

Review by Robert Temple from IMDB.com, 10/31/2009  
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His review for The Horror of Party Beach:

Eulabelle Moore's only feature film

Why on earth would I review a film as worthless and ridiculous as this one? There is only one reason. It is because it was the only feature film in which my old friend Eulabelle Moore appeared, and I want to put on record on the database a few facts about her, and give her a tribute. It is now 45 years since Eulabelle died, and I must be one of the last people left alive who knew her.

I was a teenager at the time. Eulabelle and I spent many, many hours talking together, and there was a time long ago when I could have related the entire story of her life. As I seem to recall, she had come up from the South to New York during the Depression, where she tried to start a new life. She never married and had no children, and was pretty much a loner, despite having many fond friends and acquaintances, as she was extremely gregarious when in company, but she was naturally a solitary person.

She got into acting late in life, and appeared in her first Broadway play at the age of 33. In those days of segregation, she tended to be type-cast as the black maid, which after all were often the only parts available for black women on the stage. She soon became a favourite character actress on Broadway and was frequently described as the Hattie McDaniel of New York. Everyone who has ever seen 'Gone with the Wind' remembers Hattie McDaniel, who went on to appear in film after film with her wonderful sense of humour, colourful language, and no-nonsense approach to keeping her 'white folks' in order and under control whilst pretending to be their servant. Eulabelle never played things with as broad strokes as Hattie, but was far more subtle and sophisticated. I believe they met a couple of times but were not friends. I suspect that Hattie was no great brain, but Eulabelle was extraordinarily intelligent and sophisticated in her way. In our endless conversations late into the night, she always spoke with such compelling intelligence and insight that it was a joy to learn the lessons of life from her morality tales.

She carried her skillet (old iron frying-pan) with her everywhere she went, along with a miniature portable stove and pan to boil her vegetables in. She was an expert at survival by cooking for herself in boarding house rooms. One of the reasons she and I 'bonded' was that I have always been as attached to my skillet as she was to hers, since the one from which I have had my fried bacon and eggs for breakfast all my life goes back to the 17th century and was used by my Leonard ancestors almost daily since they made it in their own iron works, the

first in America, at Taunton, Massachusetts. It has been in continuous use in the family for over 300 years, and looks it! (Isn't it strange, the objects which survive?) Eulabelle loved hearing about my skillet, and having skillets in common really meant something to us. It also meant a lot to her that it was my grandmother who started the American craze for black-eyed peas, which Eulabelle loved. Eulabelle was an expert at cooking her soul food, but I did teach her one trick, how to cook barley as rice. She and I had many a feast on it, she raved about it, and she couldn't have been more thrilled at this 'new soul food' which I had recommended to her and which 'even we black folks down South had never heard of nor thought of eating like that, but I wish we had'.

On Broadway, Eulabelle had been directed by Elia Kazan twice, Otto Preminger, Robert Rossen, and George Abbott. She had appeared in plays by Thornton Wilder, Moss and Hart, and Tennessee Williams, and a play based on a novel by Eudora Welty, and had acted with Tallulah Bankhead, Frederic March, Montgomery Clift, E. G. Marshall, Uta Hagen, Anthony Quinn (as Stanley Kowalski in 'Streetcar'), Marlon Brando (as Stanley Kowalski; the IMDB database is in error by not recording this one, and Eulabelle used to call him 'that boy' and told me what it was like to work with him, and how he never repaid some money he borrowed from her), David Wayne, Eartha Kitt, Wendell Corey, James Earl Jones, Calvin Lockhart, and Colleen Dewhurst. The stories she had to tell were endless.

She had a bad heart when I knew her, and this may have been the reason why she died at the age of only 61 in 1964. I did not know of her death for some time, so missed her funeral. I may well be the last friend of Eulabelle's who is left. No one should think she talked like she does in this film, where she had to play a typical housemaid in an apron who talks folksy, and where she has to say things like: 'It's the voodoo, that's what it is!' How Eulabelle would have laughed to think she would be remembered for such inane conversation and for playing up to the stereotype of the stupid servant.

She was one of the liveliest and most interesting people I ever knew, never a dull moment, a mind as sharp as a whip, and a heart of gold. But I can imagine the satisfaction which she would have experienced from pocketing the check for appearing in this rubbishy horror film, as she was always poor, and needed to pay the rent. Good old Eulabelle. Now she is freed from paying rent, and freed from the constraints of having skin with a colour which confined and delimited her life and her work. She may have been 'only a black character actress' to some people, but to me she had more character than any role she ever played.