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CHITA RIVERA

An accomplished and versatile actress/singer/dancer, Chita Rivera has won two Tony Awards as Best Leading Actress in a Musical and received seven additional Tony nominations. She recently starred in the Broadway and touring productions of *The Dancer's Life*, a dazzling new musical celebrating her spectacular career, written by Terence McNally and directed by Graciela Daniele. Chita was awarded The Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Barack Obama on August 12, 2009. She received the coveted Kennedy Center Honor in Washington, DC in December, 2002, and is the first Hispanic ever chosen to receive this award.

This past Spring, Chita recreated her starring role in *The Visit*, the new Kander/Ebb/McNally musical at the Signature Theatre in Arlington, VA, which originally premiered at the Goodman Theatre, Chicago in 2001. Her more recent stage appearances include starring roles in the revival of the musical *Nine* with Antonio Banderas on Broadway; *The House of Bernarda Alba* at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles; *Venecia*, a new Argentinean play directed by Arthur Laurents at the George Street Playhouse; Reno Sweeney in *Anything Goes* at Paper Mill Playhouse. She also starred in the London, Las Vegas and Toronto productions of *Chicago-The Musical*.

For her starring role in *Kiss of the Spider Woman* on Broadway, Chita received the 1993 Tony Award as Best Leading Actress in a Musical, as well as the Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Achievement as an Actress in a Musical, the Outer Critics Circle Award as Outstanding Actress in a Musical, the Drama League Award for Distinguished Achievement in Musical Theatre and The Astaire Award honoring outstanding achievement in Broadway Dance. Chita first played the role of the Spider Woman in the Toronto production of the show in 1992, receiving unanimous acclaim. She then repeated her triumph in the fall of 1992 in the London production of *Spider Woman*, which won The Evening Standard Award as Best Musical of the Year. This was followed by the Broadway and touring productions.

Chita's performing aspirations began with ballet training at the age of 11 in her native Washington, DC. Five years later, Chita moved to New York, where she auditioned for legendary choreographer George Balanchine. Balanchine of course recognized Chita's talent and gave her a scholarship to the American School of Ballet, where she began taking classes at the same time as the dancers Edward Villella, Melissa Hayden, Allegra Kent and Maria Tallchief.

As an aspiring 17 year-old ballerina, Chita decided to accompany a friend to an audition for the chorus of *Call Me Madam*. Although she had no serious intention of pursuing a part in the show, Chita was cast as a principal dancer, and choreographed by Jerome Robbins. The ballet world's loss was Broadway's gain -- a future legend's theater career was born.

After completing a cross-country tour of *Call Me Madam*, Chita returned to New York to replace Onna White as a principal dancer in *Guys and Dolls*. Following *Guys and Dolls*, Chita joined the cast of the original Broadway company of *Can-Can*, in which her future co-star, Gwen Verdon, first achieved stardom.

Chita then went Off-Broadway to prove that she could do more than dance, doing so to great acclaim with her amazing performance in Ben Bagley's *Shoestring Revue*, in which she did the very first Marilyn Monroe impersonation. Her co-stars in *The Shoestring Revue* included Beatrice Arthur and Arte Johnson.

Chita then returned to Broadway as a featured performer in *Seventh Heaven*, choreographed by Peter Gennaro; and *Mr. Wonderful*, starring Sammy Davis, Jr.

But it was not until September 26, 1957 that Chita made the transition from accomplished Broadway performer to a toast of the town Broadway star with her electric performance as Anita in the Broadway premiere of *West Side Story*. Chita then took some time off for the birth of her daughter, Lisa. Chita had met and married Lisa's father, dancer Tony Mordente, during the run of *West Side Story*.

Chita then went on to star in the London production of *West Side Story*, which had been postponed until Chita was ready to perform after Lisa's birth. Chita's New York success was repeated in London, and she stayed with the show there for a year. She then returned to Broadway to star as Rosie with Dick Van Dyke in the new musical, *Bye Bye Birdie*, in which she led the show-stopping number "Shriner's Ballet." Her rousing performance earned a Tony nomination as Best Actress. Chita then reprised her role in the London production of *Bye Bye Birdie* at Her Majesty's Theatre, where she first achieved London stardom in *West Side Story*.

Back in the US, her triumphant performance as Jenny in the national tour of *The Threepenny Opera*, was soon followed by the title role in the national tour of Bob Fosse's *Sweet Charity*. Chita was also cast in the film version of *Sweet Charity*, in which she played Nicky opposite Shirley MacLaine. During the filming of *Sweet Charity*, Chita fell in love with Los Angeles and decided to make it her home for the next seven years.

But touring theatre successes often took her from home. She played Billie Dawn in *Born Yesterday* and Serafina in *The Rose Tattoo*; she toured opposite John

Raitt in *Zorba*; and she extended her range in such productions as *Kiss Me Kate*, opposite Hal Linden, *Jacques Brel....*, and Oliver Hailey's *Father's Day*. All of these productions and other projects had kept Chita away from Broadway for eight years, far too long according to her friends and colleagues Fred Ebb, John Kander, and Bob Fosse. So they lured Chita back to New York to star as Velma Kelly, opposite Gwen Verdon, in their new musical, *Chicago*.

But as soon as she arrived in New York, Chita discovered that *Chicago's* rehearsals had been postponed because director/choreographer Fosse was ill. It was then that Fred Ebb, who had written a highly-successful nightclub act for Chita in the 60's, went to work on another for her until Fosse recovered. She opened to rave reviews and capacity crowds.

Chicago opened to glorious reviews and Chita and Gwen Verdon were the toast of Broadway (1975). Both received Tony nominations as Best Actress. During the run of *Chicago*, Chita co-starred with Liza Minnelli for the first time, when Ms. Minnelli subbed for five weeks for an ailing Gwen Verdon.

Chita's fourth and fifth Tony nominations as Best Actress came in the early 80's with her performances opposite Donald O'Connor in *Bring Back Birdie* and then as the Evil Queen in *Merlin*, opposite Doug Henning. But it was not until 1984, when she re-united with Liza Minnelli in John Kander and Fred Ebb's new musical, *The Rink*, that Chita finally won her Tony as Best Actress, along with the Drama Desk Award. Chita returned to Broadway again shortly after *The Rink* in *Jerry's Girls*, co-starring with Leslie Uggams and Dorothy Loudon. In 1988, Chita toured the country (and Japan) in *Can-Can*, co-starring the Radio City Musical Hall Rockettes. In 2003 she received her sixth Tony nomination for *Nine*.

Chita's critically-acclaimed concert dates continued to play to ovations from packed houses around the world in such cities as New York, London, Monte Carlo, Los Angeles, Tokyo, Toronto, Amsterdam, San Francisco, Cannes, Chicago and San Juan among many others.

Chita has been seen regularly on television, beginning with early appearances on every major show emanating from New York including Dinah Shore, Garry Moore, Judy Garland, Carol Burnett and Ed Sullivan. Other television credits include *Will & Grace*, *Pippin* (Showtime), *Kennedy Center Tonight*, *Broadway Plays Washington*, her own *Chita Plus Three* (HBO), The New Dick Van Dyke Show and *Live From Wolftap*. Chita is also particularly proud of her participation in the National Theater of the Deaf's presentation of *The Road to Cordoba*.

Chita, who now lives in Westchester County, New York, names her daughter, singer/dancer/choreographer, Lisa Mordente, as her most treasured production.