

Idaho tribe: 'Mrs. Swing' was Indian

By JOHN MILLER
Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho — Mildred Rinker Bailey was known to fans as “Mrs. Swing,” whose slight, throaty voice won acclaim as one of the great white jazz singers of the '30s and '40s.

But the Coeur d'Alene Indian Tribe is now hoping to set the record straight: Bailey, who died impoverished in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., in 1951, was an American Indian who spent her childhood on the reservation near DeSmet, Idaho.

This week, the tribe introduced a resolution honoring Bailey in the Idaho Legislature, in part to convince the Jazz at Lincoln Center Hall of Fame in New York City to add her to its inductees — on grounds she helped blaze a trail for better-known singers like Ella Fitzgerald and Billie Holiday.

“Mildred was a pioneer,” said Coeur d'Alene Tribal Chairman Chief J. Allan. “She paved the way for many other female singers to follow.”

Though Bailey's Coeur d'Alene ties may not have been common knowledge among her fans, it clearly wasn't a secret.

“Part Indian, she was born Mildred Rinker on a farm near Spokane,” reads her Associated Press obituary, dated Dec. 13, 1951.

Still, in jazz history books, Bailey has gone down largely as a white female jazz stylist.

The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz hails her as “the first white singer to absorb and master the jazz-flavored phrasing...of her black contemporaries.”



AP photos

Mildred Bailey in New York City.

Howard Koslow, the illustrator who created Bailey's likeness on a 29-cent U.S. Postal Service stamp based on an image by iconic jazz photographer William Gottlieb, said he had only that brief New Grove entry as a reference.

But his depiction of Bailey's dark complexion and black hair, for the stamp issued in a series honoring jazz and blues musicians, appears to capture her complex heritage.

“She has that look about her,” Koslow recalled.

Bailey was born Feb. 16, 1900, in the Washington farming town of Tekoa, near the Idaho border. Her mother was a Coeur d'Alene tribal member, her father of Swiss-Irish stock.

At 13, she moved from the reservation to Spokane, where a neighbor destined to become world famous as “Bing” Crosby joined Bailey and

her brother, Al Rinker, at the family's piano. Al Rinker and Crosby formed the group “The Rhythm Boys.”

By the mid-1920s, all three were singing in California; in 1929, Crosby recommended to famous orchestra leader Paul Whiteman he add Bailey as a regular.

“I was lucky in knowing the great jazz and blues singer Mildred Bailey so early in life,” Crosby wrote in his 1953 autobiography. “I learned a lot from her.”

So has Julia Keefe, a 22-year-old jazz singer from Spokane. Keefe, a member of Idaho's Nez Perce Indian Tribe, discovered Bailey as a student at Spokane's Gonzaga Prep, while researching Crosby's own time at the Catholic high school.

In 2009, Keefe performed a musical tribute featuring Bailey's songs, including “Old Rockin' Chair” and “He's Not Worth Your Tears,” at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C.

A year later, Keefe was touring the Jazz at Lincoln Center Hall of Fame, pondering the greats on its 18-foot video wall when she asked herself, “Where's Mildred?”

Thus began her quiet effort to elevate Bailey's profile in the modern jazz world, a push the Idaho Legislature hopes to assist.

“It's sad to think she died penniless, or nearly penniless, after all the things that she accomplished,” said Rep. Bob Nonini, a sponsor of resolution. “But it's never too late to recognize somebody.”

An important question remains: How important were Bailey's Indian



Jazz singer Mildred Bailey performs at Carnegie Hall in New York in 1947.

roots to her art?

An undated quotation, attributed to her by the U.S. Postal Service in 1994, hints at an answer.

“I don't know whether this

(Indian) music compares with jazz or the classics, but I do know that it offers a young singer a remarkable training and background,” Bailey reportedly said.

flick picks

“Hunger Games”

PG-13, rating not yet available

Jennifer Lawrence
Josh Hutcherson

In a future where teens fight to the death on live television, Katniss Everdeen must rely on her instincts and a washed up mentor to survive.

Gateway: Thurs. midnight

“Pariah”

R, rating not available

Adepero Oduye
Kim Wayans

A teenage lesbian struggles with conflicting identities and risks friendship, heartbreak and family in a desperate search for sexual expression.

Mirage: Daily 6:30 (1 Sat.-Sun.)

“21 Jump Street”

R ★★ 1/2

Jonah Hill
Channing Tatum

A mismatched pair of cops go undercover at a high school to bust a drug ring.

Gateway: Daily 12:30, 2:45, 5, 7:20 (9:40 Fri.-Sat.)

Gateway VIP: Daily 4:30, 7 (9:20 Fri.-Sat.)

“A Thousand Words”

PG-13 ★

Eddie Murphy
Cliff Curtis

A man's life is bound to a magical tree that sheds a leaf for every word he speaks.

Gateway: Daily 1, 3, 5, 7 (9 Fri.-Sat.)

“Dangerous Method”

R ★★

Kiera Knightley
Michael Fassbender

Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud develop the field of psychoanalysis through a beautiful but manic patient.

Gateway: Fri.-Wed. 3, 7:15 (9:15 Fri.-Sat.); Thurs. 3

“John Carter”

PG-13 ★★

Taylor Kitsch
Lynn Collins

A Civil War veteran is transplanted to Mars in the midst of a civil war between alien races.

Liberty: Fri., Mon.-Thurs. 4:30, 7:05 (9:40 Fri.); Sat.-Sun. 1:55, 4:30, 7:05 (9:40 Sat.)

Liberty in 3D: Fri., Mon.-Thurs. 6:30 (9:15 Fri.); Sat.-Sun. 1, 3:45, 6:30 (9:15 Sat.)

Mirage: Fri. 6:30, 9:30; Sat. 3:30, 6:30, 9:30; Sun. 4, 7; Mon.-Thurs. 7

“Dr. Suess' The Lorax”

PG ★★ 1/2

Zac Efron
Taylor Swift

A boy sets off in search of a Trufula tree and discovers the story of the Lorax, a grumpy creature bent on protecting his world from over-consumption.

Gateway: Daily 12:40, 2:40, 4:40, 6:40 (8:40 Fri.-Sat.)

Gateway in 3D: Daily 1:10, 3:10, 5:10, 7:10

Omak: Fri. 6:30, 9; Sat. 4, 6:30, 9; Sun. 4:30, 7; Mon.-Thurs. 7

Junction: Fri. 3, 6, 9; Sat. 12, 3, 6, 9; Sun. 12, 3, 6; Mon.-Thurs. 4, 7

“The Vow”

PG-13 ★★ 1/2

Rachel McAdams
Channing Tatum

A husband tries to win his wife's heart after she suffers severe memory loss in a car accident.

Gateway: Daily 12:45, 3, 5:15, 7:25 (9:35 Fri.-Sat.)

Ruby: Fri.-Mon. 7

“Project X”

R ★★

Thomas Mann
Oliver Cooper

Three high school seniors throw an epic party to improve their social status, but the situation spirals out of control.

Liberty: Fri., Mon.-Thurs. 5:30, 7:35 (9:40 Fri.); Sat.-Sun. 1:20, 3:25, 5:30, 7:35 (9:40 Sat.)

Mirage: Daily 8:45 (4 Sat.-Sun.)

“Gone”

PG-13 ★ 1/2

Amanda Seyfried
Daniel Sunjata

When her sister disappears, a woman is convinced that a serial killer who kidnapped her two years ago has returned.

Liberty: Fri., Mon.-Thurs. 5:15 (9:35 Fri.); Sat.-Sun. 3:15, 5:15 (9:35 Sat.)

“Act of Valor”

R ★★ 1/2

Alex Veadov
Roselyn Sanchez

Inspired by true events, an elite team of Navy SEALs recovers a kidnapped CIA agent and discovers a terrorist plot against the U.S.

Gateway: Daily 2:30, 4:45, 7:05 (9:25 Fri.-Sat.)

Gateway VIP: Daily 6:40

Mirage: Fri. 6:30, 9:15; Sat.-Sun. 3:30, 6:30 (9:15 Sat.); Mon.-Thurs. 6:30

“Ghost Rider 2: Spirit of Vengeance”

PG-13 ★★ 1/2

Nicholas Cage
Violante Placido

When the devil tries to take human form in a young boy, it's up to cursed motorcycle rider Johnny Blaze to stop him.

Gateway in 3D: Daily 12:45, 4:55 (9 Fri.-Sat.)

“Safe House”

R ★★

Denzel Washington
Ryan Reynolds

A rookie must look after a fugitive CIA renegade in a safe house, which is attacked.

Liberty: Fri., Mon.-Thurs. 4:30, 7 (9:25 Fri.); Sat.-Sun. 2, 4:30, 7 (9:25 Sat.)

“Wanderlust”

R ★

Jennifer Aniston
Paul Rudd

An unemployed couple from Manhattan tries living in a rural commune.

Gateway: Daily 1:15, 5:15, (9:20 Fri.-Sat.)

“The Artist”

PG-13 ★★

Jean Dujardin
Bérénice Bejo

A silent movie star faces new film technology and sparks with a young dancer on the rise to fame.

Gateway: Daily 12:30, 3:15, 7:15

Gateway VIP: Daily 4:35

“Chronicle”

PG-13 ★★

Michael B. Jordan
Dane DeHaan

Three teens acquire supernatural powers and begin to lose control.

Liberty: Fri., Mon.-Thurs. 5:30, 7:30 (9:30 Fri.); Sat.-Sun. 1:30, 3:30, 5:30, 7:30 (9:30 Sat.)

“The Woman in Black”

PG-13 ★★

Daniel Radcliffe
Janet McTeer

A widowed young lawyer discovers the vengeful ghost of a scorned woman inside an old, creepy house.

Liberty: Fri., Mon.-Thurs. 7:20 (9:25 Fri.); Sat.-Sun. 3:15, 7:20 (9:25 Sat.)

“The Grey”

R ★★

Liam Neeson
Dermot Mulroney

A survival story about a group of oil rig workers whose plane crashes in the remote Alaskan wilderness.

Liberty: Fri., Mon.-Thurs. 7:15; Sat.-Sun. 12:55, 7:15

“This Means War”

PG-13 ★★

Reese Witherspoon
Chris Pine

Two spies wage war against each other over a woman.

Gateway: Daily 1:30, 3:30, 5:30, 7:30 (9:30 Fri.-Sat.)

Gateway VIP: Fri.-Sat. 9

“Journey 2: The Mysterious Island”

PG ★★

Dwayne Johnson
Michael Caine

A sequel to “Journey to the Center of the Earth,” a family embarks on an search for their grandfather.

Gateway: Daily 1, 5

Gateway in 3D: Daily 2:45, 6:55 (9 Fri.-Sat.)

“Iron Lady”

PG-13 ★★ 1/2

Meryl Streep
Jim Broadbent

A portrait of Margaret Thatcher, the United Kingdom's only female prime minister.

Liberty: Fri., Mon.-Thurs. 5:15; Sat.-Sun. 1:10, 5:15

Theater contacts:

Gateway, Liberty cinemas: 662-4567

Junction Cinema: 548-6684

Ruby Theatre: 682-5016

Omak, Mirage theaters: 826-0860

to escape.
Liberty: Fri., Mon.-Thurs. 5, 7 (9 Fri.); Sat.-Sun. 1, 3, 5, 7 (9 Sat.)



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