Bio information for Rita Moreno
(Edited version of info found in Biography Resource Center)

Rita Moreno is one of three female entertainers (and the first Hispanic entertainer) to have won all four of the most prestigious show business awards: the Oscar, the Tony, two Emmy awards, and a Grammy. She has also received dozens of other show business awards, most notably, the Golden Globe Award and the Joseph Jefferson Award. She received a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in 1995. She has continued to act through the 2000s.

The Early Years

At age 13, she had her Broadway debut and dropped out of school a year later to concentrate on her show business career. Then, in true Hollywood tradition, a talent scout arranged a meeting for Moreno with Louis B. Mayer, and she signed a contract with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) at the age of 17. Moreno, now using the surname of her stepfather Edward Moreno, shortened her nickname Rosita to "Rita" at the request of MGM.

Career Hindered by Stereotypes

After joining MGM, Moreno's career advanced steadily. In little more than ten years, she had reinvented herself into a Hollywood starlet. The range of her talents, however, were ignored, and she found herself incessantly cast as a fiery Latin sex kitten or an Indian maiden in a succession of stereotypical, ethnic roles in such films as The Fabulous Senorita, Latin Lovers, and The Yellow Tomahawk. "There was no such animal as a Spanish-American actress," Moreno told the Worcester Telegram & Gazette. "What happened was, in those days they did a lot of westerns and there was always a part for a senorita, singing and dancing my little bum off and, tock-eeng lahk deez. When that period was over, there was nothing left but gang movies." Still, when her contract with MGM was canceled early, Moreno was devastated.

After MGM she signed on with Twentieth Century Fox. The roles she played were no different--she was typecast as the dumb, sexy characters moviemakers thought she was suited for.

Recognized as a Major Talent… Finally

Moreno spent the next few years working in stage productions, including Arthur Miller's A View from the Bridge. After a nearly 10 year relationship with Marlon Brando ended, she took an overdose of sleeping pills. The suicide attempt was a turning point in her life, reminding her that "life is really very precious." Later that year, she appeared in the movie version of West Side Story. It was only after she won an Academy Award--the first for a Hispanic actress--for her outstanding performance as strong-willed and independent Anita that she was finally recognized as a major talent.

What is the connection between this article and the story of the Monkey King?