Hunter, Alberta


She went to Chicago at the age of 11 and there began to sing professionally. In the early 1920s she moved to New York City, where she proved to be a popular club and theatre performer. She recorded regularly throughout the decade, sometimes under the name of Josephine Beatty, her half sister. Her accompanists included Fats Waller, Eubie Blake, Louis Armstrong, Sidney Bechet, and, most frequently, Fletcher Henderson. She began writing songs at this time, and Bessie Smith's 1923 recording of Hunter's "Downhearted Blues" remains a popular classic.

Hunter costarred with Paul Robeson in the London production of Show Boat in 1928-29, and she continued to work frequently in Europe during the 1930s. She toured extensively for the USO during World War II and the Korean War. Then in 1954, after the death of her mother, Hunter, for all practical purposes, gave up her musical career to become a nurse. When she was forced in 1977 to retire from nursing because of her age, she resumed a full-time singing career.