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INTERVIEW OF THE PRESIDENT

BY VH-1

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Q Starting off with just present day, being President, it comes with a lot of pomp and circumstance and Hail to the Chief. What has music meant to you personally and publicly as President?

THE PRESIDENT: First of all, it gives a lot of meaning to being President, because the President has the Marine Band, and then whenever we have a state visit here a marching band from the Army in colonial costumes with old instruments performs. So a lot of being President is the reminder of the music here. The Air Force, the Navy, the Army all have dance bands; they play here at the White House for events. So that's a good part of it.

The second thing that I would say is that one of the nice things about being President is nearly anybody will come perform for you. So I've gotten to be friends with people that I've loved for 20 or 30 years -- James Taylor, Carly Simon, Barbra Streisand, Aretha Franklin, countless others. And then to bring a lot of other new people in and give people a chance to be heard. We've had -- working with public television here we've had a country music concert reflecting women in country music. We've done jazz music. We've done blues. It's just been fascinating. Just last week we had Yo-yo Ma, Edgar Meyer, and Mark O'Malley in here to do there wonderful Appalachian music. So all of that has been very, very important.

And then, of course, I've gotten to bring some of the most wonderful gospel and religious singers in the country in my two Inaugural services, and there are other times. So for me, one of the best things personally about being President has been the music and the way I could just sort of swallow up all my musical interests. It's been great.

Q Let's get back to where the musical interests started. Warren Moss was here during the Inauguration and we were talking to him. He tells a hysterical story that -- was it George Gray was handing out instruments in, like, 3rd or 4th grade. And he grabbed the trumpet and you were left with the saxophone. Did you always want to play the saxophone?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, I did. Actually, I started on the clarinet when I was nine with George Gray, who was a friend of mine all his life. We were pen pals forever, my grade school

band director. And he had a daughter who was also a musician. So I played clarinet for a while, and, frankly, I wasn't very good at it. And they switched me to saxophone when I was nine years old. So I've been playing since I was nine.

Q Mr. Sperlin (phonetic) said you were made for the saxophone.

THE PRESIDENT: It suited me. It suits me emotionally, intellectually. I always liked it.

Q There are some great videos that we have. Virginia put home videos on tape and gave them to David and we were looking at them, of you dancing in the living room. Virginia's there and I guess it's Roger Clinton -- and little Roger is running around. What was the music that would have been playing then? I think you might have been 12, 13.

THE PRESIDENT: Oh, when I was 12 or 13, it would have been -- gosh, that was back in 1958 -- it would have been Elvis Presley, Bill Haley, Fats Domino, all those people.

Q What did the music mean for you growing up? I mean, all your friendships --

THE PRESIDENT: I loved it. I loved the whole rock and roll thing. And I was -- a lot of parents in the '50s didn't like it very much. They thought there was something vaguely bad about it, you know. And my mother thought it was wonderful. She loved Elvis Presley from the first day she saw him. She thought rock and roll was great for kids. So music was always encouraged in our home, and we had -- until I was 15, when I lived in a place that actually had a hardwood floor and a big room where you could have dances, so we had kids dancing there all the time. It was great.

Q Was it your mom who got you hooked on the musical bug? I mean, with her love for music, or was it --

THE PRESIDENT: I think so. Neither of my parents had a particular interest, obsession with music like I did. My mother loved rock and roll and loved Elvis Presley in particular. And my father actually had played saxophone as a little boy. And I own a soprano saxophone, believe it or not, that is playable today -- I've had it restored -- that was made in 1915. I also have an old C Melody saxophone that my father played. That was the only family connection, but he didn't play anymore when I started. And I just fell in love with it and just kept on doing it.

Q Now, you mentioned, when we were talking about the presidency, your love for gospel and spiritual music. And a lot of people -- of course, I know about it, but a lot of people hadn't known about that love. You know, they just always saw you on Arsenio playing saxophone. You've mentioned -- an interesting sort of reference to that was you all, that you've mentioned many times, that we all need to be repairers of the breach. What role does music play in that?

THE PRESIDENT: Oh, I think that, for me, there is nothing that's any more emotionally healing. When I'm blue or down, I can hear some good gospel music, it immediately just lifts me up. And I've always felt that way. One of the greatest things about my being governor of a southern state with a lot of gospel roots is that I heard a phenomenal amount of fabulous church music from my childhood all up through my public service, both in black churches and in white churches. And that's where I got involved with the Pentecostals, who have contributed so much to my religious music education and so much to the enrichment not only of me, but Hillary and Chelsea as well.

Q What's it like during those Inaugural prayer services or anytime that you hear your friends such as Janice or Mickey or even my mom, what's it like to hear them, friends who love you singing those songs?

THE PRESIDENT: It's different and better. I think it's really nice when you get to know people, particularly if you've known them a long time, you just take a lot of joy in their talent and they can touch you in a way when they're singing to you they can't when they're talking to you. It's an amazing thing. It's quite wonderful.

I also feel an immense pride. Whenever I see someone perform now that I know, who's a personal friend of mine, anywhere, especially my childhood friends or people I've known for a long time, but even people I've gotten to be friends with in the last five or 10 years, and I know how hard it is and I see how good they are, it really makes me proud.

Q That's wonderful. You mentioned black artists, black music. Was that -- you mentioned Virginia loved Elvis and there was sort of the Beatles. Going into black music, was that different -- Motown?

THE PRESIDENT: When I was a child, I just -- I was elated by all those Motown artists. I loved them all. And in the late '80s I once got to play in Michigan, Dancing in the Streets with the Four Tops, Martha and the Vandellas, and Junior Walker. And I never will forget. I never will forget playing a saxophone riff with Junior Walker. It was a great thing. And I always loved that. I loved Ray Charles and I loved that. And then I loved all the religious music.

One of the most memorable concerts in my entire life was a concert I attended as a young man when I was living in England. I went to the Royal Albert Hall and I heard Mahalia Jackson sing. And all these British kids came to hear it. And I thought, you know -- most of them had never even been exposed to anything like Mahalia Jackson. And when she finished singing, they stormed the stage. It was unbelievable. It was like she was a young rock star or something.

So that's a big part of what music is to me, is my whole relationship with African Americans and the roots that we share, and it always has been.

Q It sounds like there was a real change not only in what was going on in your heart, but musically, when you went to Georgetown. Of course, Tom Campbell says you still came in

with your little portable record player. But the discussions were longer at dinner about --

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, and the music began to change. And the people became more serious. They got involved in the discussions about civil rights and there were riots in the streets and then there was the war in Vietnam. We literally had riots in Washington when Martin Luther King was killed. But there was a lot of music around all that.

I remember -- you have these little songs I guess you associate with different periods in your life. When I came to Georgetown, on Sunday afternoon there was a place called the Cellar Door right down from where I lived. And you could go down there on Sunday afternoon and for a dollar you could go in and get a Coke and listen to whoever was playing play. And one group that played a lot there was a group called the Mugwumps. The lead singer of the Mugwumps was Cass Elliot, who later became Mama Cass of the Mamas and the Papas. And two other people in the Mugwumps became two of the four people in the Lovin' Spoonful. So when the Mamas and the Papas came on later in my college career, they always -- every time I hear the Mamas and Papas, I think about Georgetown, I think about college, I think about "Monday, Monday" and all those old great songs.

And I think there is some of that at each stage of my life. The last week -- last month I was in England, when I lived in England was June of 1970, and that's when the Beatles broke up. So every time I hear "Let It Be" -- every time I hear "Let It Be" I remember those endless lines of people who lined up to see the last movie that the Beatles made right when they announced they were breaking up.

Q Now, the Beatles landed in America I guess the year you went to Georgetown --

THE PRESIDENT: '64.

Q Yes, yes.

THE PRESIDENT: My senior year in high school.

Q Do you remember that?

THE PRESIDENT: Oh, yeah.

Q I mean, were you really into the Beatles?

THE PRESIDENT: Oh, absolutely. I remember when they came in. I remember going over to a friend of mine's house and playing some Beatles records. I remember when they went on the Ed Sullivan Show. I remember -- I was interested to see them on the Ed Sullivan Show because you know when Elvis Presley went on the Ed Sullivan Show they could only show him from the waist up because they thought he was too lewd for the times.

Q What's the difference between -- was it a hard transition between Elvis and Beatles and Motown?

THE PRESIDENT: Not for me, but I've always had very eclectic interests in music. And most people didn't choose that I knew. I felt a real special relationship to Elvis Presley because he was from Mississippi, he was a poor white kid, he sang with a lot of soul. He was sort of my roots -- "Heartbreak Hotel" and "Hound Dog" and "Don't Be Cruel" and "Love Me Tender," that was sort of the beginning of the awakening of America to rock and roll.

And then when the Beatles came, I just thought they were so -- they were full of energy, but they were also brilliant. I mean, you go back and listen to Sergeant Pepper's album today -- they were brilliant. I still think "Eleanor Rigby" is one of the most powerful songs I ever heard. They were just brilliant.

Q You were talking about your mom, Virginia, and her love for music and how she loved rock and roll. Did that have -- I mean, it must have made a huge difference not only in your life, but in Roger's life now that he's gone into music.

THE PRESIDENT: Huge. Yes. I mean, we both felt encouraged to like music and to be involved in it. And our mother had a lot to do with it. But it was something that lifted us up. We had some hard times, and we could always get out of them if we had enough good music playing.

Q Did you ever consider going into music?

THE PRESIDENT: I did. When I was 15 or 16, I thought about it a lot. I even thought about going to Europe to study, because in France you could study classical saxophone and actually develop a career that would be both classical and jazz and all that. And that's very rare. Wynton Marsalis is the only world-class musician in my lifetime, I think, who was preeminent in classical and preeminent in jazz music.

But I made a very -- I decided not to do it for two reasons. One is, I didn't know if I'd like the lifestyle. I didn't want to get my days and nights mixed up. And back then the idea of somebody like Kenny G., who has become a good friend of mine -- he's a marvelous person -- the idea of someone like him actually making a living just doing concerts and records was -- it seemed so remote. And I didn't want to have to just do clubs and stay up all night and sleep all day. All the saxophone players I knew did that. Even the ones that made a lot of jazz records basically had their days and nights mixed up, as far as I was concerned. And I just didn't want to do it.

And the other reason I didn't do it is I didn't think I was -- I just wasn't sure I was good enough. I didn't think I would be truly great at it. And I thought if you're going to sacrifice your life to it and give your life to it, then you should know that you could really be great at it.

Q It's kind of cool that Roger is doing music.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes. Saw him on television last week, singing away.

Q What's it like?

THE PRESIDENT: I like it. I'm very happy for him. Because it's all I think he's ever really wanted to do. He really just -- once he started doing it and realized he was pretty good at it, he didn't care about anything else.

And one of the things that I want for every young person in this country is I want them to be free to be able to do what they want to do to live out their dreams. He's had to work hard and make a lot of sacrifices, but he's been able to do a lot of that.

Q I want to talk about Mr. Sperlin (phonetic) --

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, that's good.

Q -- and music education. You were talking about change and how when you were 16 you really had to think about it hard. Mr. Sperlin said that he realized that because you came back from Boys Nation and he could see a difference -- that you were still really committed to music, with all the bands you were in.

THE PRESIDENT: When I went to Boys Nation, it sort of crystallized for me something that I had been thinking a long time, which is that I really -- I had always been interested in politics, I had always been interested in public service, I had always been consumed with the issues that dominated my childhood, which were in rough order, basically, first, the Cold War; then the civil rights revolution; then the whole -- all the social upheavals and the war in Vietnam. And all these things were -- you couldn't be alive in the '50s and '60s and not be concerned about great public issues. And I thought I could make a difference, and I thought I could be really good at it. I thought I could do better at that than anything else. And it's something I thought I'd never get tired of, because you're always learning something new, there's always new people coming, there's always things happening.

And the judgment I made when I was 16, I have to say now that I'm 50 I feel -- I don't know why I knew it then, but I was right. And I'm glad I did it. I never stopped loving music, but I just knew I couldn't -- that I wouldn't be a musician.

That's the great thing about music, though. Most -- 90-some percent of the people who do it don't become musicians. But I must say -- I know that you talked to Virgil Sperlin, my band director, for this show, and he's a man who had a profound, positive influence on my life and on so many other people. And one of the things that's really disturbed me about education in America today is that so many schools have not been able to maintain their music programs, their

arts programs, even their basic physical education programs, because these things are very important to human development, to emotional development and to intellectual development. And they complement the academic programs.

And I must say, even after I decided, well, I'm not going to do this for a lifetime, the time I spent with my band directors and with the boys and girls that played with me -- and then the men and women that have played with me since and sung with me and done all these things -- they've made my life a lot richer. And I wish that -- one of the things I hope we can do is find a way to give that back to the students, particularly students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds. They ought to have a chance to do music and to do art and to do -- and to exercise their God-given abilities.

And whenever I think of Virgil Sperlin, for the rest of my life I'll always think about what a gift he gave to me and hundreds of other people.

Q With all due respect, I just have another question. VH-1 is launching a campaign to save the music in our public schools. Too often it's being considered a luxury, yet it does raise the math scores, the reading scores, the attendance and team-building skills. What do you want Americans to know, what can they do to help save the music?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, there are several things Americans can do. First of all, they can make sure that their school districts, to the maximum extent possible, preserve these music programs, because they are a lifeline to learning and to life for so many young people. Secondly, if it's necessary, they can be willing to vote for local -- increases necessary to preserve those programs while the academics are preserved.

The third thing they can do is to go around and either donate or get others to donate instruments or other things which will make it possible for these band programs and these other music programs to go on. I think it is very, very important to education. I think all young people should be exposed to music and to the arts. And as I said, I think it's even wrong to get rid of these physical education programs, to treat physical health as if it's just the providence of athletes. That's also wrong.

But the music, in particular, we know -- there's so much evidence that it has a positive impact on academic performance, on social skills and how you relate to other people, on self-confidence, that anything we can do in every community in this country to save these programs for the schools and for the children should be done.

Q Thank you, Mr. President.

(Looking at albums) -- It's got "Ruby" in it, doesn't it? "She's Funny That Way," "I'll Be Seeing You," one of my favorite songs. Glenn Yarbrough was the heart-throb of the early '60s. Nancy Wilson -- this is the best Judy Collins album ever made, I think. Although, I also like that

one. Bridge Over Troubled Water. Did you see that in The Graduate in 1967?

Joe Cochran -- I was -- Joe Cochran was on Johnny Carson in 1988 when I did Johnny Carson, and I love to hear Joe Cochran sing.

Q What were you and the First Lady thinking of when you -- was it listening to Joanie Mitchell, "Chelsea Morning"?

THE PRESIDENT: I liked the song and -- now we -- I loved the song. And she, Joanie Mitchell wrote it and Judy Collins recorded it. And it was great because Judy Collins later became a great friend of ours, which was wonderful. And I heard it first when Judy Collins sang it, and then I later heard Joanie Mitchell's recording of it.

And then after I was elected Governor in 1978, we went to London, Hillary and I did, and spent 10 days around the Christmas holidays. And all we did was walk and go to restaurants and go to plays and go to museums and galleries. That's all we did -- it was great 10-day vacation. And one day we were walking in Chelsea and then we started singing that song -- just walking down the street, alone, in Chelsea. And I looked at her and I said, you know, if we have a daughter we ought to name her Chelsea. And that's how we decided to do it. Walking in the borough of Chelsea in London in 1978 in December.

Q A wonderful story.

THE PRESIDENT: That's how our child got her name.

Q Thank you for sharing it. It really was --

THE PRESIDENT: Thanks.

END

4:10 P.M. EST