

Arts in the School Event
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The White House

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton
Recognizing the Power of the Arts in Education
September 17, 1998

I am particularly pleased that a group of you who are so committed to the arts could be the first to be part of an event here in the newly redecorated State Dining room at the White House. I see as I look out many familiar faces, life-long advocates of the arts. I see some new friends on behalf of this cause, and I think it is fair to say that there have never been more arts education champions at the White House at any one time in our history.

There are many thanks due to each of you, because what you are doing is working tirelessly for the day when every single child in every single school in America can pick up a paint brush or an instrument in school and can compose a future.

I want to thank the Thomas S. Kenan Institute for the Arts for sponsoring this event and the reception that is following. We are here with very important people today --people who have made their commitment to our schools and education system, particularly to ensure the survival and growth of arts departments in our education system.

I had the great pleasure of visiting a school here in Washington today as a part of the VH1 effort to "Save the Music." The VH1 cable channel is committed to making sure that all children get instruction in music and that they can try it out themselves on good quality instruments.

I was pleased because that school, like so many, not only in the District of Columbia, but throughout our country, had a music program at one time but had a budget cutback which threatened the program with elimination. But thanks to a dedicated teacher and the generosity of friends of that school, they were able to round up some funds and keep part of the program.

We heard from a sixth grader named Troy who, when he was in third grade, started taking drum lessons and it really made him happy. The next year the in-school arts program was gone because of the budget problems. But because of a teacher named Mr. Clipper, the students began to meet before school, and, using a lot of instruments that were in bad repair being passed around among themselves, they had their music curriculum. And then finally today, because of the support of teachers, principals and our new superintendent in the District of Columbia and the generous partnership of VH1 and Cablevision, we were able to announce a donation for \$100,000 in support of music education.

Now, that is just one example of what is happening today around our country, because there has been a reaction to the loss of music and arts and what that means to children everywhere. And I think that is why we are all here today, because the time is absolutely right to call for providing arts education for our children.

In 1977, "Coming to Our Senses" made a case that American children who study the arts get better educations. In 1983 "A Nation at Risk" made the argument that the arts and humanities had a significant role to play in our education system. And ten years ago, in "Toward Civilization," the National Endowment for the Arts said that the arts were important disciplines to have in schools. They were and still are.

We have been told time and time again to reaffirm the importance of the arts not as a luxury, but as a necessity. There are so many examples as well as research efforts --I am sure that you could give ten or twenty off the top of your head. I have seen very personally in the last several years what the difference can be when the arts are part of education --particularly in the education of inner city kids, kids at-risk, kids who are otherwise disadvantaged.

I have heard stories of children who wouldn't talk in school until they were finally introduced to an arts program or a musical experience: Babyface -- those of you who may not know Babyface are not at all of this generation -- because the children at the school this morning were thrilled to have him there. He shared the story about how as a young man he wouldn't talk at school, he wouldn't ask questions. He wouldn't even answer questions, no matter what the teacher said to him. And then one day he was introduced to the choir and he said he could feel the effect throughout his entire life. All of a sudden, he found his voice.

Well, I have seen that in schools in every part of this country. And I have listened to children and young people tell me why the arts are so important to them. A program funded by the NEA that I visited at a school here in DC a few weeks ago has children write their own poetry and then act it out. One young man stood up and read from his poem. One of the lines was, "I am so musical that when I write songs you sing them for the rest of your life."

They not only write poems but learn to control and recognize their feelings. These young people, who attend this school, which is largely drawn from the housing project across the street, talk about how important it was to be able to let out the feelings they had every single day. And they found a way to do that through poetry, through the arts.

The National Endowment for the Arts has done a lot of good work through the years bringing artists to the schools and encouraging schools to make sure that arts instruction moves forward. And I feel compelled to say that I am very grateful for the support in the Senate that has been resoundingly given to the NEA. It is very important to all of us who care about the arts to understand how significant it is that the federal government has a role to play in supporting the arts and in funding programs like the ones which send artists to schools where children would never have seen artists otherwise. And I just want to reiterate on behalf of my husband that the President will never back down on his commitment to federal funding for the arts and federal funding for the NEA. (applause)

My husband and I have supported arts funding and arts education almost intuitively over our lifetimes, but now we have research which very fortunately supports those intuitions. Ground-breaking research done primarily at the University of California at Irvine demonstrates that instruction in the arts, and particularly instrumental music, enables children to enhance their

reasoning, their spatial understanding, their analytical abilities.

We are now more convinced than ever that even exposing infants and babies to music helps them to develop brain connections which will help them be more successful in school later on. That is why supporting arts education is not only the right thing to do, but it is the smart thing for our nation and for both the public sector and the private sector, to do. Because we are, by doing so, doing one of the things we know that will pay off the most in making children better able to learn.

Today arts are a core subject under the President's program called "Goals 2000." Yes, reading and writing and mathematics and history, they are all there, and they need to be there, but so are the arts. \$10 million has been awarded to local art education applicants under Goals 2000 to enable them to better include the arts in their children's educations.

We also have new standards for our 2,000 Head Start centers that recognize how we can best get our children ready for schools by developing their creative self-expression through activities in art, music, movement and dialogue.

We are also very grateful that the Arts Education Partnership has been created by the NEA and the Department of Education with the generous help of foundations and cultural institutions, many of which are represented in this room. And so we are finally reaching a consensus in our nation that we need to have arts education in our schools. And we need to be sure that we are setting standards so that arts and education can help to really meet the needs of our young people.

I am always reminded of people who have been here before. President John Adams said a lot of very sensible things. He was the first inhabitant, along with his wife Abigail, of the White House. And I know many of you know this quote, but I quoted Plato this morning at the school. I told the students that he was sort of like an "ancient rapper." I don't know if that made much sense, so I will try John Adams instead. He once said, "I must study politics and war, so that my sons may have the liberty to study mathematics and philosophy. My sons ought to study mathematics and philosophy in order to give their children a right to study painting, poetry and music."

And that is really what our hope is --a full education in the deepest sense of the word is what will best prepare people for the challenges of this uncertain future that poses so many opportunities, but also will call on us in ways we cannot even imagine now, to be as fully human as possible, to live together, to work together, to understand our interconnectedness.

So that is why we are issuing a call to action here in our nation to bring the arts back into every school in America. In fact the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities, along with its partners, is about to publish a study on the best lessons learned from school districts that value the arts. What they have found is that everyone who has a stake in our children's success, must see art education as their cause. Not just educators and parents, but also businesses, cultural organizations, colleges and universities. Over the next few years, I and many of you will have the opportunity to speak out on this topic and I want to enlist your support in making the case to the American public.

I am pleased to announce today new commitments from people who understand how important the arts-education partnership is and who want to join the crusade.

Between this school year and next, Mr. Holland's Opus Foundation is doubling its goal to provide instruments to school music programs. Now "Mr. Holland's Opus" happens to be one of my favorite movies. Because, for those of you who have seen it, you know that it really is a chronicle of life in the 60's forward. And for those of us who were in high school in the '60's, we remember, if we were lucky enough to attend most schools at that time in America in the suburbs and cities, there were music programs, and drama programs and art programs that we were able to take advantage of. As you watch that movie you watch the slow elimination of arts programs. I want to thank Mr. Holland's Opus Foundation for their commitment.

Ovation, a new cable channel for the arts, is asking young people around the nation to respond to the theme, "I Love Art, Here's Why," by writing an essay or a poem, or composing a sign or drawing a picture. I think that is a wonderful way for young people to express themselves and for their feelings and thoughts to be shared with the rest of us.

The Artists Rights Foundation is enlisting famous directors in six cities to teach the art of film making.

I want to thank Binney & Smith, which is echoing our White House Millennium theme by developing thirteen art exercises that ask students to honor the past and imagine the future.

The director of our wonderful symphony here in the nation's capital, Leonard Slatkin, is touring in Europe, but wanted to be here and sent a message. He would be standing here, baton in hand to direct us, were he able, and that message is, "I will do everything in my power to fulfill the mission of this project and bring the arts back to our schools."

So you see we have a wide spectrum of support from many different aspects of our society. And in a year or two, or five, or ten, we can look back and say that at this meeting we came forward in a united way to create the opportunity for the arts in education to flourish once again.

There are many people who are responding to that call, and it is my privilege to introduce one of them to you. I think that it is fair to say that many people have a stake in the creation of not only future artists, but audiences for artists. And among the people who have such a stake, are those who would broadcast to us the work of artists.

People in the corporate world know Michael Jordan as the Chairman and CEO of the CBS Corporation. People in the arts world know him as the Chairman for Americans for the Arts. Now I hope that people everywhere know him as the leader who brought those two very powerful and important institutions together --AFA and CBS --to raise public awareness about the value of the arts for our children. And to encourage children everywhere to understand the significance to their own lives of the arts, and to create posters, performers and artists and audiences for the Twenty First Century. Please join me in welcoming Mr. Michael Jordan.

Michael Jordan speaks...

Thank you very much Mr. Jordan, it is really exciting and really encouraging to hear that level of commitment with the combination of good research and advocacy that is so important.

Over the last year I have had the pleasure of getting to know our next speaker, John Sykes, the President of VH1. He comes here today with a background in music and artist management and an extraordinary commitment to putting musical instruments back in our schools. And he actually convinced my husband to give away a saxophone.

I mentioned this morning when John and I were together at the school that he has a commitment to putting music back in the schools that is not just a short term one. It is a long term commitment that involves everyone he works with and everyone he can touch and convince. It was just such a thrill to see those children today looking at that pile of instruments that this gift to the DC schools represents. So it is my great honor and privilege to introduce John Sykes.

John Sykes speaks...

Thank you so much John for that extraordinary conviction and thank you for your leadership on this issue. I am very very grateful.

As John said, as a part of our Millennium evening collection tomorrow night, we are highlighting different aspects of our history and our present and our future. Tomorrow we have a walk through the effects of jazz on America -- on our soul, on our identity, on where we are going -- and it is going to be broadcast live on VH1 and will be simulcast on the internet.

It is something that we are doing here in the White House through our Millennium Office to try to reach a larger audience about the significance of the arts in our lives. It is hard to imagine America without jazz.

For the last thirty years our next speaker has been a teacher, a principal and a superintendent. He has done it all with great dedication and persistence. Now he is the Executive Director of the Council of State School Officers, he is helping to steer an arts education partnership with great success. And I am pleased he is here today to be able to tell us more about what he is doing and what he hopes to do. Please join me in welcoming Gordon Ambach.

Gordon Ambach speaks

Thank you so much Gordon for your leadership, your serious commitment and your willingness to speak out on behalf of these important initiatives.

Our next two speakers have been involved in public schools all their lives. They are the products of public schools, they are the parents of two public school kids and they are powerful voices for the arts in their school district. In fact, the district that they represent is featured in the report I mentioned earlier. This couple has a very clear sense of what parental involvement in education means.

Ken is a school board member of Queens District 25 and Valerie is the President of the PTA in Public School 154. This is a couple who is on the front lines doing the work, raising the children, being involved in the schools, that we hope to encourage everyone to do. They are a great example. It is my honor to introduce Valerie and Ken Cohen.

Mr. and Mrs. Cohen speak

Thank you so much Mr. and Mrs. Cohen and thank you so much for sharing your experience; your conversion experience Mr. Cohen and your participatory one Mrs. Cohen, and thank you also for mentioning the Annenberg grant. I think everyone in this room knows what a debt we owe to Walter Annenberg and the Annenberg Foundation for the work that they have done individually and collectively on behalf of the arts. We are very grateful to them and we certainly have a small but telling testimony about the difference that they make in the lives of children, families, schools and the communities.

Now the only way to really understand the arts is to experience them. And I have a feeling that all of us are in for a real treat. The Fillmore Arts Center Jazz Band is supported by the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts. Its members are all in school arts programs and its music has touched the lives of people in Washington and throughout the region. Here to introduce the band and tell us what music has meant to him is Andrew Rose. A graduate of the Fillmore Arts Center, he is now a senior at the Duke Ellington School of the Arts here in Washington. Please join me in welcoming Andrew Rose and the Fillmore Arts Center Band.

Andrew Rose speaks and the band plays...

Thank you all for being a part of this, but in particular let me thank the Fillmore Arts Center Band for enhancing our time together this afternoon. It was delightful to hear you at the White House. And I want to thank all of you for coming. We will have a receiving line and a reception out in the hallway. And it is just such a pleasure to have this opportunity to thank you for what you have done on behalf of the arts and arts education and I look forward to working with you.

Thank you very much.