

Press Release



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For Immediate Release:

**EARTHA KITT TO TAKE NEWPORT BY STORM
FRIDAY EVENING, AUGUST 12 AT NEWPORT CASINO
AT THE JVC JAZZ FESTIVAL-NEWPORT
ARTIE SHAW ORCHESTRA TO OPEN EVENING CONCERT**

Television, film, Broadway and cabaret legend Eartha Kitt says that she appeared at the first Newport Jazz Festival in 1954 and danced during Dizzy Gillespie's set. She was just 27 at the time and hadn't yet reached the peak of her career.

As Eartha Kitt epitomizes the idea of the sex-kitten chanteuse, rising to fame with a nightclub act centered around her slinky stage presence and her throaty purr of a voice, the famed Newport Casino at the International Tennis Hall of Fame is the PURRfect setting for champagne and Eartha with her stellar band and Musical Director Daryl Waters. Since the announcement in mid-April of her upcoming appearance, ticket sales have been brisk. The Artie Shaw Orchestra under the direction of Dick Johnson, will also perform Friday, August 12, beginning at 8 pm.

Eartha Kitt's life story is nothing short of the amazing tale of a survivor, and she recants much about her life in her stunning show. Though now 78, some of her biggest fans are in their twenties!

Miss Kitt's fans are getting younger all the time. As Stephen Holden of the *New York Times* recently wrote, "Eartha Kitt is finally being discovered by the generation that thought Madonna pioneered the image of the pop singer as a gold-digging femme fatale . . . Her avariciously slinky stage alter ego is as classic in its way as Mae West's shimmying blond bawd, and just as funny." In recent years, Eartha Kitt has been just as active as ever and has no plans to slow down. With National tours of *The Wizard of Oz*, *Rogers and Hammerstein's Cinderella*, her frequent guest appearances on television programs such as *The Nanny*, *New York Undercover*, *Hollywood Squares* and her world-famous voice heard on television commercials and in New York City taxi cabs advising riders to buckle up, Kitt just doesn't stop. Miss Kitt's latest Broadway production was as Liliane Le Fleur in the 2003 revival of *Nine The Musical*. Her hilarious performance as *Yzma*, the villain in Disney's 2001 feature animation *The Emperor's New Groove*, won her an *Annie Award*® for Best Vocal Performance in an Animated Feature Film and is currently in production for the sequel, *The Emperor's New Groove II*. She can also be seen as Mme. Zeroni in the 2003 Disney family comedy *Holes* and in the recently released Samuel Goldwyn film *Anything But Love*.

Ostracized at an early age due to her mixed-race heritage, eight-year-old Eartha Mae Kitt was given away by her mother and sent from the poverty-ridden South Carolina cotton fields to live with an aunt in Harlem. It was in New York that her distinct individuality and flair for show business manifested itself, when on a friend's dare, the shy teen auditioned for the famed *Katherine Dunham Dance Troupe*. She was awarded a position as a featured dancer and vocalist and before the age of twenty, she had toured worldwide with the company. While performing with the Dunham Troupe in Paris, Miss Kitt was spotted by a nightclub owner who signed her on as a singer. She gained fame and admirers quickly, including Orson Welles, who called her "the most exciting woman in the world" and signed her to play Helen of Troy in his acclaimed stage production of *Dr. Faust*.

While performing in New York at the Village Vanguard, she was seen by Broadway producer, Leonard Sillman, who cast her to sing the sultry tune "*Monotonous*" in his production of *New Faces of 1952*. Her legendary performance in *New Faces*, which ran for a year on Broadway, would lead to a national tour and the Twentieth Century Fox film by the same name.

Broadway stardom led to a recording contract and a succession of best-selling records including *Love For Sale*, *I Want to Be Evil*, *Santa Baby* and *Folk Tales of the Tribes of Africa*, for which she received a Grammy nomination. She also published her first autobiography, *Thursday's Child*, during this period. Miss Kitt then returned to Broadway in the dramatic play *Mrs. Patterson*, for which she received her first Tony nomination. Other stage appearances followed, as did films including *The Mark of the Hawk* with Sidney Poitier, *Anna Lucasta* with Sammy Davis, Jr. and *St. Louis Blues* with Nat King Cole.

In 1967, Miss Kitt played the infamous *Catwoman* in the television series, *Batman*, a role that became synonymous with her and her trademark growl. Thanks to the popularity of the series, Miss Kitt can still be seen as this famous villain on TV land and cable stations across the US.

Singing in ten different languages, Miss Kitt has performed in over 100 countries and was honored with a star on **Hollywood Boulevard's Walk of Fame** in 1960. In 1966, she was nominated for an Emmy® for her role in the series, *I Spy*. Miss Kitt's career took a sudden turn in 1968 when at a White House luncheon hosted by Lady Bird Johnson, she spoke out against the Vietnam War. For many years afterward, she was blacklisted by many in the U.S. entertainment industry and was forced to work abroad where her status remained undiminished. In 1974 she returned to the United States professionally in an acclaimed Carnegie Hall concert and in 1978 received her second Tony Award® nomination for her starring role in the Broadway musical *Timbuktu*. Miss Kitt's second autobiography, *Alone With Me*, was published in 1976, and the third volume, *I'm Still Here: Confessions of a Sex Kitten*, was released in 1989. Her newest best-selling book, *Rejuvenate! (It's Never Too Late)*, was released by Scribner in May 2001. In *Rejuvenate! (It's Never Too Late)* Miss Kitt shares with the reader her strategies for staying healthy and vital in mind and body.

The Artie Shaw Orchestra, led by the distinguished clarinetist Dick Johnson will open this year's Newport Casino program. The late Artie Shaw, who passed away last December, is credited with putting the "swing" into swing. On www.allmusic.com, journalist Scott Yanow writes about Shaw, "One of jazz's finest clarinetists, Artie Shaw never seemed fully satisfied with his musical life, constantly breaking up successful bands and running away from success. While Count Basie and Duke Ellington were satisfied to lead just one orchestra during the swing era, and Benny Goodman (due to illness) had two, Shaw led five, all of them distinctive and memorable."

Yanow continues, "The surprise success of his 1938 recording of *Begin the Beguine* made the clarinetist into a superstar and his orchestra into one of the most popular in the world. Billie Holiday was with the band for a few months, although only one recording (*Any Old Time*) resulted. Shaw found the pressure of the band business difficult to deal with and in November 1939 suddenly left the bandstand and moved to Mexico for two months. When Shaw returned, his first session, utilizing a large string section, resulted in another major hit, *Frenesi*; it seemed that he could not escape success. Shaw's third regular orchestra, who had a string section and such star soloists as trumpeter Billy Butterfield and pianist Johnny Guarnieri, was one of his finest, waxing perhaps the greatest version of *Stardust* along with the memorable *Concerto for Clarinet*. The Gramercy Five, a small group formed out of the band (using Guarnieri on harpsichord), also scored with the million-selling *Summit Ridge Drive*.

Despite all this, Shaw broke up the orchestra in 1941, only to re-form an even larger one later in the year. The latter group featured Hot Lips Page along with Auld and Guarnieri. After Pearl Harbor, Shaw enlisted and led a Navy band before getting a medical discharge in February 1944. Later in the year, his new orchestra featured Roy Eldridge, Dodo Marmarosa, and Barney Kessel, and found Shaw's own style becoming quite modern, almost boppish. But, with the end of the swing era, Shaw again broke up his band in early 1946 and was semi-retired for several years, playing classical music as much as jazz.

His last attempt at a big band was a short-lived one, a boppish unit who lasted for a few months in 1949 and included Zoot Sims, Al Cohn, and Don Fagerquist; their modern music was a commercial flop. After a few years of limited musical activity, Shaw returned one last time, recording extensively with a version of the Gramercy Five that featured Tal Farlow or Joe Puma on guitar along with Hank Jones. Then, in 1955, Artie Shaw permanently gave up the clarinet to pursue his dreams of being a writer. Although he served as the frontman (with Dick Johnson playing the clarinet solos) for a reorganized Artie Shaw Orchestra in 1983, Shaw never played again. He received plenty of publicity for his eight marriages (including to actresses Lana Turner, Ava Gardner, and Evelyn Keyes) and for his odd autobiography, *The Trouble With Cinderella* (which barely touches on the music business or his wives), but the outspoken Artie Shaw deserves to be best remembered as one of the truly great clarinetists. His RCA recordings, which were reissued in complete fashion in a perfectly done Bluebird LP series, have only been made available in piecemeal fashion on CD."

FESTIVAL TICKETS & INFORMATION:

- **Thursday, August 11, 7 pm:** "Miles Electric: A Different Kind of Blue" at the Jane Pickens Theatre, 49 Touro Street, Newport. General Admission tickets: \$15.00.
- **Friday, August 12, 8 pm:** An Evening with Eartha Kitt with Musical Director Daryl Waters; The Artie Shaw Orchestra Under the Direction of Dick Johnson at the Newport Casino, International Tennis Hall of Fame, 194 Bellevue Avenue. All seats reserved: \$85.00, \$65.00, \$50.00 and \$30.00.
- **Saturday, August 13 and Sunday, August 14:** at Fort Adams State Park (11:30 am – 7:00 pm): General admission: \$65.00 in advance, \$70.00 on festival weekend, if available. Children under 12, \$5.00 at all times; under 2, free. On site festival parking, \$6.00 per vehicle. Reserved seating, JVC Jazz Stage: \$75.00.
- **TICKETS** are on sale via Ticketweb at <http://www.Ticketweb.com/>, by phone at **866-468-7619** and at the Newport Festival office located at 770 Aquidneck Avenue in Middletown, Rhode Island; cash, checks and major credit cards are accepted. Call 401-847-3700 for more information and office hours.
- Tickets are also available by mail order. To order by mail, send a check or money order for the total ticket cost plus a \$4.00 handling charge per order to: Festival Productions, Inc., P.O. Box 605, Newport, RI 02840. Order forms are also available on the festival web site at: <http://www.festivalproductions.net/>.
- **JVC**, the jazz festival's sponsor, is celebrating its 22nd year of jazz festival sponsorship. JVC is one of the world's leading manufacturers of high quality audio and video equipment.
- **Borders** is the official on-site book & music retailer of the JVC Jazz Festival-Newport.
- **ABC 6, WLNE-TV** is the official television partner of the JVC Jazz Festival-Newport.
- **WGBH 89.7** is the Official Boston Radio Station of the JVC Jazz Festival-Newport.
- **99.3 Swing FM WJZS** is the Official Rhode Island Radio Station of the JVC Jazz Festival-Newport.
- **Festival Productions, Inc.** has its own website at <http://www.festivalproductions.net/>

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