Chita Rivera

Ballet

“Well, my influences were, first of all, my mother and father, and then I was always interested in the ballet. So, there were many wonderful ballet dancers, ballerinas, that I loved--Maria Tallchief, Mr. Balanchine, and all of his work. There were many. But my house was always a musical house. There was always wonderful music being played. My father was a musician and my mother was a graceful, elegant woman who loved music, culture, and dance. So, I was actually a tomboy when I was a kid. Rather than playing in the trees, my mother put me in ballet school. In other words, I used to climb trees and walk on fences, race--do all of that stuff--run bicycles and skates. My mother sort of focused my energy and attention on ballet . . . That was at a very young age when I was seven or eight years old, and from there on, I became interested. The more I got exposed, the more I was interested in working very hard to be as good as I could possibly be.”

Challenges

“I don’t approach anything thinking it’s a challenge. I mean challenge, yes, but not anything that is negative. Challenges, to me, really keep you alive and really keep you right in the forefront of things. So, it is a challenge, but it’s worthwhile because there is tremendous growth that comes from climbing that mountain.”

Path Finding

“Never think that there isn’t anything you can’t do. You can do anything and be very proud of who you are, where you come from, your family, your culture . . . , that you have much to offer. Just stay in your own lane and never let anybody tell you [that you] can’t do something.”