

THE PRESIDENT HAS SEEN

12-3-00

'00 DEC 2 PM 5:23

PRESIDENT WILLIAM J. CLINTON
REMARKS AT KENNEDY CENTER HONORS

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON, DC

*copied
Speechwriting*

December 3, 2000

- 1 -

Thank you very much. Honorees, artists, Cabinet members, Members of Congress, distinguished guests: welcome to the White House and to the Kennedy Center Honors. I want to begin by telling you how honored Hillary and I are to have had the opportunity – eight opportunities – to host this tribute to the men and women who enrich our lives and our nation with their extraordinary creativity.

- 2 -

Thank you for devoting your lives to lifting our spirits and broadening our horizons.

Thirty-eight years ago, John F. Kennedy wrote that “art means more than the resuscitation of the past: It means the free and unconfined search for new ways of expressing the experience of the present and the vision of the future.”

Each of tonight's honorees has brought to a venerable art form a spark of the new and unexpected; and each has left it more modern, more brilliant, and forever changed.

Now let me present them.

Very few people visit the East Room and find themselves in danger of striking its almost 20-foot ceiling. But that is just what happened to **Mikhail Baryshnikov** when he arrived to rehearse for a White House performance in 1979. With our portable stage set up, ^{well} this stately ceiling was too low for his trademark soaring leaps.

12-3-00

But no ceiling or boundary, not even the Iron Curtain, has ever held Mikhail Baryshnikov back for long. His successful performance that night was televised for millions of Americans as *Baryshnikov at the White House* -- another step toward cementing his reputation as the greatest male classical dancer of our time, ~~quite possibly of all time.~~

~~Mikhail Baryshnikov inspired us not only with his~~
~~breath-taking jumps and turns onstage, but also with his daring~~
leap to freedom in 1974. ^B ~~With boundless energy and~~
~~unbridled joy, he incarnated for millions the ideal of liberty.~~
~~Soon, he was leaping beyond classical ballet to appear in~~
movies and ~~on~~ Broadway.

In 1976 he fulfilled a lifelong dream, ^{by} ~~and~~ bounded onto
the stage of American modern dance – and it has never been
the same again. From *Push Comes to Shove* to his
pathbreaking White Oak Dance Project, Mikhail Baryshnikov
has pushed the boundaries of a challenging art form even as he
broadened its audience.

He continues to give brilliant performances at an age when
most of us are gently being told to get our exercise in private.

Thank you, Mikhail Baryshnikov, for the heights to which
you have lifted the art of dance – and to which you have lifted
us.

No less an authority than John Lennon once said, "If you tried to give rock and roll another name, you might call it **'Chuck Berry.'**"

The Beach Boys,  the Beatles and the Rolling Stones all copied him, but Chuck Berry was the original.

- 10 -

He fused country and blues into a sound that was distinctly American – yet utterly new. And forty years later, the Chuck Berry sound still blazes across America's stages and from our radios. He is quite simply one of the 20th century's most influential musicians. His guitar riffs were some of rock's first – and still some of its greatest.

- 11 -

His stage moves – especially the duck walk, which he invented – are often imitated but never equalled. His fresh and vivid lyrics captured American life whether you were rich or poor, young or not-so young – and they suggested the rhythms of a new and better day for black and white Americans alike.

NASA even sent his music on a space probe searching for intelligent life – if there are aliens out there, they're duck-walking now.

I had the honor of inviting Chuck ~~Berry~~ to play at both of my inaugurals – as well as at my 25th Georgetown reunion, ~~which was held~~ ^{here} on the White House grounds.

~~When I saw three generations of Americans dancing to~~
~~"Johnny B. Goode" and "Rock and Roll Music," I saw~~
~~America's undimmed promise.~~

Thank you, Chuck Berry, for using music to bring America together – and to keep us all just a little bit younger.

These days, you hear a lot of people saying we need to change the tenor here in Washington. I'm sure they are not talking about **Placido Domingo**. Washington is truly blessed to have him as artistic director, as a conductor – and still performing as one of the greatest operatic tenors of all time.

It has become almost impossible to imagine opera without Placido Domingo. He has performed 118 roles, probably more than any other tenor -- and he is still adding new ones. His powerful acting and profound musicality have set new standards.

And he has worked unceasingly to bring opera to a wider audience -- through movies, television and live concerts, and especially as one of the Three Tenors. Their concerts have brought operatic singing to an audience of one billion. Think about it. One in six people, all across the world, has thrilled to the sound of this man's voice.

But Placido Domingo has always been much more than a voice. As a young man, he was an amateur bullfighter. Now, instead of a cape, he waves the baton as a sought-after conductor.

As a visionary artistic director of opera in Washington and Los Angeles, and a frequent performer around our nation, he has sparked the rebirth of American opera. And he has shared his prodigious gifts ~~even more widely. He has lifted his voice~~ in support of disaster relief efforts from Armenia to Acapulco.

Through his annual vocal competition he has championed young singers from all over the world; and he has worked to bring opera to places it has never before been heard.

Thank you, Placido Domingo, for sharing with us your matchless artistry – and for being a true citizen of the world.

Clint Eastwood is the ~~quintessential American actor~~ ^{frances} ~~He~~ has been one of ~~our~~ favorite movie stars for more than 35 years. And he is an Oscar-winning director. ^{ca} I hope I'm half as successful as a former elected official. ^{OK's Downey well for}

His path to stardom began with bit parts in movies that starred a tarantula and a talking mule. His break came in the spaghetti western *A Fistful of Dollars* -- an Italian movie filmed in Spain and based on a classic Japanese film. The rest is history. The "Man With No Last Name" became a household name.

And ever since, his characters have ranged the peaks and valleys of human experience -- from urban vigilantes to mythical cowboys, from troubled artists to Secret Service Agents.

While he keeps making top-grossing movies, Clint Eastwood also keeps taking risks. Playing against type. Making small, thoughtful films that no one else would. Quietly building a second career as one of America's best directors.

Composing songs for five of his movies – and turning his lifelong love of jazz into a movie about legendary saxophonist Charlie Parker. Like the strong, silent cowboy he so often played, Clint Eastwood has become a quiet force in American film and a star for the ages.

Thank you, Clint Eastwood, for giving American audiences so much to cheer about – and think about.

Earlier this decade, *TV Guide* gave **Angela Lansbury** a perfect 100 on its lovability index. There's no mystery why: she's known and adored by tens of millions of viewers as Jessica Fletcher on *Murder, She Wrote*.

But fans who've followed her remarkable career know her just as well as Broadway's greatest stage mother of them all, Gypsy Rose Lee. And everyone who loves movies about politics remembers her brilliant performances in *The Manchurian Candidate* and *State of the Union*.

The United States was lucky to welcome Angela Lansbury to our shores as a child refugee from the Nazi bombing of London in 1940. Just four years later, she made her first movie – and won her first Oscar nomination. She went on to earn two more ~~Oscar nominations~~, and became an acclaimed actress in an impressive variety of roles.

- 28 -

But Hollywood couldn't hold Angela Lansbury. She conquered Broadway in *Mame* and went on to win four Tony Awards. Then, she found television – *Murder, She Wrote* debuted in 1984 and continued for twelve seasons.

- 29 -

Over her career, Angela Lansbury's acting has given us a window into the full range of human emotion and experience. Her inventiveness and sheer courage have inspired her colleagues; and her commitment to charity, especially in the fight against AIDS should inspire us all.

Thank you, Angela Lansbury, for a lifetime of great performance.

There they are, ladies and gentlemen: Mikhail Baryshnikov, who soared out of the Soviet Union and into our hearts. Chuck Berry, who rocked and rolled his way from segregated St. Louis into the American mainstream. Placido Domingo, who brought his songs from Spain and changed the tenor of American music.

Clint Eastwood, who rose out of Depression-era California to earn a place on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. Angela Lansbury, who left her childhood home in England to become American royalty. Each one brought something unique to the arts in America – and each one has enriched us beyond measure.

Together, they bring us closer to John F. Kennedy's vision of art as "the great unifying and humanizing experience." Their distinct triumphs lift up our nation– and they have made America a better, richer place.

Thank you all, and God bless America.