

# [***How Rita Moreno uses honors like an upcoming public television award to further her philanthropy***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BYP-RMG1-JC5B-G0F2-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Byline:** GLENN GAMBOA, AP Business Writer

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**Body**

NEW YORK — [*Rita Moreno*](https://apnews.com/hub/rita-moreno) says it was always in her nature to be generous – to hold doors for people and help lighten a mother’s load if she was struggling with shopping bags and children.

But Moreno, still the only Latina EGOT -- winner of Emmy, Grammy, Oscar and Tony awards -- in history, says it took a particularly outspoken roommate to teach her the importance of ***politics*** and philanthropy.

“She really just indoctrinated me into the joys of being generous and helping people, really helping people,” Moreno told The Associated Press. “After that, I learned to do it in a bigger way.”

Following her Oscar win for “West Side Story,” Moreno joined the “Ban the Bomb” demonstrations against atomic testing. In 1963, she joined [*the March on Washington*](https://apnews.com/article/march-washington-1963-martin-luther-king-6e4aa7bb8cdbcafd09218557cc0ea842) and was close enough to Martin Luther King, Jr. as he spoke that she saw gospel singer Mahalia Jackson urge him, “Tell him about the dream, Martin,” leading him to ad lib his most famous speech. For decades, she has fought against the racism and sexism she has experienced in the entertainment – for herself and for those who have followed in her footsteps.

For her trailblazing career and philanthropic accomplishments, Moreno will be honored at the WNET Group 2024 Gala at the Edison Ballroom in New York City on Tuesday night. Accepting the honor at the fundraiser for America’s flagship PBS station, and its associated public television networks and NPR stations, also allows Moreno to help the kind of artistic programs she has supported for decades.

It’s a philanthropic strategy that Moreno has long used. It’s why she served on the National Council on the Arts and the President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities for President Bill Clinton. And it’s why she has lent her name to the Rita Moreno Arts Building, which will house a theater for the Entertainment Community Fund in Los Angeles.

“When I’m asked to be a part of something like that, I’m always astonished,” said Moreno, adding that she “couldn’t be prouder” to be honored by public television because it has been such an important part of her life and career.

Moreno spent six seasons on PBS’ “The Electric Company,” which helped teach young people, as well as not-so-young people, how to read. The show, which also starred Morgan Freeman and Skip Hinnant, meant so much to her that she stayed on it even while working full time on Broadway. It was during her “Electric Company” stint that she won a Tony for her role as Googie Gomez in Terrence McNally’s play “The Ritz” in 1975.

“It was not easy,” Moreno said. “We worked extremely hard on (‘The Electric Company’) and we did a lot of trick photography. But I loved working on it. I’ve always loved being funny, so it gave me a fantastic outlet for my sense of humor. I love ridiculous humor.”

But Moreno’s work on “The Electric Company” had serious impact as well. She could see it helping her daughter, Fernanda, who was five when the show began, with her reading. And for generations of Latino young people, Moreno was the first person they saw on TV who looked like them.

When Moreno was celebrated by the Kennedy Center Honors in 2015, actress Gina Rodriguez paid tribute to her by saying, “When you followed your dreams, Rita, you gave me the allowance to follow mine.”

Neal Shapiro, WNET Group CEO and former president of NBC News, called Moreno “the ideal choice” for the honor.

“We love her,” he said. “We adore her both for the artist she is and the great work she’s brought to the American public. And we have a special relationship with her for the work we have done on past issues and that she has been on some of our shows like ‘The Electric Company.’”

Shapiro said Moreno’s work, especially on Broadway, is the kind of pioneering excellence in the arts that PBS wants to bring to the entire country, not just those who happen to catch her in New York.

“And the way she has handled her career, she’s been very concerned about representation, making sure that all voices are represented,” he added.

The gala honoring Moreno will also serve as a kickoff of sorts for the nonprofit’s new Broadway and Beyond initiative, which will collect new theater programs on-air and online in May and June.

For Moreno, the gala serves as a rare respite in yet another busy period in her career. At 92, she was very involved in the recent movie “The Prank,” where she even cut the bangs of her wig herself so that she would look meaner for the role. This summer, she begins work in the new horror movie “Theirs,” alongside Harvey Keitel.

And meeting all the people she has inspired would be a full-time job in itself. Moreno laughs about meeting rocker Lenny Kravitz at the Vanity Fair after-Oscars party earlier this year.

“He was all by himself standing near a bar or something and I said, ‘Hello, I’m Rita Moreno’,” she said. “And before I could say the ‘no,’ he was on his knees on the floor, saying, ‘Oh my god, oh my god, oh my god’\u2026 and it was because of me.

“I just kept looking at my daughter and said, ‘What’s this?’,” Moreno continued. “And it was because he’s a huge admirer. How do you like that?”

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