

LAS VEGAS Sentinel Voice

VOLUME 29, ISSUE 36

GRIOT COMMUNICATIONS GROUP, INC.

January 1, 2009

"THE TRUTH SHALL SET YOU FREE"

Kitt talent will be missed

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Eartha Kitt's "Santa Baby" is a constant presence during the Christmas season. This year, the song that she recorded in 1953 also served as a tribute to the singer, dancer and actress, who died last week at 81.

She was diagnosed with colon cancer in 2006 and had been getting treatment in New York, said spokesman Andrew Freedman.

Kitt was a self-proclaimed "sex kitten" whose sultry voice and catlike purr attracted fans worldwide.

Dubbed the "most exciting woman in the world" by Orson Welles, Kitt's career spanned six decades, from her start as a dancer with the famed Katherine Dunham troupe to cabarets and acting and singing on stage, in movies and on television.

She won two Emmys and was also nominated for several Tonys and two Grammys.

Kitt was featured on the cover of her 2001 book, "Re-

juvenate," a guide to staying physically fit, in a long, curve-hugging black dress with a figure that some 20-year-old women would envy. She also wrote three autobiographies.

She persevered through an unhappy childhood as a mixed-race daughter of the South, and made headlines in the 1960s for denouncing the Vietnam War during a visit to the White House.

Her first album, "RCA Victor Presents Eartha Kitt," was released in 1954. It featured songs such as "I Want to Be Evil," "C'est Si Bon" and the saucy gold digger's theme song, "Santa Baby," which is revived on radio each Christmas.

The following year, the record company released "That Bad Eartha," which featured "Let's Do It," "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes" and "My Heart Belongs to Daddy."

After becoming a hit singing "Monotonous" in the Broadway revue "New Faces

of 1952," Kitt appeared in "Mrs. Patterson" in 1954-55. (Some references say she earned a Tony nomination for "Mrs. Patterson," but only winners were publicly announced at that time.) She also made appearances in "Shinbone Alley" and "The Owl and the Pussycat."

She was the sexy Catwoman on the popular "Batman" TV series in 1967-68, replacing Julie Newmar, who originated the role. A guest appearance on an episode of "I Spy" brought Kitt an Emmy nomination in 1966.

In 1996, Kitt was nominated for a Grammy in the category of traditional pop vocal performance for her album "Back in Business." She also had been nominated in the children's recording category for the 1969 record, "Folk Tales of the Tribes of Africa."

Kitt also acted in movies, playing the lead female role opposite Nat King Cole in "St. Louis Blues" in 1958.

She more recently appeared in "Boomerang" and "Harriet the Spy" in the 1990s.

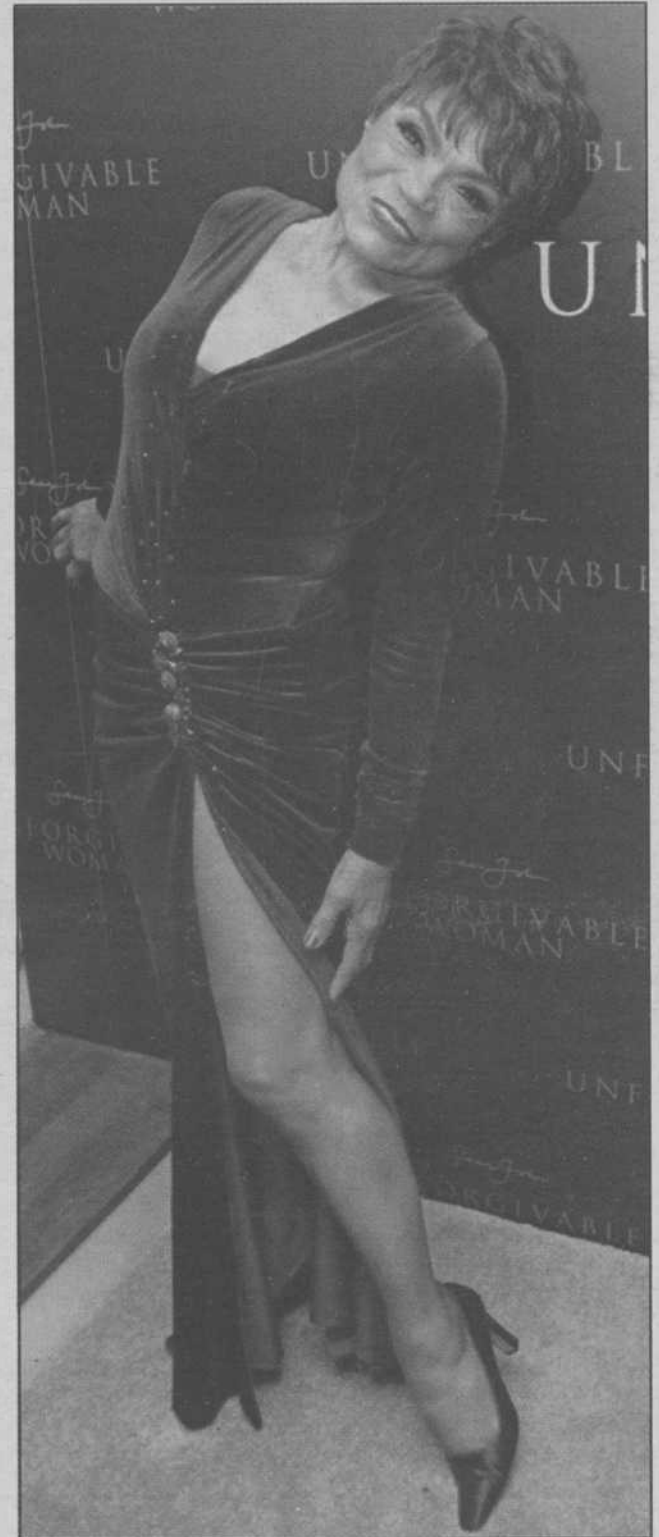
"Generally the whole entertainment business now is bland," she said in a 1996 Associated Press interview. "It depends so much on gadgetry and flash now. You don't have to have talent to be in the business today."

"I think we had to have something to offer, if you wanted to be recognized as worth paying for."

Kitt was plainspoken about causes she believed in. Her anti-war comments at the White House came as she attended a White House luncheon hosted by Lady Bird Johnson.

"You send the best of this country off to be shot and maimed," she told the group of about 50 women. "They rebel in the street. They don't want to go to school because they're going to be snatched off from their mothers to be shot in Vietnam."

For four years afterward, Kitt performed almost exclu-



Legendary actress Eartha Kitt redefined sexy and sultry but always managed not to subjugate her obvious intellect.

sively overseas. She was investigated by the FBI and CIA, which allegedly found her to be foul-mouthed and promiscuous.

"The thing that hurts, that became anger, was when I realized that if you tell the truth — in a country that says you're entitled to tell the truth — you get your face slapped and you get put out of work," Kitt told *Essence* magazine two decades later.

In 1978, Kitt returned to Broadway in the musical "Timbuktu!" — which brought her a Tony nomination — and was invited back to the White House by Presi-

dent Jimmy Carter.

In 2000, Kitt earned another Tony nomination for "The Wild Party." She played the fairy godmother in Rodgers and Hammerstein's "Cinderella" in 2002.

As recently as October 2003, she was on Broadway after replacing Chita Rivera in a revival of "Nine."

She also gained new fans as the voice of Yzma in the 2000 Disney animated feature "The Emperor's New Groove," and won two Emmys for her voice work in "The Emperor's New School."

(See Kitt, Page 7)



THE ABC'S OF KWANZAA

Dr. Al Gourrier, guest speaker at the Clark County Democratic Black Caucus' Kwanzaa gala, explains some of the finer points to first-timers of the Afrocentric cultural holiday. The event was held Saturday at the Nevada Partners Event Center. The inaugural event drew a respectable crowd, many of them dressed in traditional African garb.

Sentinel-Voice photo by Ramon Savoy