

Cleo Laine



Laine began her musical career in the early 50's in her native England, where she was born in a London suburb. Cleo showed early singing talent which was nurtured by her Jamaican father and English mother who sent her to singing and dancing lessons. However, it wasn't until her mid-twenties that she seriously applied herself to singing and auditioned for the hugely successful British band led by the acclaimed John Dankworth. Cleo toured extensively with the band and in 1958; she married Dankworth, which strengthened their bond as personal and professional collaborators. Together they have toured the world with sold-out engagements before enthusiastic audiences.

In addition to concert appearances, Cleo has carved a niche as an illustrious actress. Laine's professional career in the legitimate theatre began in London when she starred in *Flesh to a Tiger*, directed by Tony Richardson at the Royal Court Theatre. Her theatrical credits include *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Valmouth*, *Women of Troy* and the title role in Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*.

Frequently, she has used her musical and acting talents to full advantage in a diverse collection of projects including *Showboat* and *Colette* in London's West End, *The Seven Deadly Sins* as part of the Edinburgh Festival. In the U.S. she appeared in *A Little Night Music* and *The Merry Widow*. She originated the role of Princess Puffer in the Broadway hit musical *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, for which she received a Tony nomination and earned a Theatre World Award as well as a Drama Desk nomination for best actress in a musical. She also starred in the Houston Ballet's production of *Lady in Waiting*, an

original opera/ballet composed by John Dankworth, Benny Green and J. Renault-Williams; She played the voice of “God” in the BBC Proms’ production of Benjamin Britten’s *Noyes Fludde* -- quite a different role than that of “The Witch” in Stephen Sondheim's *Into the Woods* in which Cleo starred in Los Angeles receiving a nomination by the L.A. drama critics for best lead performance.

In 1983 Cleo became the first British artist to win a coveted Grammy award - Best Female Jazz Vocalist, for the third of her “live” Carnegie Hall albums, all recorded at the famous New York auditorium. Ella Fitzgerald, whom Cleo had befriended many years before on a US tour with husband John Dankworth’s big band, celebrated the occasion by sending Cleo two dozen roses together with a card reading “Congratulations, gal - and about time too!”.

She has been a frequent guest on American television including such specials as “An Evening at the Boston Pops with Cleo Laine” and “Cleo Laine: Live at Wolftrap”. In addition to her numerous international television specials, she has also been a featured performer on the classic British television show “That Was The Week That Was”.

In addition to receiving an honorary Doctor of Music degree from Boston’s prestigious Berklee School of Music and being named, along with her husband John Dankworth, the Variety Club's “Show Business Personality of the Year,” Cleo Laine was honoured by Queen Elizabeth with an O.B.E. The beginning of this decade has already brought Cleo new acclaim with a Presidential Lifetime Achievement Award presented by the National Association of Recording Merchandisers (NARM), and a Lifetime Achievement Accolade from the British Jazz Awards in 1996.

Whether interpreting a collection of Shakespeare’s sonnets set to music, appearing in Jazz Festivals, operas, or singing with Symphony orchestras and big bands, Cleo Laine is consistently finding new forums for her considerable range of talents.