

Katharine Hepburn, Aunt, Holds Court

By VINCENT CANBY

When Katharine Houghton, a pretty, 22-year-old actress, referred to the handsome woman sitting next to her as simply "my aunt," yesterday afternoon, it seemed somehow inadequate.

Miss Houghton's aunt is Katharine Hepburn, who has been one of the most articulate and, in some ways, formidable stars of American theater and motion pictures for more than 30 years.

Miss Hepburn, aunt, star and conversationalist, yesterday held her first general press conference in New York in years to introduce her niece, who makes her screen debut as Miss Hepburn's daughter in the new film, "Guess Who's Coming for Dinner."

The film, a social comedy in which Miss Hepburn co-stars with the late Spencer Tracy and with Sidney Poitier, opens here Dec. 11.

Acknowledging that in the past she has more often avoided the press than pursued it, Miss Hepburn said brightly: "I'm getting nicer in my old age. Most people become grumpy."

Interviewed at 21

The star, who will be 58 on Nov. 8, sat on a couch on the second floor of the 21 restaurant, alternating her decisive opinions ("I've always been absolutely sure of what's right and what's wrong") with radiant smiles (when a woman mentioned she had seen "The Lake," a notable Hepburn disaster).

She wore tan slacks, a black turtle neck sweater and what looked to be a black Confederate campaign hat on the back of her still-auburn hair. Miss

Houghton, who bears a remarkable resemblance to her aunt, including the fine cheekbones, was in modified Hepburn gear—a black turtle neck sweater, but with a red tweed skirt and no campaign hat.

Spurred by the questions, Miss Hepburn delivered hearty little discourses on a number of topics, including the debilitating effects of unnecessary pain killers. She had just—apparently with enthusiasm—had a tooth filled without benefit of Novocain: "A little pain builds your character, damn it! Discipline has gone out of style."

Of critics: "I've been roasted and ridiculed, but I know that I'm fun to ridicule and I don't mind. I know that I'll come back in a couple of years."

A Fan of Spencer Tracy

Of acting: "I think Spencer and Laurette Taylor were the best actors I've ever seen. They both were Irish and both had problems in their lives, but they were so direct. They had concentration."

When she spoke of Mr. Tracy, who died last June and who was both her close friend and co-star since 1942, her remarks were especially poignant.

As an actor, she said, he was as simple and unadorned "as a baked potato." In contrast, she described Katharine Hepburn the actress as "a desert, with lots of whipped cream." He had no mannerisms, she said, adding: "He never got in his own way. I still do."

She listened to a question and then answered carefully and with some feeling: "I think Spencer always thought

that acting was a rather silly way for a man to make a living. He felt he should have been a doctor, or something. We both came from backgrounds totally removed from acting. But he was of such an emotional balance, you know, that he had to be an artist."

"Of course, he never realized this," she said, and paused to laugh. "He was a baked potato."

Through it all, Miss Houghton, a Sarah Lawrence graduate with one Broadway flop ("A Very Rich Woman") behind her, listened and learned. She told briefly how she had got her first film job. (It was through no pressure on her part, Miss Hepburn insisted.)

"I read William Rose's script and liked his handling of the [miscegenation] situation. It was sound and amusing and it sped right along."

At which point Aunt Kate, who listens to no nonsense, interjected briskly: "And it was a damned good part!"

Fete to Aid Musicians

A program of entertainment and dancing will be staged Monday at Roseland Dance City, 239 West 52d Street, to raise funds for the Musicians' Emergency Fund of Local 802, American Federation of Musicians. Admission will be \$3. Meyer Davis and Ray Bloch will provide the music and William B. Williams will be master of ceremonies. In the entertainment portion will be Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald, the Israeli Singers, Fernando Pasqualone, the Louise Parks Dancers, the Hollidays and Sasha Tormas.