



Rita Moreno on the set of 'West Side Story,' as shown in the documentary 'Rita Moreno: Just a Girl Who Decided to Go For It' (Courtesy of MGM Media Licensing)

Films Bring Laughter, Tears, Impact

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but also necessary; people put so little effort into understanding and supporting what they don't know how to categorize. While much about Matt's circumstances is nevertheless enviable, it's not hard to understand why Anna would find herself happy to spend time with him despite their many differences. And Anna—well, Patti Harrison steals this movie, capturing more complexity in a look or in the tone of a brief comment than most rom-com protagonists manage to convey in clunky exposition. Anna is somehow herself without having quite figured out all of what that means; though she means to be diffident, she also is curious, and Matt's earnestness (along with the realities of carrying a life) seem to open her too, even despite herself.

The boundaries get messy and, truthfully, all relationships are hard, and those that don't fit into conventional boxes are particularly so. But in the end, this film is about all kinds of true things—what it means to be a parent, what it means to be generous, what it means to be intimate, what it means to be human, what it means to be together. (Streaming on several platforms.)

I approached "Rita Moreno: Just a Girl Who Decided to Go For It" with some wariness—not because I don't admire the Latina icon of stage and screen (I very much do) but because I braced against the way icons from marginalized communities are used to feed a narrative about the "American dream"—that anyone from even the most humble beginnings can make it here if they just "decide to go for it." Sure enough, within the first few minutes of the film, President Obama and television writer and producer Norman Lear herald Moreno as the embodiment of the "American dream."

Although the film never directly confronts those statements, it tells Moreno's story in a way that puts the lie to them. Yes, Moreno came to U.S. with her seamstress mother from Puerto Rico at age five and, by age six, she was dancing in Greenwich Village nightclubs and signed a contract with MGM while she was still a teenager. At age 20, she appeared in "Singin' in the Rain," and she won an Oscar for "Westside Story" when she was 30.

But a large chunk of Moreno's career involved roles that she felt ashamed of while she was playing them; she was required to use make-up to darken her skin and

enlisted to play a string of stereotypical ethnic "others"—island girls, concubines, sex objects—and expected to employ indistinct ethnic accents. The type-casting continued even after her Oscar win and since, by then, she had decided to refuse such roles, she didn't work in film for several years. She was raped by her agent and regularly experienced sexual abuse throughout her early career. And an extended and tempestuous relationship with Marlon Brando culminated in a botched abortion and a suicide attempt. The American dream is regularly a nightmare, even for its most successful dreamers—and for every person who decides to go for it and "succeeds," how many talented dreamers don't manage to survive such obstacles? And what kind of success was denied to even someone as successful and talented and determined as Rita Moreno?

Those questions get fair (if sometimes indirect) attention from this film, ably directed by Mariem Pérez Rivera, in large part benefitting from Moreno's own quite remarkable self-awareness and commitment to honesty. We are fortunate that someone with

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Hollywood Theatre Reopens

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and members keeping us afloat throughout this past year-and-a-half," said Hollywood Theatre Executive Director Doug Whyte.

"We were able to find some creative ways to continue bringing films to our community, but we know everyone's been waiting

to get back inside the theatre. We are beyond excited to have finally reached this point," he said.

Summer of Soul, part music film, part historical record—centers around the Harlem Cultural Festival, an epic event that celebrated Black history, culture, and fashion over the course of six weeks in the summer of 1969, just one hundred miles south of Woodstock.

The footage from this festival was never seen and largely forgotten—until now. Featuring never-before-seen concert performances by Stevie Wonder, Nina Simone, Sly & the Family Stone, Gladys Knight & the Pips, Mahalia Jackson, B.B. King, The 5th Dimension and more!

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