

From Princess Pepper to Sister McDuffy The Extraordinary Story of **DAHLE SCOTT**



The first three stanzas to Scott's self-confessed 1996 poem "The Singer" just about describe the triumphs and tough times of a woman blessed with a multitude of skills and talents. This amazing woman, always resolute, always open to fresh ideas and always willing to share them with others, is said to possess a personality that draws people to her. Always willing to lend a hand where needed, Dahle Scott has lived more lives than Morris the cat.

Born Emma Taylor in June 1929 in Danville, Illinois on the border with Indiana, Scott grew up in a caring, middle class family. Her mother, Cozette Napier McGuire, sang in Lucky Millinder's band in the early 1930s, and her father, Ernest R. Taylor, an amateur singer, worked for the U.S. Postal Service. She worshipped her grandfather, Elisha Taylor, a building contractor who built Laura Lee Fellowship Houses, Piggly Wiggly stores, churches and tire company buildings. When she was just a few weeks old, the family up and moved to Chicago where they settled at 446 Evans Street just a few blocks from the Pershing Hotel (64th and Evans). Scott's father found a job at the Post Office.

The first three verses of the six verse "The Singer" by Emma McDuffy (Dahle Scott) from "Reflections", a collection of original, self-published poetry:

*The singer sang with all her soul
It didn't matter, that she was getting old
Singing wasn't all that she knew
But this was what, she wanted to do
She had traveled far and wide
With musicians at her side
She had awards and a cup
But her singing she couldn't give up*

*All her friends and she felt, too
The hand of fame, was long over due
What could she do about this thing
All she ever, wanted to do, was sing
She would go by bus, car or by plane
So that she could do her thing*

*No use fretting or getting depressed
She would stand tall and not be cold
She'd sing songs... stories to be told*

At elementary school Scott made friends with a young female classmate who shared her dreams of being in show business when they quit school. Both started taking violin lessons, but practice at home where their respective family members were driven half insane by the constant scraping coupled with the fact that the pair soon lost interest led to a switch to vocal coaching. Young Scott also favoured taking piano lessons. Scott's first vocal coach was an aunt, Bernice Hassel. Hassel also taught **Bobby Short**.

Scott's two principal heroes were **Sarah Vaughan** and **Ella Fitzgerald**, two singers she most always tried to emulate. Unlike her revered great ones, Hassel taught Scott to modulate her

voice in a way which brought out her personal best qualities. Later on, Scott would share billing with Sarah Vaughan and over the years become firm friends with her. When reaching some degree of proficiency, Scott got the opportunity to play the Flame Club in Milwaukee and was even handed a spot singing on Radio WDAN.

Scott picked up her education wherever she could. She attended three high schools, one in Danville, Illinois, one in Chicago and one in Inglewood out in California. She skipped a few grades but graduated in 1944. Scott later received a diploma in business management at The California Business College in Los Angeles. In Chicago she attended Rev. Clay Evans' Fellowship Baptist Church along with the young **Jessie Jackson**. Scott developed a smooth vibrato-contralto voice. By the time she had reached her eighteenth birthday, Scott, having assumed the pseudonym Princess Pepper, had put together a four-piece teenage combo. Members included **Chuck Morris**, **Robert McGuire**, **Charles Mars** and **Chuck Williamson**.

As if these were not enough activities, in Chicago she started organizing fashion shows exhibiting some of her own designs with dresses she had made. She kept this up over the years and got so good she even designed stage

outfits for **Ruth Brown**, **Lorez Alexander**, and **Linda Hopkins** with whom she became very close. Scott and Hopkins are today as play sisters.

Scott and her combo, comprised of sax, bass, piano and drums, did not wait for bookers to come to them. They simply rented halls and gave dances. Rehearsals took place in a basement owned by Scott's grandfather who, after a little persuasion, let it out rent free. At one point, Scott worked with "**Jimmy**" **James McLin**, a guitarist who had spent some time during the 1930s backing **Billie Holiday**. Scott also worked with his brothers Ed and Claude who played trumpet and sax. All were from Brookville, Florida.

After World War II Scott started working for the NAACP where she met Eleanor Roosevelt and her husband's African-American adviser, Mary McCleod Bethune, also founder and president of the Bethune-Cookman College. In 1948 Scott toured with **The Harlem Review** with **Butterbeans & Susie** as headliners. Scott remembers taking her band to New York for the first time in 1949 and being absolutely amazed by the grandeur she saw as the train pulled into Grand Central Station. She set up base at the Elvin Hotel on Fifty-second Street.

Scott appeared at Club Harlem and managed to pick up a guest spot on the **Sherman Dudley Show** where she gave a smooth, silky rendition of "St. Louis Blues". This was the time she hooked up with "**Hot Lips**" **Page** who seemed to make a career of giving young female torch singers a start in show business. Scott worked with Page as a result of a referral from **Lionel Hampton**.

Apart from becoming proficient at the

Dahle Scott & her Mom, Cozette Napier McGuire



Photo courtesy Dahle Scott/Opal Nattoms

pencil sketch, Scott took up drumming, and during the 1950s she played for **Eddie "Cleanhead" Vinson**.

Throughout the 1950s Scott managed nightclubs in Chicago, Los Angeles and Wichita, Kansas, performed good deeds for a number of charities and owned the management rights to Chicago heavy-weight prizefighter Robert Williams. In 1953 Scott married (**Bro.**) **Jack McDuff**, a.k.a. Eugene McDuffy, born September 17, 1926 in Champaign, Illinois. McDuff started out playing both bass and piano. His first gigs were as bassist for **Denny Zeitlin** and **Joe Farrell**. McDuff studied privately in Cincinnati before heading out to Chicago. The couple met in Chicago when McDuff, still a pianist, was playing for **Johnny Griffin** and **Max Roach**.

It was in 1955 that Scott first tried her hand at writing skits and routines to go with musical programs for kids in Chicago's projects. She branched out into cosmetology and, while studying the subject at school in the evening, worked at the Lattes Beauty Parlour in the Loop. Scott claims to be the first black ever to operate a beauty parlour in Chicago. She also says she was the first black traveling hair stylist while working for Glemby Beauty Salon, sponsors of Roux and Clairol products. Back in those days, Blacks were not allowed to represent major cosmetic brands. Scott did straightening with pressing comb, grease and hot iron and became skilled enough to fix the hair of most of Chicago's socialites, including "Miss Johnson", editor of Ebony Magazine.

The permanent move from Chicago out to Pasadena, California came about in 1959. She got a job as a salesperson for the Kress Department Store. Scott says she was the first black Kress Department store employee ever to work with the general public. Up until then, according to Scott, all black employees were relegated to the stockrooms out the back. In the evenings she continued her studies at the School of Cosmetology. Chicago's most powerful deejay, **Al Benson**, wanted Scott to record for the **Chess Bros**. And introduced her to them. Unfortunately, **Len and Phil Chess** were too taken up with **Little Walter's** career to pay any attention to Scott and consequently passed her over.

Scott claims to have recorded for Len Allen's United label as well as a record she says she cut in 1959 for Bill Sheppard's Apex label with the **Shades of Rhythm** ("A Hundred Years From Today"/"Life With You" - Apex 967), a group she is known to have shared club dates with, notably the Sardean Bar in Chicago, during 1985-86. But this au-



Photo courtesy Dahle Scott/Opal Nations

Dahle Scott circa 1960

thor has not been able to track down any United recording nor has he heard Apex 967 in order to verify these claims.

After only a few months in Los Angeles, Scott set up "Celebrity Night" at The Parisian Room, a series of special star-studded concerts she hosted throughout the 1960s. In 1962 she ventured into journalism writing celebrity columns for both Scoop and the Los Angeles Communicator for two years. In 1963 she started a column entitled "V.I.P. Table of the Stars". Articles flourished from out of a public relations office in Hollywood. She became so prolific at writing about the most pressing local issues of the day that she vanity-published a chapbook entitled "Shared Thoughts". The booklet contained half-page common-sense insights into such disparate issues as domestic violence, hate crimes and breast cancer. On the day Jimmy Carter became president of the United States, Scott's combo won the "Gong" Show and she is really proud of that.



Photo courtesy Dahle Scott/Opal Nations

Dahle & Joe Williams - Pointsetta Park



Dahle & Co.: Ron Afif - Guitar, Dalhe Scott, Larrance Marable - Drums, Tim Givens - Bass

Back in show biz again, Scott went on the road with **Louis Jordan's Tympany Five**. The little group played the Pershing Hotel in Chicago. The outfit featured **Billy Howell** on valve trombone and **Clarence Wheeler** on alto and baritone sax.

In 1969 Scott was fortunate enough to venture overseas on an **Ink Spots** tour with her combo. Scott and her musicians traveled through China, Japan and South East Asia. The Seventies were marked by Scott's long overdue singles recordings, which by any reckoning are few in number. Apart from a test pressing of "I Gotta Be Me" cut with John Herd, this writer knows of only four singles releases. Three of these were cut for her old Chicago-days friend **Carl Jones** on his Colt and C.J. labels. All were made in Chicago when Scott had briefly returned there during the 1970s.

The first of these releases, Colt 645, was a sultry rendition of **Frank Sinatra's** "One More For The Road" backed with "Tell It For Me" issued in 1975. Following on its heels came "Out On The Town Tonight" sandwiched with "Givin' Me The Blues" (Bel-Ad 1005). Both sides were accompanied by the **Roy Porter Sound Machine**. Her third release, a Country and Western song on the Colt label, "I Wouldn't Wish" became her most requested song at the Melody Room on the Strip later on.

The last single release to pass my ears was "Glorious Day" backed with "All That I Ask" cut for Carl Jones (CJ 677). "Glorious Day" is a celebration of life and is her favourite release. In 1987 Scott returned to Los Angeles where she played a number of clubs including Erika's at the Rose and the Vine Street Bar & Grill. In 1988 she gathered a bunch of musicians and went out as Dahle & Co. The idea was to have a constantly evolving combo, wherein musician-friends could come and go and guest-spot in the group whenever they had the time. **Linda Hopkins** was a frequent performer with the group.

Scott's major gig for 1990 was a benefit for bassist **Allen Jackson** and others at the Western Avenue Golf Club Clubhouse. In 1992 Scott went over big at Café Trevi in Woodland Hills. 1993 was the year Scott signed with Howard Ransom and Cliff White's Fat Lady Records based in Las Vegas and was seen live at the Vine Street Bar & Grill. She also published her first book of poetry, "Reflections", using the pen name Emma McDuffy. Scott and pianist arranger **Gildo Mahones** drew up plans to put out an album with a few of the Dahle & Co. musicians, **Herman Riley**, tenor, **Terry Evans**, guitar, **Sherman Ferguson**, drums and **Richard Simon**, bass.

Scott's club engagements continued to flourish. Matty's at 7228 Melrose with **Bill Heid** on keyboards and supporting vocals, the Nucleus Club just a few doors up at 7267, the Thai Bistro on South La Brea Avenue with **Roy Alexander** on piano, **Clarence Johnston**, drums, **Larry Feldman**, guitar, **Rini Kramer**, percussion, and **Peter Marshall** on bass, then on to Joseph's Restaurant and Lounge in Culver City.

More nite spots followed: the Play Jazz Etc. Supper Club on Santa Monica Plaza, the Hollywood Athletic Club on Sunset Boulevard with **Chester Whitmore's Opus One Big Band**, at Marla's Crossroads with actress Maria Gibbs and on and on up to the present time. Always in demand, always asked back, always gracious, always a friend to everyone, Scott made few enemies.

In 1998 she founded the Jammin Foundation to honour jazz celebration and set aside time to put together benefits for the Retinitis Pigmentosa Foundation, a malady she suffers herself. In 1996 Scott severed relations with Jack McDuff who insists that he and Dahle Scott are divorced. But Scott says she never signed divorce papers and McDuff, thinking he was free as a bird, married again. Dahle Scott chuckles to herself when she thinks of her estranged husband shacking up with another woman he thinks is his wife.

In 1995 Scott hosted a cablevision show on Channel 37 entitled "Jazz Tyme". The program, shot entirely in L.A., featured many of her friends and admirers. To Scott, it's the kids that matter most and how well they can adjust to life's many challenges. "It is the kids we should put first," says Scott. "That's why I served on the planning committee at the Second Baptist Church and get involved with the 'Hope for the Hood Project'. We have to get the kids involved in worthwhile activities. We have to show them how to build a future for themselves."



Dahle Scott's 65th Birthday, 1994 - Thai Bistro