

CHITA RIVERA

THE DANCER'S LIFE

Written by Terrence McNally

Director-Choreographer Craciela Daniele

For tickets call 757-671-8100 or Scope Box Office

Hello, I'm Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large. Alas, Broadway never came to Chrysler Hall this season. The journey was botched up, to put it nicely, by Bacci, Inc. Their dastardly betrayal has left a big void in our theatrical life. However, the arid spell is over. Chita is in town, the ever wonderful, time-defying legend, Chita Rivera.

Her show is a mini-season unto itself. It's Broadway in a nut-shell. She takes us through her life of dance in landmark Broadway productions before there were mandatory helicopters and falling chandeliers. The emphasis was on the dancers. And, if you have dancers, you have choreographers. During her life on the stage, Broadway has had some mighty fine creators of dance. Ms. Rivera pays tribute to them and to the myriad dancers who have executed their work with dazzling skill and dedication.

Chita Rivera has been called the Goddess of Broadway. As do most careers, hers began modestly. Now she is "the ultimate gypsy made good" as someone has called her. In this stroll through her life we have glimpses of how it all happened.

Director-Choreographer Graciela Danielle uses shadow dancing most effectively in various parts of the show. In fact, The Goddess is first revealed to us in silhouette and we recognize her instantly. When she appears, she begins to tell her story with song and dance and direct narration. She has terrific backup dancer/singers to help and they more than fulfill their obligations.

She first tells us about receiving the Kennedy Center Medal of Honor. Then, there is a sort of flash back to her fifty years in show business. Her first shows were off-Broadway with people like Bea Arthur and Elaine Stritch. Dancers are called gypsies because they keep going from show to show year after year until they can't do it any more. That's the way Chita did it. She first appeared in a show called SEVENTH HEAVEN. Then she auditioned for the road show of CALL ME MADAM and got the part. That was followed by CAN-CAN where she met the great Gwen Verdon. Next came the role that changed her life: Anita in WEST SIDE STORY with choreography by Jerome Robbins and Peter Genaro. She became a star and the rest is high kicking history that includes her one-of-a-kind performance of Velma in Bob Fosse's CHICAGO marked by two Tony Awards and numerous other accolades.

.Ms. Rivera says at one point that "looking back doesn't have to be painful." She's had her share of flops, both professionally and personally, with shows that didn't make it and a failed marriage. She is now 74 years old. She's different and yet the same. She still kicks her legs to the sky like a teenager but leaves splits to the younger folk. Her voice is deeper but mellow and warm.

There is something about Mr. McNally's structure and dialogue that too often doesn't ring true to the person we think of as Chita Rivera. He fails to capture the no nonsense straight forward unpretentious gypsy that is at the heart of this great artist. But, she shines through even so. Her extraordinary talents are indestructible. Time cannot wither but only modify the enduring, astounding and most of all loveable Chita Rivera. If you don't believe me, please go see for yourself. You don't want to miss her.

This show ends its tour Sunday. What's Chita going to do? Why begin a new show, of course. It's a musical adaptation of Friedrich Durrenmatt's THE VISIT by her old chums Kander and Web. A new show. That's what successful gypsies do.

This is Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large and I'll see you at the next opening.