

December 3, 1978

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT

AT

RECEPTION FOR RECIPIENTS OF KENNEDY CENTER HONORS

EAST ROOM

THE WHITE HOUSE

6:30 P.M. EST

First of all, let me say that it is a great honor for us to participate in this delightful and memorable event, to have the honorees here on the platform with me and to have all of you come to recognize superb talent and performance.

I feel somewhat out of place here with these great people, but I am not going to apologize. (Laughter) They say that politics is the second oldest profession, and closely related to the first. (Laughter) I am not going to comment on that, but I would like to say that I think politics is perhaps the oldest and perhaps the foremost of the performing arts. (Laughter)

There is a lot of similarity, and I feel very close to the performers when I assess my own contributions daily and think about the advice that is always given, "Always leave the public demanding more." (Laughter) This always seems to me my relationship. (Applause)

I think that this evening there is a correlation between political life and the performing arts. Perhaps the two most significant contributions of the United States of America have been a constant and sustained commitment to political freedom on the one hand and a worldwide acknowledgment of the vitality of our contribution to the arts.

This evening we are recognizing five people, who by any possible standard, have achieved a level of not only American but worldwide greatness. It is not necessary for me to comment on their accomplishments. Their work speaks for itself.

(MORE)

As you know, they are different, one from another. But collectively they represent a broad picture of what Americans have come to honor and trust and revere and enjoy and the enjoyment and participation in the arts of all kinds. The performing arts let us see art in the state of being actually created. That is the significance of this art form.

Not long ago Marian Anderson came here to the White House to receive a special gold medal mandated by an Act of Congress. When I handed her the medal, unfortunately, I dropped it on the floor and it is now in the process of being repaired. (Laughter) But as she came in the door this evening, I thought about her, how she has let her own great contributions as one of the world's foremost singers characterize the tension, the suffering, the anguish, the struggle, the courage, and the achievement of her own people.

Her talent was so great that racial prejudice could not stand in its way. And she is being recognized tonight, as she has on many former occasions, for the greatness of her life and the greatness of her performance. (Applause)

Whenever anyone uses the word style or class, they think about Fred Astaire. (Applause) He lives in the consciousness of the entire world, and he has a reputation that is well-deserved for effortless grace in the performance of his great art. He is not only a superb dancer, but a notable singer and also, of course, a great actor. And I am honored to have the chance to recognize you with my brief words this evening, Fred Astaire. (Applause)

George Balanchine came to our country about 45 years ago. There is no argument throughout the world that he is the greatest choreographer of the 20th century. (Applause) And many of us who are very knowledgeable think he is the greatest choreographer of all time. (Applause)

His imagination and his spirit, the innovation which he has brought to his art form has made the New York City Ballet Company the most innovative and the most creative dance company in the world. And it is a great honor to have you here, George Balanchine.

Richard Rodgers completed his first show in 1925, and the quantity of his music can only be matched by its sus-

(MORE)

tained unchanging quality. The words Rodgers and Hart, Rodgers and Hammerstein are an integral part of the life of tens of millions of Americans who have been introduced to superb music by the fine work of Mr. Rodgers. Many people think he is two people because his accomplishments have been so great. But there is no doubt that he is the most popular composer that our country has ever known. And it is a great honor to have you here. (Applause)

And Arthur Rubinstein -- (Applause) -- is the world's most beloved concert pianist, and this love which he enjoys is so obviously well-deserved. A child prodigy himself, he first came to make a United States tour in 1903, 75 years ago. The joy that has always been expressed in his music is exemplary of the joy which his life itself has represented. The brilliance of his music is combined with a poetic, simple, heartfelt warmth and sensitivity and compassion. And no musical performer could combine to any more superlative degree those sometimes conflicting characteristics, but somehow, because of his great talent, there is no conflict between brilliance and technical achievement on the one hand and warmth and feeling on the other.

These five people, Americans, great, beloved, recognized, come here tonight to be honored through the auspices of the Kennedy Center. But as a matter of fact, they come here to honor us and all the people of the world.

Thank you very much. (Applause)

END

(AT 6:40 P.M. EST)