

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

Concert of the Century for

VH-1 Save the Music

The White House

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THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

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REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
AND MRS. CLINTON
AT THE
CONCERT OF THE CENTURY FOR VH-1
SAVE THE MUSIC

3:58 P.M. EDT

MRS. CLINTON: Welcome, and please be seated. We're delighted to welcome you to the Concert Of The Century here at the White House. Under this tent, there are educators, activists and some of the best artists in our country. There are also people like me, who never quite learned to carry a tune, but appreciate those who can. But all of us are here with the same goal: to put music back into our schools and into our children's lives. (Applause.)

I want to thank you all for coming to what will be an amazing performance. Many of you were with me a year ago at the White House when we issued a call to action, and asked all Americans to make the cause of the arts and music education their own. And that's exactly what this concert will help us do.

None of this would have been possible without so many of the people here today. And I want to thank Bill Ivey and the National Endowment for the Arts, for bringing the arts to every corner of America. (Applause.)

I want to thank Tommy Hilfiger for his generous support of music education. (Applause.) And I'm grateful for all the extraordinary artists who are lending their voices and talents here today. And I especially want to thank our friend, John Sykes, and the VH-1 crew, Save the Music Foundation, for all you do every day to save the music. (Applause.)

And time and again, I've seen John's personal commitment to this issue, and the difference it has made to so many children who now have an instrument to play, and the confidence to go as far as their dreams and talents will take them. We've enjoyed getting to know John, and please join me in welcoming John Sykes. (Applause.)

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MRS. CLINTON: I am delighted to join the National Endowment for the Arts and the VH-1 Save the Music Foundation, and so many extraordinary artists and educators who are bringing the power of music into our children's lives.

I had the privilege, last year, to meet Troy, the boy we just saw in the film. And as he talked about the french horn, I saw the same excitement I have seen in the eyes of so many young people who are playing their hearts out in schools around the country. I have met children who joined an orchestra instead of a gang; children who had never spoken, not one word, until they took a music class; and children who have picked up instruments and followed their dreams.

We know that learning music changes lives, and every child must have that chance. Whether you are Shamari Smith playing the trombone in South Central L.A., or 'NSync, who is here with us today, all the young people filling their hearts and minds with music are stars. And their stories tell us that music education is a necessity, not a luxury. It can spark our children's confidence and creativity -- (applause) -- and it can be the one anchor that keeps so many of them engaged in their schools and communities, instead of dropping out or giving up.

And as a report released just yesterday shows, kids who play instruments are even more likely to succeed in math. But don't trust the statistics; go to a school concert in your town. Take a look at a child's proud face as she takes a bow. Or talk to inspiring teachers, like Roberta Guaspari, who have matched their students with the instruments that they need to come alive and transform lives.

Roberta is the teacher whose remarkable story of courage and commitment will be told in the new movie, "Music of the Heart." If we ever needed proof that music education works, we need only listen now to the talented young people in Roberta's East Harlem Violin Program. They are here to perform the number one song in America, the theme from "Music of the Heart," with Gloria Estefan and 'NSync. (Applause.)

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THE PRESIDENT: Well, I don't know how much longer we have on the commercial break, and I don't own this network, so I could really get the hook. (Laughter.)

But let me thank you, and thank all the artists. And I've got all this stuff to say on the teleprompter at the end, but I just want to tell you why I did this. I still remember Miss Lucille Rutherford, who taught me to sing, and George Gray, who taught me to play the clarinet and the saxophone; my two junior high school band directors; and my wonderful high school band director, Virgil Sperlen. And I don't think I would have become President if it hadn't been for school music. And that's why I did this. And I thank you. Thank you. (Applause.)

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THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Robert deNiro for the introduction, for your friendship, for your fabulous movies. (Laughter.) Let me thank all of the wonderful performers who have

graced this stage today; they have blessed our lives and all of America who has heard them. Let's give them all a big hand one more time. (Applause.)

We respect and honor them for their talents and their knowledge of music. But we also respect what they have given us tonight. I respect them so much, I left my saxophone up in the White House. (Laughter.) But we have had another wonderful lesson this afternoon, thanks to the National Endowment of the Arts, which is supporting our country's living cultural heritage; and VH-1, the Save the Music Foundation, preserving our musical traditions.

The most important lesson we've had is that what we've seen in stunning brilliance tonight should at least be a possibility in the lives and the minds of all of our children. Music education is very important to me. When I was a young boy as a school musician, I started at nine with Ms. Lillian Rutherford and George Gray learning to sing and play. I learned that music was more than scales or keys or how to make sure I was always in tune. Music taught me how to mix practice and patience with creativity. Music taught me how to be both an individual performer and a good member of a team. It taught me how to work always to bring mind and body and spirit together and the beauty of music.

And so for all my teachers, for the ones I mentioned, for my junior high school band directors, Carol Powell and Joel Duskin, for my wonderful friend Virgil Sperlen, who taught me in high school. Some are still with me, some have gone on to their reward. I want to say again, I don't think I would be President if it hadn't been for school music. (Applause.)

And I am very grateful to John Sykes, to VH-1, to all the wonderful stars and performers who are here tonight, because they want to give all our young people that same opportunity to learn, to achieve, to express themselves -- and to develop their math brain cells. (Laughter.)

This century has been called the American Century. It gave rise to democracy around the world. For the first time in history, more than half the world's people are living under governments of their own choosing. So we gave that to the world. But at the same time, we mustn't forget that America brought the world the rhythm of jazz, the consolation of country, the hard truth of the blues, the excitement of rock 'n' roll. And the diversity of our music, and our musicians -- which we have seen tonight -- mirrors the diversity of our people, and reminds us of the greatest lesson we have always to teach and always to learn: that we are stronger when we're playing in harmony, based on our common humanity. (Applause.)

A stunning example of that is the great American songwriter, George Gershwin, a Jewish boy from New York who wrote the magnificent black opera, "Porgy and Bess." He listened to others. And he once said, "true music must repeat the thought and inspirations of the people and the time."

My people are Americans and my time is today. Let us promise that we Americans will keep American music and the spirit it represents, inspiring our children and their children as we enter the new millennium.

Thank you and God bless you all. (Applause.)

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6:08 P.M. EDT