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Here's Edie Adams, again, after 50 years

BY MICHAEL BARRETT, SPECIAL TO THE EXPRESS-NEWS : NOVEMBER 21, 2013 : Updated: November 21, 2013 4:58pm

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Photo By Courtesy Josh Mills

Edie Adams is accompanied by jazz great Duke Ellington on her "Here's Edie" variety show.

It's time to remember Edie Adams.

When the singer, actress and comedian died in 2008, most baby boomers recalled her for a few movies such as "It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World" and "The Apartment," and as the wife of TV comic genius Ernie Kovacs. She spent much of her career preserving and promoting her late husband's legacy, to the detriment of her own. With the release of her lost variety show on DVD as "Here's Edie: The Complete Television Collection," Adams gets her due.

"It's about 50-plus years in the making," said Josh Mills, Adams' son by her second husband. "My mom ... had a show from 1962 to 1964, and it's never been seen since it was originally broadcast."

Adams preserved as much as she could in her private archive, including a lot of Kovacs' material and every episode of this show, which alternated with "The Sid Caesar Hour." Mills, who now runs the archive, put out two Kovacs DVD sets in the last two years, and they did "incredibly well," he said. "We found a bunch of new people that really wanted to discover some

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classic comedy.”

Last year, he produced an Edie Adams Christmas CD of songs taken from the series “Kovacs Unlimited.” The video of that series no longer exists, but Adams paid for “airchecks,” or transcription discs, which were recordings made for sponsors to check that their ads were aired during broadcast. The CD demonstrated a warm, versatile, lovely voice.

“My mom went to Juilliard, and she was very much hanging out with the Leonard Bernsteins of the world. She was very much into high art,” Mills said. “She had to take classes like acoustics of the theater and things that most singers of the 1950s didn’t really do.”

He recalled that she got her start in TV because she went on “Arthur Godfrey’s Talent Scouts” (a precursor to “America’s Got Talent”) and told the producers she could sing opera or pop.

“They said something to the effect of, well, if you sing an opera song, you’ll probably win but you’re not going to get work, but if you sing a popular song, you probably won’t win but you probably will get work, and that’s exactly what happened,” Mills said. “She sang a Patti Page song and she didn’t win but she got invited to other things.”

Adams married Kovacs and co-starred on his various shows, but after he died in January 1962, she was left in a cash bind.

“Ernie had some gambling debts and they just both spent pretty lavishly on their lifestyle, and my mom found herself in pretty deep debt when Ernie passed away, so she really had to work her tail off,” Mills said.

She did shows in Las Vegas and elsewhere, and she launched “Here’s Edie.”

“My mom actually got to do some great things with that show,” Mills said. “It was the one thing in her life that she got to figure out for herself as a producer and star that she could do what she wanted.

“There’s opera on there, there’s choral music, there’s folk music, parodies of the Beatles. My mom decided this was going to be a different variety show. One show was taped in Las Vegas, which is her nightclub act. One show was taped in London because she was working there at the time. Another show is in the studio. It’s a really super-eclectic show, which is very much like my mom, now that I think about it.”

Guests include Duke Ellington, Bob Hope, Bobby Darin, Sammy Davis Jr., Sid Caesar, Johnny Mathis, Count Basie, Andre Previn, Al Hirt, Eddie Fisher, Peter Falk and Zsa Zsa Gabor.

Mills said he had a great relationship with his mother.

“When I played Little League, she worked at the snack stand slinging hot dogs, so she was very down to earth,” he said, “but at the same time I got to spend Christmas in Venice, Italy, with Jack Lemmon, so it was very random.”

He is determined to promote her legacy, or what’s left of it.

“A lot of things got destroyed,” he said. “Ernie’s entire run on the DuMont Network is sitting at the bottom of the Hudson River because a network executive decided we don’t really want to pay these storage fees, and so they got an 18-wheeler and backed it up to the Hudson River. So a lot of our history is swimming with sharks, I guess.”

Michael Barrett is a freelance writer in San Antonio.

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