

# Chita Rivera

She's been nominated for eight Tony awards (winning twice) and in 2002 received the Kennedy Center's lifetime achievement honor. She'll live forever in theater history for her roles in the original *West Side Story* and *Chicago*. So it's no surprise that on January 23, Rivera spent her 73rd birthday right where she belongs: on Broadway, in *Chita Rivera: The Dancer's Life*, with its book by Terrence McNally. Rivera scoffs at the idea of Broadway musicals—and thus her career—without the input of gay people. "Oh, please," she says with a laugh. "It's insane to imagine the world without them."

—Michael Giltz



In your show you talk about choreographers like Jack Cole, who did such shows as *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* and films such as *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. You were good friends with Cole and his partner.

That's why I'm so happy to speak about him. Jack Cole was one of the most fascinating people you could meet in the entire world. Nobody made Marilyn Monroe or Jane Russell or Gwen Verdon

more female than he did. This man was male and female—he was everything. I really think to be a full person, everyone should be. You've got to be it all.

You certainly cut a strong figure in your cameo for the movie *Chicago*. I thought I looked like Cher in drag! If there is such a thing. God, was that fun. [Director] Rob Marshall is one of my best friends. When he took me around the set, I was ready to just

jump in there. I was ready to tell Catherine Zeta-Jones she had an appointment. In Egypt.

You worked with Jerome Robbins—a stern taskmaster, even for a choreographer.

He was hard; he was difficult. A lot of people hated him. Everybody tried desperately for me to say something shitty about him, excuse the expression. [Laughs] But I won't. Anybody that ever worked for him, he

made them better. And that's what you're there for. To get better.

And it doesn't get better than Kander and Ebb, who you collaborated with on *Chicago*, *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, and *The Rink*. They were my honeys, my sweethearts. At this age in his life, John [Kander] is just gorgeous. You can see that spirit in him coming through his eyes.

Any chance of *The Visit*—their last collaboration to make

it to the stage before Fred Ebb died—still making it to Broadway?

Well, that's what we hope we'll get to do. [In *The Dancer's Life*] I did one of the songs, "Love and Love Alone." It's a wrencher—it's so smart, it's so passionate, it's so simple. [She starts to recite the lyrics] "When you're young / Feeling oh so strong / What can prove you wrong? / Love and love alone / When the sun / Seems forever bright / What can dim its light? /

Love and love alone. / So beware young love / Lost in a kiss / There's a truth, young love / Simple as this / Every fond hello ends in goodbye / What we're certain will live / Will die." It's gorgeous. Gorgeous! And Freddie used to say he hated writing ballads. And I used to slap him. [Laughs]

As well you should. As well I should! And I'm the only one who could. I miss my Freddie desperately. He's my brother. ■