

HAPPENINGS

Kitt gives views of world scene

GRASSROOTS NEWS, N.W.
—She sizzled, smoked and stimulated her Portland audience in a way that was as unique as her voice and speech. She intellectualized and philosophized to the eloquent beat of Ron Steen's Quartet and cultural Pan-Africanist Bruce Smith. You guessed it. Eartha Kitt came to town.

Kitt is an international star whose electrifying career has spanned theatre, films, nightclubs, television and recordings. She is also known for having words with former first lady Lady Bird Johnson, in which she attempted to introduce the subject of the war in Vietnam into an afternoon at the White House. Those days are behind her, but her candor remains. In our interview she did not bite her tongue.

"The people in America have been very disappointed that our heroes like King and the Kennedy's, who tried to bring the people together, got shot down. We are now dormant and complacent. It is not that we entertainers aren't doing anything, but we are doing it behind the scenes."

Kitt says she believes people in America have an unwarranted fear to claim leadership. "We are living in a country where people shouldn't be afraid to stand up and be counted. I think Reagan is trying to bring the people together, but the machinery of American politics keeps Reagan from doing this."

As an international star with a reputation that precedes, Kitt shies away from the glitter an entourage might provide. "I like for the people to get a hold of me. I'm never too busy for the people. If I'm not listening to the people, what am I learning? How can I be constructive if I do not have information from the people to carry to those in a powerful position to do something about what we are unhappy about?"

Contact is what it is all about!"

It is on this basis that Ms. Kitt perceives the contact fostered by some politicians as temporary and phony. "All of a sudden it becomes time for them to vie for a position and you will find them going into the Black, Irish and Spanish community. Why in the hell didn't they do that before?"

Her willingness to be near the people led her to South Africa and her name is on the list of performers to boycott for entertaining in South Africa where the color of your skin determines the type of life you would lead. Eartha Kitt says she does not feel guilty about going.

"If I had not gone to South Africa, I would have not felt the impact of what they were going through. I cannot read the newspapers and know what the people are going through."

What did she find out? "I found out that the people are very disturbed and have the same kind of feeling I had when I was a child in my own country. I couldn't go into a restaurant or drink from a fountain unless it said 'Colored.' If I didn't go there, I would not know that they were going through what I went through, but at a stronger level. You cannot prick the consciousness of people by not being involved."

Kitt says her presence in South Africa made a difference. "We opened up parks where Blacks, colored and whites could go. We had integrated audiences that were not there before. The point is that even if it occurred for a moment — it happened. If it happened once, it can happen again. You cannot hide behind boycotts or take-aways."

Kitt cites another example of a misbegotten boycott. "Look at the Korean plane situation. So, they boycott the Russians for sixty days.



EARTHA KITT

What the hell good is sixty days going to do? We Americans are going to pay for it. Some way or another the Russians will make us pay."

Eartha Kitt is upset by the lack of support the Afro-American community gives the Afro-American artist. "We did the most beautiful show called 'Timbuktu.' And we looked for Blacks to back our shows and couldn't find anyone. They told us if it wasn't a chicken shack or a whiskey store they were not interested. I'm not saying that is right or wrong, but that is what is happening. The Black artist has a much more difficult time because we are not being supported by our own

people."

Her advice to the generation of the 1980s, "All of us need to be more self-constructive. One of us can do something wrong and the whole group will be blamed for it. We need to think more about what we are doing for ourselves. You cannot keep blaming everything on the government for troubles you get into. The real question is why aren't we more constructive among ourselves?"

The Cat is back — Eartha Kitt.

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