

Ethel Waters at 70

Red Eye Gravy

And High Tribute

New York — (RNS) — In her autobiography, "His Eye Is on the Sparrow," Miss Ethel Waters says, "I was always an outsider." At a Billy Graham crusade however, she is very much an insider.

During the recent crusade here, she was honored at a breakfast in the grand ballroom of the Waldorf-Astoria. There, she was handed telegrams of commendation from President Nixon and Gov. Ronald Reagan of California, where she has lived since 1942.

The breakfast, attended by some 250 friends, was sponsored by the Tennessee Crusade Train Conference, an organization that has been taking a group to a Graham crusade each year since 1954. After a breakfast of Tennessee country ham, buttermilk biscuits, scrambled eggs, red eye gravy, Southern grits, and Tumbler Creek sorghum, the sponsors heard a program of tributes to Miss Waters, as well as a selection of songs by Ethel.

The former blues singer and actress has been a featured soloist in Graham crusades since the 1957 New York crusade. During that 16 weeks here she sang in the choir every night but one, and six times sang the number that is her trademark and provided the title for her autobiography, "His Eye Is on the Sparrow."

Graham team members like to tease Miss Waters by telling about a technical problem they faced when she came in 1957 to sing in the choir. She could not get into the seats, with her 350 pounds. So they took out one of the dividing arms and she occupied two seats each

night. (She has since lost a considerable amount of weight.)

Miss Waters testifies that her life has been different since 1957. She speaks of "the old Ethel" and "the other kind of life."

Her autobiography, published in 1951, reveals, however, that she has always been religious. Along with the circumstances of her illegitimate birth in Chester, Pa., her early acquaintance with the underside of society, and her various marriages and liaisons, it tells another story of unusual religious faith.

Her mother, she says, was "always where there was a church meeting, and wanted to be an evangelist." She adds that she always felt she inherited "her deeply religious feelings," though not her mother's "backwoods" conception of God.

Her grandmother, with whom she lived most of her childhood, "inclined to the Catholic faith," and had Ethel baptized by a priest during a serious illness at the age of six.

At 11, Miss Waters came "truly to know and to reverence Christ, the Redeemer" during a revival at a Protestant church. She continued to think of herself as a Catholic, however.

"Though I'm deeply religious," she says in her autobiography, "I still do not go often to any churches, except Catholic ones. The others to me, have an almost theatrical air. Instead of going to church, I listen on Sunday to all the church programs on the radio."

The autobiography also tells that she was using her income

from vaudeville, movies, plays, and recordings (some jobs brought her as much as \$4,000 a week during the Depression) to help her family, support a number of needy children, and give regular assistance to a convent whose mother superior helped Miss Waters with letters of counsel.

Now 70, Miss Waters is giving much of her time to traveling and singing with the Graham team. She has recently emerged from her semi-retirement, however, to guest star in a television role and to appear on the stage in Chicago for several weeks.

During the "crusade" she gives her own individualized interpretation of the spirituals and Gospel songs she sings. Miss Waters repeats phrases and adds words to emphasize the message.

To establish rapport, she begins by giving a bright "Hi" to the audience and having them say "Hi" back to her. She may also add a few words of personal comment to her singing.

Her genius for charming an audience proved especially helpful at the Knoxville crusade service attended by President Nixon. She looked at the group of student protesters who were chanting obscenities and said in her grandmotherly fashion, "I love you, children, but if I was over there where you are, I'd just smack you. But I love you and I'd also give you a big hug and kiss and tell you so."

The hecklers became silent, and the rest of the 75,000 people in the stadium gave their biggest ovation of the evening.

As I See It

Seeing's Not Believing

By Pat Costa



My mother, who was visiting us recently, broke off her end of the conversation to stare fascinated at the TV screen where a movie about some gangsters was playing.

Elizabeth Montgomery, as one of the molls, was busily driving her man to a literally explosive rendezvous.

It wasn't the dynamite, however, that held my mother's attention but the manner in which the actress was maneuvering the steering wheel.

Great, expressive turns of the wheel in spite of the fact that the car seemed to be on a straight road with few or no curves. The car, in fact, never swerved, only the wheel.

"If a steering wheel were actually moved that much," commented my much-traveled mother, "the car would be on its side."

I agreed and noted that it was just another example of what I consider the movie and television credibility gap — the point where some bit of stage direction is so out of step with reality that it completely distracts one's attention from the dialogue.

My favorite example of the credibility gap is the stage direction that calls for the pouring of coffee.

With great drama, a coffee pot is picked up and guided in the direction of the coffee cups,

whereupon a liquid usually the consistency of watery mud is poured until a total of one inch of it rests in the cup.

I almost always lose track of whatever else is going on as I watch the actor attempt to swallow it.

Another cliché that loses something is the bag of groceries which always has the bunch of celery sticking out of the top. In nearly 20 years of television watching I can testify I've never seen a bag without the celery. Every time an actor goes to the supermarket he buys a bunch of celery — or so we are to believe.

Another sight to tickle the funnybone of the viewer is the actress waking up from what has purportedly been an eight-hour sleep with every hair of her beautifully coiffed head in exact place. If you also will notice carefully these people have never seen or heard of crumpled bed sheets and every husband obviously changes into freshly ironed pajamas several times during the night to emerge as unrumpled as a department store mannequin.

But biggest peeves deal with scary thrillers. The house is definitely haunted, the young tender blonde maiden is told, and she still elects to remain all alone in the dwelling for the night.

Now that's really pushing it a bit too far.

Raise High Your Candles

By THE MISSION SINGERS

To be perfectly honest, the lyrics of Lay Down Candles in the Rain—which Melanie wrote and sings with the Edwin Hawkins Singers—are not the most powerful ever written, but one of her most interesting lines is: "We all had caught the same disease, and we all sang the songs of peace."

A group of people being tried recently for some acts of civil disobedience argued at their trial that by society's standards they were sick people, and so should be allowed to plead temporary insanity.

Perhaps this is the same idea that Melanie is getting at with her words. (It's interesting that her voice itself portrays a kind of listlessness and lack of normalcy.) She feels if, by more traditional standards, young people are weird and freaky, why not rejoice in that judgment and sing songs of peace? She seems to say: If we are different, why not do something positive with our uniqueness?

Not too long ago, a priest used the idea of a candle to spark a world-wide movement of positive action. He used the motto: "Better to light one candle than to curse the darkness." Though some people might think the Christopher Movement past its prime now, its ideals will live on for a while, perhaps in songs like Lay Down Candles in the Rain.

"Raise the candles high . . . raise them higher again, and if you do we could stay dry against the rain." The rain that most of us fear is rain of fire, fire from

bombs. If we are to keep dry against that rain, we've got to raise our candles high; fight fire with fire.

The "white birds" that bring a message of love and peace to people who know only how to frown might be considered doves, but they could also be the white flame of the candles. We can all bring a little light to the world. If we don't, we could "stay black against the night."

But Melanie's song also provides a good opportunity to talk about a part of the pop music world that we've been pretty much ignoring: The music. We've been concentrating mainly on songs' lyrics because those are the most easily obscured or ignored. But we never mean to imply, by our silence about the music itself, that the beat, rhythm and drive of a song are not really important parts of whatever message a song might have.

When people talk about pop

songs, they often borrow Marshall McLuhan's idea, "the medium is the message." Both ideas pinpoint one of the main values of Melanie's song. Lay Down Candles in the Rain — simple in lyrics — gets its idea across by almost massaging you with sounds that set a definite mood.

For example, take Melanie's singing and shouting the words, "So raise the candles high, cause if you don't we could stay black against the night." Even if you can't catch the words when you hear her sing it, her meaning is still recognizable. Her voice, her emotion, her music — these convey the fear that darkness can bring. One can almost get the feel of being alone in an open country field on a moonless night when you can see nothing, not even your own hand. There's beauty there, but fear too. That fear is in Melanie's voice; you don't need words to hear it.

(Catholic Press Features)

LAY DOWN CANDLES IN THE RAIN

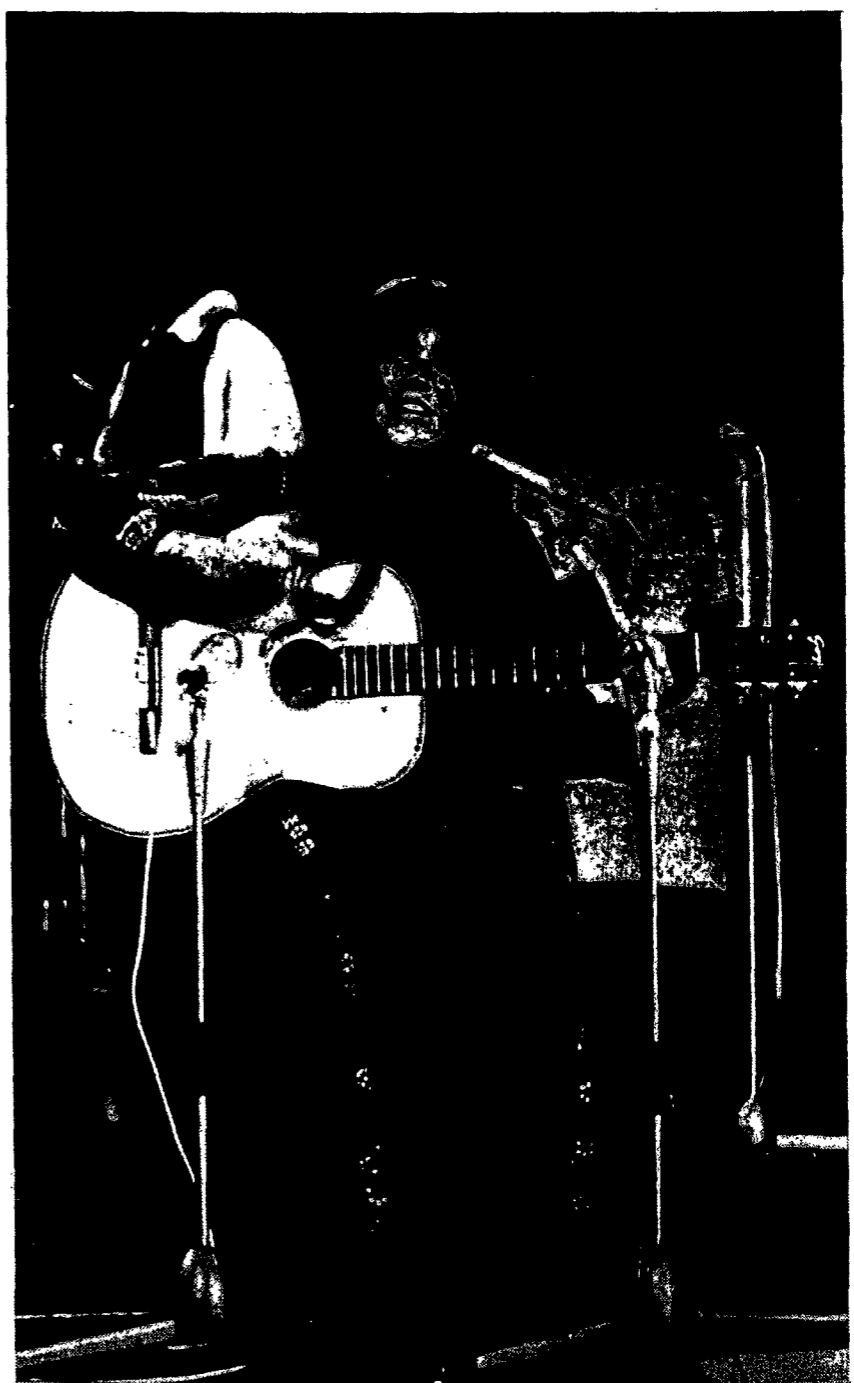
Lay down, lay down, lay it all down,
Let your white birds smile up at the ones who stand and frown.

We were so close, there was no room,
We bled inside each other's wounds,
We all had caught the same disease
And we all sang the songs of peace.

So raise the candles high, 'cause if you don't
We could stay black against the night.
So raise them higher again, and if you do
We could stay dry against the rain.

Some came to snig, some came to pray,
Some came to keep the dark away.
So raise the candles high, 'cause if you don't
We could stay black against the night.
So raise them higher again, and if you do
We could stay dry against the rain.

THE MUSIC BAG



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