

Films Bring Laughter, Tears, Impact

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 such a juicy life story (Moreno is now almost 90) has also clearly done the personal work to reflect on her life with clarity that affords her the somewhat rare capacity to hold the “both-and” of her experiences. She speaks frankly of the abuses she has withstood in Hollywood, of the self-hate that impacted her relationship with the “lust of her life,” Marlon Brando, of his

good advice that she needed therapy (advice he might well have self-applied), and of a long and apparently loving and successful marriage that also made her feel trapped. She expresses both gratitude for the meatiness of the role that won her an Oscar, and also reflects on the complexity of playing a character whose embrace of “America” famously involves rejection of her native Puerto Rico.

(Terry Gross’s recent interview of Moreno on “Fresh Air” offers an interesting supplement to the film, especially as to Moreno’s role in “West Side Story.”)

The result is a remarkably helpful examination of what is better termed the American nightmare—redeemed in rare cases by those who are especially resilient and who also choose not to forget (against lots of pressure) that there are plenty in their communities who work just as hard, decide to go for it, and don’t succeed. Moreno’s peculiar combination of buoyancy, resilience, and honesty allow this film to tell a truer story than we normally get to see, and also affirmed much of the experience of this Latina and likely many others. It’s currently enjoying a theatrical run.

Darleen Ortega is a judge on the Oregon Court of Appeals and the first woman of color to serve in that capacity. Her movie and theater review column Opinionated Judge appears regularly in The Portland Observer. Find her review blog at opinionated-judge.blogspot.com.

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