

## SPOTLIGHT ON

## Swellegance Gala

by Clint Hamblin

The doors of the American Ballroom at the Westin Copley Place Boston swing open revealing some rather spectacularly dressed people sipping champagne while deciding which of the many silent auction items they would bid on. It's the Boston Youth Moves Swellegance 2009 Gala Fundraiser and everyone is waiting for the arrival of the 2009 honorees, film star Richard Gere and the film, television and stage legend, Mitzi Gaynor.

Lights! Camera! Action! As if Gaynor and Gere weren't enough, in walks the striking Broadway legend Chita Rivera, the Honorary Event Chair for the event. Rivera's Broadway credits are astounding, including the original Anita in the Broadway production of *West Side Story*, *Bye Bye Birdie*, *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, *Chicago* and *The Dancer's Life*, just to name a few. For the Broadway enthusiast, this is "the" place to be.

Gaynor arrives looking as glamorous and sexy as ever dressed in a short black cocktail dress and wearing three-inch heels. At 79 years old, the still very blonde Gaynor is stunning, charismatic and full of life.

Gere barely got past the front door before gushing fans surrounded him taking pictures and asking for autographs. WCVB-TV (Channel 5) personality and event host, J.C. Monahan couldn't help but mention, "Richard Gere, the sexiest man alive, is with us tonight." Cue the swooning!

A short film retrospective of Gere's work included clips from *An Officer and a Gentleman*, *Pretty Woman* and *Chicago*, after which he received the Boston Youth Moves Image Award. Gere eloquently accepted, praising Boston Youth Moves for their generosity and tireless work exposing youngsters to dance.

A short film retrospective of Gaynor's work included the epic film *South Pacific*, where she played Nellie Forbush, dancing with Gene Kelly in *Les Girls* and clips from her too numerous to mention Emmy Award-winning television specials from the late '60s to early '70s. Rivera presented Gaynor with the ninth annual Boston Youth Moves Lifetime Achievement Award, and like the great star that she still is, Gaynor took the stage and instantly seduced the audience.

"Somebody said, 'Mitzi Gaynor is here tonight.' And another person replied, 'Is she still alive?'" Gaynor joked. She thanked Jeannette Neill and Jim Viera, co-founders of Boston Youth Moves, for their dedication to dance in Boston.

Earlier in the week when Gaynor was asked how she started dancing, she remembered, "Where I grew up, there weren't a lot of kids around, so I joined a dance class and made friends. Dance became my life."

"I really wanted to be an ice skating ballerina who could hit a high 'C,'" she said. When I asked who her favorite partner was,



Mitzi Gaynor in *Razzle Dazzle: My life behind the Sequins*



Richard Gere

she replied, "Donald O'Connor could always make me laugh, and he was so talented and a Virgo, like me. Gene Kelly, who occasionally took himself too seriously, was also a Virgo. You know – our way is the only way! I would say *arrivederci l'alligatore* or see you later alligator in Italian, and Kelly would instantly crack up and get back to work, forgetting the burden of being *the Gene Kelly*."

A PBS musical documentary, "Razzle Dazzle: My Life Behind the Sequins" will be shown on PBS this month. I already have my copy. Mitzi's memorabilia cost me \$350 and is worth every penny. Did I mention my upcoming trip to New Orleans? I love silent auctions.

Proceeds from this grand affair will subsidize dance education and performing arts programs to Boston-area youth. Boston Youth Moves provides subsidized tuition to all of its full-time students, financial aid to students in need, in addition to providing a prominent faculty, master classes and mentoring programs.

For more information about the program, go to [www.bostonyouthmoves.org](http://www.bostonyouthmoves.org).



Chita Rivera in *The Dancer's Life*