

Rita Hayworth

Previous (Riot)

Next (Ritchie Valens)

Rita Hayworth (October 17, 1918 – May 14, 1987), was an American actress who reached fame during the 1940s as the era's leading sex symbol. Although there was prejudice against Hispanic actors at the time, Hayworth is now widely regarded to be one of the first Hispanic-American "sex goddesses" of "Golden Age" Hollywood with leading roles in film (Davis 2005). Rita was a gifted dancer and actress who played glamorous roles that maximized her "sex appeal." In World War II, her picture was popular as a "pin up" among American servicemen (Kobal 1978, 129). Her personal life was less happy, however and she became more and more irked with the trappings of fame. Her failed marriages contributed to her over consumption of alcohol.

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As an actress, she pushed the envelope on what was acceptable in terms of sex-appeal and will be forever remembered for her striptease in *Gilda* considered by some the most famous film scene ever. She often combined the roles of victim and victimizer—a woman who was herself abused who used her sexuality to manipulate men. Some may think that she pushed the envelope out too far. On the other hand, what she explored in her films is part of the story of life and throughout history some women have managed to exercise considerable power and influence through men even when women were officially absent from public life. The opening up of opportunities for women to take their full share of responsibility in the world alongside men is increasingly making this strategy redundant. She has also been a role model for other actors and actresses from minority communities.

Early career

Margarita Carmen Cansino, better known as **Rita Hayworth**, was born in Brooklyn, New York, the daughter of Spanish flamenco dancer Eduardo Cansino (Sr.) and Irish-American Ziegfeld girl Volga Hayworth .

She performed with her parents in nightclubs in California and the Foreign Club in Tijuana, Mexico. Hayworth was on stage by the age of six as a member of **The Cansinos**, a famous family of Roma Gitano Spanish dancers working in vaudeville. At age sixteen, she attracted the attention of film producers as part of "The Dancing Cansinos" and was signed by Fox Studios in 1935.

From Cansino to Hayworth

After her option was not renewed by Fox, Rita Cansino freelanced at minor film studios before signing with Columbia Pictures in 1937. The issue wasn't whether Hayworth was perceived as being Spanish, but rather what the public's idea of "Spanish" was.

During Cansino's time, Latin-ness was often used as a kind of "flounce" or a decorative feature, yet it was also a central notion for the culture. In the 1930s and 40s, the USA was in the grip of a Spanish Beauty cult and often played Iberians or Latins (*Blood and Sand*, *You Were Never Lovelier*, *The Loves of Carmen*). In 1937, Margarita Carmen Cansino became Rita Hayworth. Her name change served as protection against discrimination in Hollywood, as she shook off her Latin identity (Kobal 1978, 91-93).

After two more years of minor roles, she gave an impressive performance in Howard Hawks' 1939 film, *Only Angels Have Wings*, as part of an ensemble cast headed by Cary Grant. Her sensitive portrayal of a disillusioned wife sparked the interest of other studios. Between assignments at Columbia Pictures, she was borrowed by Metro Goldwyn Mayer for George Cukor's *Susan and God* (1940) with Joan Crawford and Warner Brothers for Raoul Walsh's *The Strawberry Blonde* (1941) with James Cagney. (Kobal 1978, 95-102, 104-05, 111-113).

While on loan to Fox Studios for Rouben Mamoulian's *Blood and Sand* (1941) starring Tyrone Power, Hayworth achieved stardom with her sizzling performance as the amoral and seductive Doña Sol des Muire. This Technicolor film forever branded her as one of Hollywood's most beautiful redheads. Gene Tierney was originally intended for the role, but was dropped by Darryl F. Zanuck when she eloped with Oleg Cassini. Carole Landis was the next choice for the role, but refused to dye her blonde hair red and was replaced by Rita

Rita Hayworth



Birth name:	Margarita Carmen Cansino
Date of birth:	October 17, 1918
Birth location:	Brooklyn, New York, U.S.
Date of death:	May 14, 1987 (aged 68)
Death location:	The San Remo, New York City, U.S.
Spouse:	Edward C. Judson (1937-1943) Orson Welles (1943-1948) Prince Aly Khan (1949-1953) Dick Haymes (1953-1955) James Hill (1958-1961)



more than pleased with Hayworth's dancing and considered her an excellent partner, he declined to have her appear in any more pictures with him. He gave his reason as being tired of working as part of a "team," as he was with Ginger Rogers, and wanting to "break out" in his own right (Leaming 1990).

Career success

The "love goddess" image was cemented with Bob Landry's 1941 *Life* magazine photograph of her (kneeling on her own bed in a silk and lace nightgown), which caused a sensation and became (at over five million copies) one of the most requested wartime pinups. During World War II she ranked with Betty Grable, Dorothy Lamour, Hedy Lamarr, and Lana Turner as the pinup girls most popular with servicemen. Rita Hayworth would also become Columbia's biggest star of the 1940s, under the watchful eye of studio chief Harry Cohn, who recognized her value. After she made *Tales of Manhattan* (1942) at Twentieth Century Fox opposite Charles Boyer, Cohn would not allow Hayworth to be lent to other studios.

Hayworth's well-known films include the musicals that made her famous: *You'll Never Get Rich* (1941) and *You Were Never Lovelier* (1942) (both with Fred Astaire, who wrote in his autobiography that she "danced with trained perfection and individuality"), *My Gal Sal* (1942) with Victor Mature, and her best known musical, *Cover Girl* (1944) with Gene Kelly. Although her singing voice was dubbed in her movies, Hayworth was one of Hollywood's best dancers, imbued with power, precision, tremendous enthusiasm, and an unearthly grace. Cohn continued to effectively showcase Hayworth's talents in Technicolor films: *Tonight and Every Night* (1945) with Lee Bowman, and *Down to Earth* (1947), with Larry Parks. Her erotic appeal was most notable in *Gilda* (1946), a black-and-white *film noir* directed by Charles Vidor, which encountered some difficulty with censors. This role—in which Hayworth in black satin performed a legendary one-glove striptease—made her into a cultural icon as the ultimate *femme fatale*. Alluding to her bombshell status, in 1946 her likeness was placed on the first nuclear bomb to be tested after World War II at Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands, as part of Operation Crossroads (Kobal 1978, 129). Hayworth performed one of her best remembered dance routines, the samba from 1945's *Tonight and Every Night*, while pregnant with her first child, Rebecca Welles (daughter of Orson Welles). Hayworth was also the first dancer to partner both Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly on film—the others being Judy Garland, Cyd Charisse, Debbie Reynolds, Vera Ellen, and Leslie Caron.

Hayworth gave one of her most acclaimed performances in Orson Welles's *The Lady from Shanghai* (1948), though it failed at the box office. The failure was in part attributed to the fact that director/co-star Welles had Hayworth's famous red locks cut off and the rest dyed blonde for her role. This was done without Harry Cohn's knowledge or approval, and he was furious over the change. Her next film, *The Loves of Carmen* (1948) with Glenn Ford, was the first film co-produced by Columbia and Rita's own production company, The Beckworth Corporation (named for her daughter Rebecca). It was Columbia's biggest moneymaker for that year. She received a percentage of the profits from this and all of her subsequent films until 1955, when Hayworth dissolved Beckworth to pay off debts she owed to Columbia.

Marriage to Prince Aly Aga Khan, and later career

Rita left her film career in 1948 to marry Prince Aly Khan, the son of the Aga Khan, the leader of the Ismaili sect of Shia Islam. Initially Hayworth and Prince Aly had trysts at the Pontchartrain Hotel in New Orleans. The couple moved to Europe, causing a media frenzy. Joseph L. Mankiewicz, in writing and directing 1954's *The Barefoot Contessa*, was said to have based his title character, Maria Vargas (played on film by Ava Gardner), on Hayworth's life and her marriage to Khan.

After the marriage collapsed in 1951, Hayworth returned to America with great fanfare to film a string of hit films: *Affair in Trinidad* (1952) with favorite co-star Glenn Ford, *Salome* (1953) with Charles Laughton and Stewart Granger, and *Miss Sadie Thompson* (1953) with Jose Ferrer and Aldo Ray, for which her performance won critical acclaim. Then she was off the big screen for another four years, due mainly to a tumultuous marriage to singer Dick Haymes. In 1957, after making *Fire Down Below* with Robert Mitchum and Jack Lemmon, and her last musical *Pal Joey* with Frank Sinatra and Kim Novak, Rita Hayworth finally left Columbia. She got good reviews for her acting in such films as *Separate Tables* (1958) with Burt Lancaster and David Niven, and *The Story on Page One* (1960) with Anthony Franciosa, and continued working throughout the 1960s. In 1964, she appeared with John Wayne in *Circus World* (UK title *Magnificent Showman*) and in 1972 she made her last film, *The Wrath of God*.

Personal life

Although Rita Hayworth didn't like horses and thoroughbred horse racing, she became a member of the Del Mar Thoroughbred Club. Her husband Prince Aly Khan and his family were heavily involved in horse racing and Hayworth's filly Double Rose won several races in France and notably finished second in the 1949 Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe.^[1]

Naturally shy and reclusive, Hayworth was the antithesis of the characters she played. She once complained, "Men go to bed with Gilda, but they wake up with me." She was close to her frequent costar and next-door neighbor Glenn Ford.

Hayworth was married five times:

- 1) Edward C. Judson (1937–1943)
- 2) Orson Welles (1943–1948, one daughter Rebecca Welles)
- 3) Prince Aly Khan (1949–1953, one daughter Princess Yasmin Aga Khan),
- 4) Dick Haymes (1953–1955)
- 5) James Hill (1958–1961)

She also had a nephew named Richard Cansino, who is a voice actor in anime and video games; he has done most of his work under the name "Richard Hayworth."

Final years

After about 1960 Hayworth suffered from extremely early onset of Alzheimer's disease, which was not diagnosed until 1980. She



Hayworth in an evening dress by designer Howard Greer.

Lynda Carter starred in a 1983 biopic of her life. She lived in an apartment at the San Remo in New York City.

Following her death from Alzheimer's disease in 1987 at age 68, she was interred in the Holy Cross Cemetery in Culver City, California; location: Grotto, Lot 196, Grave 6 (right of main sidewalk, near the curb). Her marker includes the inscription "To yesterday's companionship and tomorrow's reunion."

One of the major fundraisers for the Alzheimer's Association is the annual Rita Hayworth Gala, which is held in New York City and Chicago. Hayworth's daughter, Princess Yasmin Aga Khan, has been the hostess for these events, which since 1985 have raised more than \$42 million for the Association.

Legacy

Rita Hayworth was one of the most famous early Latinas in Hollywood. To enter showbiz she shook off her heritage and even changed her name to disguise her Hispanic roots. She would soon rocket to stardom and be forever remembered for her signature red tresses. Rita was a talented dancer and actress, which was showcased in her various feature film roles. She was highly glamorous and yet coy. Her sex appeal was obvious, yet she never portrayed herself as forward. Rita was a legend in her time and a target of the press. As a talented young actress Hayworth forever made a place for herself in the annals of Hollywood. Her death from Alzheimer's brought greater awareness and attention to the disease.



Rita Hayworth in 1977.

In Popular Culture

- In the world famous comic book/strip *The Phantom*, the mother of the twenty-first Phantom, Maude Thorne McPatrick, is drawn to resemble Rita Hayworth. In one story, she even worked as Hayworth's stunt double in a movie.
- A poster of Hayworth was used as a plot device in Stephen King's short story, *Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption* from the Stephen King anthology *Different Seasons* ISBN 0751504335.
- A clip from *Gilda* (1946) was used in the film version of *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994) which starred Morgan Freeman and Tim Robbins.
- In 1999, Rita Hayworth was placed nineteenth on the American Film Institute's list of the 25 greatest female movie stars of all time.
- Referenced in the 2001 film *Mulholland Drive*, when Laura Harring's character takes the name "Rita" after seeing a *Gilda* movie poster.
- She is referenced in Tom Waits' song "Invitation to the Blues" on his 1976 album *Small Change*: "And you feel just like Cagney, she looks like Rita Hayworth."
- In 2005, the White Stripes wrote a song titled "Take, Take, Take" on their album *Get Behind Me Satan*, which humorously describes a man meeting Hayworth in a bar and pestering her for an autograph and a picture. She is also briefly mentioned in the song "White Moon" from the same album. Jack White named one of his guitars after her. It also portrays a picture of her on the back side. Her portrait on Jack White's guitar can be seen in the White Stripes' music video for the song You Don't Know What Love Is (You Just Do as You're Told).
- Hayworth is one of the famous personalities mentioned in Madonna's song "Vogue" as follows: "Rita Hayworth gave good face."
- In Salvador Plascencia's *The People of Paper* ISBN 0156032112. Rita Hayworth is a sad, disenfranchised character. In the novel, she was made infamous for having sex with a lettuce picker.

Miscellaneous facts

- Quote by actor Joseph Cotten: "No matter how bad the film, when Rita danced it was like watching one of nature's wonders in motion."
- Somerset Maugham said of Rita's performance in *Miss Sadie Thompson* (1953), based on his story *Rain*: "I couldn't be more delighted that it was in a screen version of one of my stories that she proved just how superb an actress she really is."
- Famous films Hayworth missed out on making: *Ramona* (1936), *Casablanca* (1942), *Laura* (1944), *Dead Reckoning* (1947), *Samson and Delilah* (1949), *Born Yesterday* (1950), *From Here to Eternity* (1953), and *The Barefoot Contessa* (1954).
- While not related by blood, Hayworth and Ginger Rogers did share an aunt and uncle by marriage.
- A picture of Rita Hayworth was attached to the first atomic bomb dropped over the Bikini Atoll.
- Rita Hayworth was mentioned in the song "Take. Take. Take." by The White Stripes, in which Jack White describes meeting her. In addition, her face is depicted in red on the white body of Jack White's guitar in the music video for "You Don't Know What Love Is (You Just Do As You're Told)." Jack White reportedly refers to the guitar as "Rita."
- A character in The Annoyance Theatre's "Splatter Theatre" was named Officer Rita Hayworth. This role is typically played by a man.
- The most popular mixed alcoholic beverage in the world, the Margarita, was named for Margarita Cansino (Rita Hayworth).

Filmography

As Rita Cansino

- *Anna Case in La Fiesta* (Short subject, 1926, Unconfirmed)
- *Cruz Diablo* aka *The Devil's Cross* (Uncredited, 1934)



- *Piernas de Seda* aka *Legs of Silk* (Uncredited, 1935)
- *Paddy O'Day* (1935)
- *Professional Soldier* (Uncredited, 1935)
- *Human Cargo* (1936)
- *Dancing Pirate* (1936)
- *Meet Nero Wolfe* (1936)
- *Rebellion* (1936)
- *Old Louisiana* (1937)
- *Hit the Saddle* (1937)
- *Trouble in Texas* (1937)

As Rita Hayworth

- *Criminals of the Air* (1937)
- *Girls Can Play* (1937)
- *The Game That Kills* (1937)
- *Life Begins with Love* (Uncredited, 1937)
- *Paid to Dance* (1937)
- *The Shadow* (1937)
- *Who Killed Gail Preston?* (1938)
- *Special Inspector* (1938)
- *There's Always a Woman* (1938)
- *Convicted* (1938)
- *Juvenile Court* (1938)
- *The Renegade Ranger* (1938)
- *Homicide Bureau* (1939)
- *The Lone Wolf Spy Hunt* (1939)
- *Only Angels Have Wings* (1939)
- *Music in My Heart* (1940)
- *Blondie on a Budget* (1940)
- *Screen Snapshots Series 19, No. 6* (Short subject, 1940)
- *Susan and God* (1940)
- *The Lady in Question* (1940)
- *Angels Over Broadway* (1940)
- *The Strawberry Blonde* (1941)
- *Affectionately Yours* (1941)
- *Blood and Sand* (1941)
- *You'll Never Get Rich* (1941)
- *My Gal Sal* (1942)
- *Tales of Manhattan* (1942)
- *You Were Never Lovelier* (1942)
- *Show Business at War* (1943) (short subject)
- *Cover Girl* (1944)
- *Tonight and Every Night* (1945)
- *Gilda* (1946)
- *Down to Earth* (1947)
- *The Lady from Shanghai* (1948)
- *The Loves of Carmen* (1948)
- *Champagne Safari* (1952)
- *Affair in Trinidad* (1952)
- *Salome* (1953)
- *Miss Sadie Thompson* (1953)
- *Screen Snapshots: Hollywood Grows Up* (Short Subject, 1954)
- *Fire Down Below* (1957)
- *Pal Joey* (1957)
- *Separate Tables* (1958)
- *They Came to Cordura* (1959)
- *The Story on Page One* (1959)
- *The Happy Thieves* (1962) (also producer)



- *The Poppy Is Also a Flower* (1966)
- *L'Avventuriero* (1967)
- *I Bastardi* (1968)
- *The Naked Zoo* (1971)
- *Road to Salina* (1971)
- *The Wrath of God* (1972)

Notes

1. Love's Long Shot (<https://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,853954,00.html?promoid=googlep>), *Time*. Retrieved October 31, 2007.

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External links

All links retrieved July 28, 2019.

- Obituary, New York Times (<https://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/bday/1017.html>) – May 16, 1987. *Rita Hayworth, Movie Legend, Dies*
- Rita Hayworth Biography (<http://claudia79.tripod.com/bio.html>) – A very thorough text, with dozens of photos.
- Find-A-Grave profile for Rita Hayworth (<http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=1253&pt>)
- NPR: Rita Hayworth, Present at the Creation (<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1143273>) – NPR archive segment on the creation of Hayworth's famous Life Magazine photograph.
- The All-American Love Goddess Rita Hayworth: 1918-1987 (<https://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,964465,00.html>) – Time Magazine 1987 obituary.

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