

ABOUT KATIE LEE
An Eclectic and Wild-Riding Career



Photo by Michael Brown

Katie Lee is venerated as the most flamboyant of knights among a growing legion of pro-wilderness activists. Katie has taken up the torch that conservationists Edward Abbey and David Brower left burning after they died - to sing, write and lecture about the importance of preserving and restoring wilderness refuges; the histories of ancient races embedded in its sinuous sandstone canyons; and the lonesome characters the West still breeds. Today, her unwavering commitment to her principles and feisty eloquence are primarily directed at draining Powell Reservoir and freeing the Colorado River through Glen Canyon

Her career odyssey began in Hollywood and ended in Jerome, AZ where she now lives. She has published five books, including a trilogy about Glen Canyon, recorded fourteen CDs, made two DVDs, and has become much sought-after for appearances in TV shows and documentary films about the Southwest.

At 95-years old, Katie is just beginning to glimpse the legacy of her eloquent activism and spreading fame.

Hollywood Actress



**Katie with
The Great Gildersleeve**

A native Arizonan, Katie began her professional career in 1948 as a stage and screen actress. She performed bit parts in motion pictures in Hollywood; had running parts on major NBC radio shows, including *The Great Gildersleeve* and *The Railroad Hour with Gordon McRae*; was an actress and folk music director on *The Telephone Hour with Helen Parrish* in the early 50's.

Folk Singer



Katie as a torch singer

In the mid-fifties, Katie began a new career as a singer in cabarets such as the Gates of Horn in Chicago, The Blue Angel in New York, and The Hungry Eye in San Francisco. She began her recording career in 1956 with *Spicy Songs for Cool Nights*, a folk album. In the next three years, Katie recorded two albums of psycho-therapy parodies, *Songs of Couch and Consultation* and *Bed of Neuroses*.



Katie with Josh White

When Katie began exploring the Colorado River and Glen Canyon (before it was dammed), she began singing the songs of the rivers and the canyons and began composing songs of her own. She stopped performing in smoky cabarets and began performing in colleges and other concert venues throughout the US, Canada and Mexico.

In 1964, she recorded *Folk Songs of the Colorado River* for Folkways. Katie re-published it in 1976 as *Colorado River Songs*.

In 1975, Katie recorded *Love's Little Sisters*, a collection of folk songs about the early American 'ladies of the night,' in Mickey Hart's (Grateful Dead) studio in Novato, California.

Folklorist: Songs of the Cowboys

Actor and singer Burl Ives said:
"The best cowboy singer I know is a girl - Katie Lee" - Burl Ives



While Katie was touring the country as a folk singer, she interviewed cowboy songwriters and researched the roots of traditional cowboy songs. She wrote what has become a classic: *Ten Thousand Goddam Cattle: A History of the American Cowboy in Song, Story and Verse*. She recorded many of these songs in a two-album set by the same name in Mickey Hart's (Grateful Dead) studio in Novato, California.

During the nineteen eighties and nineties, Katie was a featured performer at cowboy poetry festivals in such cities as Elko, Nevada, Austin, Texas, and Ruidoso, New Mexico. The festivals revived the West's great legacy of cowboy songs, which are different from country western songs, which Katie loathes. "Country and Western is neither of either, Katie once said in an article in folk song magazine Sing Out! "Its lyrics are about tight miserable places like phone booths, dingy bars, and stuffy bedrooms and some poor twit whose wife or girlfriend just dumped him.

In conjunction with her book, Katie made an award-winning television documentary, *The Last Wagon*, which celebrated the lives of Gail Gardner and Billy Simon, two Arizona cowboy legends. The film won the 1972 Cine Golden Eagle Award.

She recorded two CDs of western songs - *His Knibbs and the Badger* and *Fenced!* - for her own label, Katydid Books and Music.

Magic of Glen Canyon



Pre-eminent environmentalist David Brower called the building of Glen Canyon dam, "America's most regretted environmental mistake," Katie Lee said that the protest was like putting out a wildfire with a thimble full of water."

Ever since Glen Canyon was buried by Reservoir Powell in the nineteen sixties, Katie Lee has sung, stomped, photographed, written about, and fought to restore the magic of Glen Canyon and to let the Colorado River run free.

Katie held a knife-edged anger and bitter sadness when Glen Canyon was drowned by Powell Reservoir (which she refers to as 'Rez Foul'). These were difficult emotions to write from and she didn't try until the nineteen eighties when she spilled her feelings into a thinly disguised novel. After it was rejected by half a dozen or so publishers, Katie decided to follow the advice of her friend Edward Abbey and write a nonfiction book about her travels in Glen Canyon.

Her considerable body of work on Glen Canyon includes the book trilogy *Glen Canyon Betrayed*, *Sandstone Seduction* and *The Ghosts of Dandy Crossing*; her CDs, *Colorado River Songs*, and *Glen Canyon River Journeys*; and her DVD, *Love Song to Glen Canyon* - all paeans to the magic of a canyon that is now lost under the waters of Reservoir Powell.



Katie with Ed Abbey

Glen Canyon Betrayed was first published as *All My Rivers are Gone: A Journal of Discovery through Glen Canyon* (1998) with an introduction by author Terry Tempest Williams. In 2006, the book was re-released with a new title, *Glen Canyon Betrayed*, and added an index and afterword.

In conjunction with the book, Katie published a CD, *Glen Canyon River Journeys*, readings from *Glen Canyon Betrayed*, interspersed with songs.

In 2004, *Sandstone Seduction-Rivers and Lovers, Canyons and Friends* was published by Johnson Books. This collection of essays are about events that shaped and inspired her life.



Katie at Earth First rally

The Ghosts of Dandy Crossing, published in 2014, is one of the few historical documents about Katie's relationships with people that lived in Dandy Crossing just as the reservoir began to fill, irrevocably changing all their lives. (Dandy Crossing was a ferry crossing on the old Colorado River between Hite village and White Canyon village, about three miles downstream from what is now Hite Marina).

Author Diane Sward Rapaport once asked Katie why she is still so attached to Glen Canyon. She replied, "It's as if my feet are still stuck in the sand at the edge of the river. It's where I live. This other life I walk around in all day - well, that's a passing thing. And in many ways it's my defense against the sadder mechanisms of life around us. And God knows we all need those mechanisms from keeping ourselves from going crazy in this mad world."

Maude, Billy & Mr. D - Western Folk Opera



In 1956, Katie read an intriguing Western short story "*The Rider on the Pale Stallion*", by Helen Eustis in the *Saturday Evening Post*. In 1990, Katie transformed it into lyrics and music and gave it a different title. She considers it her best work; and has performed it many times in concert to a spellbound audience. (Published by Katydid Books and Music, 1990)

Ballad of Gutless Ditch



**Illustration by
Robin Anderson**

Katie was always composing when she was on the road, driving in her 1955 classic Thunderbird. One day, the words to this wonderful free-verse Western adventure just fell out of the sky and became a powerful ballad that is full of the magic of love, lust and betrayal. Katie published 500 copies of a special limited edition signed by her and by nationally renowned artist Robin Anderson who illustrated the book with twelve etchings. (Published in 2010 by Katydid Books and Music)

Scholars and journalists can find a considerable archive about Katie Lee at Cline Library, Northern Arizona University, in "Colorado Plateau special collection. Rare holdings include letters between Barry Goldwater and Katie Lee about the building of the Glen Canyon dam; two 8 mm films taken by Natalie Giganoux that show Natalie, Katie, Leo Walters and Frank Wright on a boat trip through Glen

Canyon before it was dammed and so on.

Bio written by author Diane Sward Rapaport (www.homesweetjerome.net)