all of America goes with him. I listen to both sides: The Democrats and the Republicans and they go blah-blah-blah. What the hell are they trying to tell me when they make a lot of promises and they don't do really anything?

On a lighter note, you have finally won an Emmy.

Two.

I love it!

[Laughing] I have the best voice in daytime television.

*It is about f***ing time!*

[Laughing] That's what I say. If you live long enough, you might be rewarded for the things that you have done on your path. I am very happy that I have finally been able to get these awards. The Emmys mean a lot. I also have what the call Annies, three of them from Disney. I think it's very gratifying to me and my daughter and her two children. You know that grandma is in demand!

You are coming to town September 20 for The Historymakers' (www.thehistorymakers.com). What are your feelings on getting this honor?

I think so many people that have been honored are from the barriers that the have broken in the entertainment field and in their personal life. Lately I have been doing things because there is nobody to stop me, such as getting schools built in South Africa. One time I was in a park with my daughter

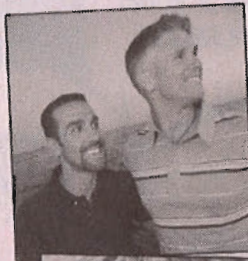
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