**A** **BILL**

TO AMEND THE CODE OF LAWS OF SOUTH CAROLINA, 1976, BY ADDING SECTION 53‑3‑75 SO AS TO DECLARE JANUARY SEVENTEENTH OF EACH YEAR AS “EARTHA KITT DAY” IN SOUTH CAROLINA IN HONOR OF THE LATE EARTHA MAE KITT, NATIONALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY KNOWN ACTRESS, SINGER, AND NATIVE SOUTH CAROLINIAN AND TO PROMOTE CULTURAL TOURISM IN THE STATE IN ORDER TO ENHANCE THE ECONOMIC WELL‑BEING AND IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF ALL SOUTH CAROLINIANS.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina:

SECTION 1. (A) The General Assembly finds that it is important to support efforts to increase tourism in the State, the state’s number one industry, and particularly to encourage cultural tourism with an emphasis on increasing visitors to undiscovered South Carolina‑rural areas outside of well‑known tourist destinations in the State. The state’s recognition and subsequent celebration of the lives of prominent native South Carolinians is one outstanding way to support this effort and the 2.5 million media campaign by the Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism to attract both in‑state and out‑of‑state visitors to the lesser‑known areas of our great State.

(B) The late Eartha Mae Kitt was a nationally and internationally known actress, singer, and cabaret star who was born in the town of North, South Carolina, a small community in Orangeburg County, on January 17, 1927. Her mother was of Cherokee and African‑American descent and her father of German or Dutch descent. She was raised by Anna Mae Riley, an African‑American woman whom she believed to be her mother. After Riley’s death, she was sent to live in New York City with Mamie Kitt, who she learned was her biological mother. She had no knowledge of her father, except that his surname was Kitt and that he was supposedly a son of the owner of the farm where she had been born.

(C) Ms. Kitt began her career as a member of the Katherine Dunham Company in 1943 and remained a member of the troupe until 1948. A talented singer with a distinctive voice, she had many hits including her most recognizable hit, “Santa Baby”, which was released in 1953. Ms. Kitt’s unique style was enhanced as she became fluent in the French language during her years performing in Europe. Her English‑speaking performances always seemed to be enriched by a soft French feel. She had skill in other languages too, as she spoke four languages and sang in seven, which she effortlessly demonstrated in many of the live recordings of her cabaret performances.

(D) In 1950, Orson Welles gave Ms. Kitt her first starring role as Helen of Troy in his staging of “Dr. Faustus”. Orson Welles and Ms. Kitt were very close professionally and he once referred to her as the “most exciting woman in the world”. Throughout the rest of the 1950s and early 1960s, Ms. Kitt would record, work in film, television, and nightclubs, and return to the Broadway stage in “Mrs. Patterson” during the 1954‑1955 season, and in “Shinbone Alley” in 1957. Also, in the 1960s, the television series “Batman” featured her as Catwoman after Julie Newmar left the role, and is perhaps her most famous television role.

(E) In 1968, during the administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson, she encountered a professional setback after she made anti‑war statements during a White House luncheon. Ms. Kitt was invited to a White House luncheon and was asked by Lady Bird Johnson about the Vietnam War. She replied, “You send the best of this country off to be shot and maimed. No wonder the kids rebel and take pot.” There was extreme public reaction to Ms. Kitt’s statements, both pro and con, and for a period of time thereafter, she devoted her energies primarily to performances in Europe and Asia.

(F) Eartha Kitt was throughout her career a favorite of international audiences. She became a cultural icon among many audiences outside the United States through her famous Monty Python sketch “The Cycling Tour”, which she performed before an enthusiastic crowd in Moscow, where an amnesiac believes he is first Clodagh Rodgers, then Trotsky, and finally Ms. Kitt. She was also widely followed in the United Kingdom as a recording artist. In 1984, “Where Is My Man”, the first certified gold record of her career, reached the Top 40 on the UK Singles Chart where it peaked at #36. Her 1989 follow‑up hit “Cha‑Cha Heels”, featuring Bronski Beat, received a positive response from UK dance clubs and reached #32 in the charts in that country.

(G) In her personal life, she married John Williams McDonald, an associate of a real estate investment company on June 6, 1960. They divorced in 1965. Their only child, a daughter named Kitt, was born on November 26, 1961. Kitt McDonald married Charles Lawrence Shapiro in 1987 and had two children, Jason and Rachel Shapiro. A long‑time Connecticut resident, Ms. Kitt lived in a converted barn on a sprawling farm in the Merryall section of New Milford for many years and was active in local charities and causes throughout Litchfield County. In 2002, Ms. Kitt moved to the southern Fairfield County, Connecticut town of Weston, to be near her daughter’s family where she died from colon cancer on Christmas Day, 2008.

(H) In 2014, the Orangeburg Times and Democrat recognized the talented songstress with the highly distinctive singing style on Day 5 of its “Vintage Orangeburg County” series, “100 Objects in 100 Days”. The series highlighted the rich cultural history of Orangeburg County and told the stories of people, places, objects, and “things” that express the unique nature of Orangeburg County. The list would not be complete without the inclusion of the one‑of‑a‑kind Eartha Mae Kitt.

(I) The members of the General Assembly believe it would be a fitting tribute to her memory and career, and an example to young South Carolinians of what a person with talent, drive, and ambition can achieve regardless of circumstances, if her birthday were officially recognized as “Eartha Kitt Day” in South Carolina each year. In addition, establishing an official day to commemorate the life of this native South Carolinian could potentially positively impact the State economically as such a day may attract visitors to the State to patronize its businesses as this remarkable woman is celebrated thereby promoting cultural tourism in the State.

SECTION 2. Chapter 3, Title 53 of the 1976 Code is amended by adding:

“Section 53‑3‑75. January seventeenth of each year, the birthday of the late actress, singer, and native South Carolinian Eartha Mae Kitt, is declared to be ‘Eartha Kitt Day’ in South Carolina.”

SECTION 3. This act takes effect upon approval by the Governor.

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