

WH - Reception for  
performing Arts Soc.  
June 12, 1995

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

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**Remarks by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton  
At a Reception for the Washington Performing Arts Society  
The White House**

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I want to welcome all of you here to the White House. I am particularly pleased that we could host this reception. And I know that we have an outgoing President, Glendon McKinney, and an incoming President, Lenney Knat, and I love being able to welcome Presidents to the White House.

I also want to thank Muriel Alper. Not only for her work with the Women's Committee over the past twenty years, but also for the work she has done as a volunteer in my office for more than two years. I have to tell you that Muriel is something of a legend in what is called, both to my face and behind my back, "Hillaryland." There is not a person on my staff who doesn't know her, doesn't love her, doesn't do whatever Muriel tells her to do. So I want to thank you, Muriel. I want to thank you for sharing so much energy, enthusiasm, dedication and humor with me and my staff, and for making our days brighter, livelier, easier and, most of all, happier. Thank you so much.

I also want to acknowledge that the White House Social Secretary, Ann Stock, is a former member of the Washington Performing Arts Society. Ann, however, has been working so hard the past two and a half years -- we've had more events and more people in the White House than in any comparable time. In fact, we exceeded most four year terms about six months ago, and that is because Ann is indefatigable. But the down side is that she has done so much in such a short period of time, that when several of you reminded her that she had worked on some of the events of the Society, she was desperately trying to remember that far back. It's sort of a sad commentary on life in a constant activity circle, as we seem to be. And I think Ann, as she said to me, missed being part of this. She did it when she used to have a life, is what she said.

I want to take this opportunity to thank all of you for your strong support of the arts in this community, and particularly for the work you do on behalf of children and our

particularly for the work you do on behalf of children and our schools through the arts programs and the cultural exchange programs. Your efforts are critical to the people, particularly the children, that you touch. Many of them would not otherwise have any really positive exposure to our common culture, or to the cultures of people from around the world. You know, I was at one of the events celebrating the 125th Anniversary of the Metropolitan Museum in New York last week, and I thanked the people there for their commitment to that institution, as I thank you for your commitment to this.

And it really is unique in the history of the world that the arts would be supported by a public-private partnership. Some countries, in fact, most, that have had any significant support for the arts have done so publicly over the years. A few have done so largely privately, through patronage and other ways. But America is unique because here we have, thankfully, a public-private commitment to the arts. This partnership has been critical to sustaining the arts throughout our history. And I believe that it is short-sighted for some among us to try to eliminate or severely cut the public commitment to the arts, which really must go hand in hand with the kind of private efforts that you are involved in.

I know many of you have already spoken out on behalf of the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities and I urge you to continue to make sure your voices are heard. Others of you have been active in speaking out on behalf of public broadcasting, which in many parts of our country is the only vehicle, the only channel that brings great art and artistic performance to the lives of literally millions of people.

You know, 40% of the homes in our country do not have cable television, and those 40% have the majority of children residing in them. So, without public broadcasting they will not hear what we are able to hear, perhaps by going to the Kennedy Center or by going to a performance that you have helped to arrange.

So I thank you for what you have done in this community, I thank you for speaking out on behalf of the relatively meager commitment of public funds we do make to the arts in our country. But it's more than just the funds, it is a statement. It is a real statement of commitment to excellence and to what has stood the test of time. The commercial marketplace for music or for art is always new, always looking for something on the cutting edge, fads come and go. Yet we know that great art often is not even recognized in its own time, and we often are paying our debt to those who came years, if not centuries before. And if we do not support what now has been recognized and accepted as great art over the centuries, the marketplace will not. That is not

what it can do. It is not one of its better contributions.

So I urge you to speak out against these efforts to cut public support and to continue your private support of the arts. We are all the richer for it and we are grateful to you for what you have done and will continue to do. And I wanted personally to say thank you very much.

We're going to have a receiving line in the Blue Room, which is through the Green Room and on the other side of the Red Room. And here is Muriel to give me some more orders.

MRS. ALPER: I just wanted to say that last week a call came in to your office and it was a South American Embassy. The voice was very heavily accented and the person said she wanted to speak to the "Prima Dona." So I thought it was another nut call, because we sometimes get them.

MRS. CLINTON: Just a few, right.

MRS. ALPER: And then I realized that it wasn't meant in the pejorative sense at all. It was really said in the greatest respect for you, because "La Prima Dona" means "The First Lady." And that's how you're called. And I thought to myself how very fortunate we are that we have a First Lady that is first in compassion, in empathy and in caring, because you do care. And only look around at the people who work in her office, and everybody loves her, and they're the ones who know her best. So please accept our little gift...it looks big, but it's really small. It's an American craft by a woman in Kentucky and it's a candle holder. It's red, white and blue. And we thought that it would be good for you.

MRS. CLINTON: It's beautiful. Thank you so much. Thank you all. Muriel knows that I really love crafts, and particularly American crafts. We have this exhibit at the Museum of American Arts, so that is especially meaningful to me. And "La Prima Dona" is one of the nicer things I've been called, so I'll take it, whatever it means. And I look forward to greeting each of you individually.

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