

Media Contact: Brandon McKinley
Public Relations and Partnerships Specialist
University of Florida College of the Arts
Office: 352.273.1489
bmckinley@arts.ufl.edu

For Immediate Release: April 9, 2018

University of Florida to award honorary degree to legendary Broadway icon Chita Rivera at spring commencement ceremony, Friday, May 4, 2018

Gainesville, Fla.— One of the American theatre’s iconic stars will add a University of Florida honorary degree to her record of achievements that include Tony Awards, the Kennedy Center Honor and the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

An accomplished and versatile actress, singer and dancer, Chita Rivera has won two Tony Awards as Best Leading Actress in a Musical and received eight additional Tony nominations, totaling an exceptional 10 Tony nominations. Her electric performance as Anita in the original Broadway premiere of *West Side Story* brought her stardom. Her illustrious career includes more than 50 stage, film and television productions.

The University of Florida will be presenting an honorary degree to Rivera on Friday, May 4, 2018 at the spring commencement ceremony. This award represents recognition of eminent achievement in scholarship or high distinction in public service, which exemplifies the purposes and ideals of the university. Honorary degrees are awarded for sustained achievements of lasting significance and value, not for a single accomplishment.

“Chita Rivera’s accomplished career and exceptional talent have left a legacy in the Broadway world,” said Joseph Glover, UF provost and senior vice president for academic affairs. “We are grateful for the connections she has made with our musical theatre program and are delighted to grant her an honorary degree from the University of Florida.”

Rivera first came to UF in 2004 to receive the Linda Wilson Lifetime Achievement Award for Excellence in Theatre. Professor Tony Mata, head of the musical theatre department, created this award with Linda and George Wilson to honor preeminent artists, and he chose Rivera to be the second recipient.

“Chita Rivera is honestly one of the few remaining legendary Broadway stars of all time,” Mata said. “There are few stars that are unlike anybody else, and she’s one of them. You can’t get any better than Chita.”

As a Latino performer himself, Mata has admired Rivera most of his life for her ability to achieve success in a musical theatre industry that was not very diverse at the time. During her visit to UF, she gave a masterclass to the UF School of Theatre + Dance students and saw their

production of *Anything Goes*. Rivera also appeared in Mata's documentary about Latino theatre, which was screened at the Tribeca Cinemas in 2014.

Rivera trained as a ballerina (from age 11) before receiving a scholarship to the School of American Ballet from the legendary choreographer George Balanchine. Rivera's first appearance (age 17) was as a principal dancer in *Call Me Madam*.

Her career is highlighted by starring in the original Broadway productions of *Bye Bye Birdie*, *The Rink* (Tony Award), *Chicago*, *Jerry's Girls*, *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (Tony Award), *The Dancer's Life*, *Nine*, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, *The Visit* and the original Broadway casts of *Guys and Dolls*, *Can-Can*, *Seventh Heaven* and *Mr. Wonderful*. On tour: *Born Yesterday*, *The Rose Tattoo*, *Call Me Madam*, *Threepenny Opera*, *Sweet Charity*, *Kiss Me Kate*, *Zorba*, *Can-Can* with The Rockettes.

Rivera was awarded The Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Barack Obama in 2009 and received the coveted Kennedy Center Honor in 2002. In November 2016, she headlined at Carnegie Hall, and in 2015, Great Performances aired their special *Chita Rivera: A Lot of Livin' To Do*, a retrospective of her extraordinary life and career, nationally on PBS. She currently tours the world with her solo concert.

About the School of Theatre + Dance

The School of Theatre + Dance is one of the University of Florida College of the Arts' institutionally-accredited schools. Undergraduate students can pursue a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in acting, dance, musical theatre, theatre production—including costume design, lighting design and scenic design—or a Bachelor of Arts degree in dance studies or general theatre. Minors are also offered in dance and theatre as well as certificates in arts in medicine and dance in healthcare. Student organizations showcase programs and other intensives provide students with invaluable professional experiences. UF is home to three School of Theatre + Dance performance venues, including the Constans Theatre, Black Box Theatre and G-6 Studio. To learn more about the School of Theatre + Dance, including upcoming performance dates and ticket information, visit www.arts.ufl.edu/theatreanddance.

About the College of the Arts

The College of the Arts, previously known as the College of Fine Arts, is one the 16 colleges and more than 150 research centers and institutes at the University of Florida in Gainesville, Florida. The College of the Arts offers baccalaureate, master's and Ph.D. degree programs in its three fully-accredited schools — the School of Art and Art History, School of Music and School of Theatre and Dance. The college is home to the Center for Arts in Medicine, Center for World Arts, Digital Worlds Institute, University Galleries and the New World School of the Arts in Miami. More than 100 faculty members and more than 1,220 students work together daily to engage, inspire and create. The college hosts more than 300 performances, exhibitions and events each year. Faculty and students also exhibit and perform at other local, national and international venues. To learn more, visit www.arts.ufl.edu.

###