

Administration of Barack Obama, 2011

Remarks at PBS's "Country Music: In Performance at the White House"

November 21, 2011

Everybody, please have a seat. Thank you so much. Well, good evening, everybody. I have been on the road a lot lately; I know the entertainers who are here tonight can relate. Johnny Cash was really singing our song when he said, "I've been everywhere, man." *[Laughter]* So I appreciate you all coming out for the best welcome-home party that I've had in a long time. I even see some members of my Cabinet and Members of Congress in the house.

Michelle and I are delighted that all of you are here for the seventh in a series of evenings we've hosted here at the White House to celebrate the music that has helped to shape our Nation.

Now, over the past couple of years, some of the greatest artists from Motown, from jazz, classical, Broadway have honored us with their performances. We've celebrated Latin rhythms and the music that helped define the civil rights movement. And tonight we're transforming the East Room into a bona fide country music hall.

As Charley Pride, who played here 2 years ago, once said: "There is enough room in country music for everybody." And over the past 5 years, I've had the extraordinary opportunity to travel all across America. I've hopped on planes to big cities. I've ridden buses through small towns. And along the way, I've gained an appreciation for just how much country music means to so many Americans.

Tonight we're thrilled to welcome a couple of generations of music stars, some of whom have been singing stories of life in America since before our younger guests were born, before I was born. Artists like James Taylor, Lyle Lovett, and Kris Kristofferson are—*[applause]*—these are among the greats that helped carry country music from regional radio to national popularity. Today, artists like Mickey and Lauren Alaina, The Band Perry, and Dierks Bentley aren't just topping the charts, they're taking country worldwide. I am so pleased to welcome back to the White House one of the enduring voices of country music, Alison Krauss. I love her. And we have Hootie in the house—*[laughter]*—Darius Rucker is now one of the best-loved country stars around.

I want also to thank Kris, Lyle, and Darius for joining Michelle this afternoon to lead a workshop on the history of country music for young musicians. It is a proud history that runs from barn stomping to the great honky-tonks to the big stage to the Grammys. It's a unique history that ties together many threads of our immigrant heritage—like the Irish fiddle, the German dulcimer, the Italian mandolin, the Spanish guitar, and the West African banjo—into music that is truly made in America. And at its most pure, that's what country music is all about: life in America. It's about storytelling, giving voice to the emotions of everyday life. Brad Paisley put it simply: "This is real, this is your life in a song. This is country music."

Country music can be about love. It can be about heartache. It can sing sad times, or it can yell out that I'm just here having a good time. And it can remind us, especially when lots of our friends and neighbors are going through tough times, of what we've got to fight for and who we have to be. It reminds us that this is America. This is a place where you can make it if you try. And there is a pretty good Brooks & Dunn song about that. I recommend it.
[Laughter]

So as we look forward to celebrating this holiday season, let's take the time to appreciate the things that matter most in our lives: country, family, and community. And let's kick it off by giving thanks for a evening of down-home country music. Have fun, and enjoy the evening.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:16 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to entertainer Mickey Guyton.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : "Country Music: In Performance at the White House".

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Names: Bentley, Dierks; Brooks, Leon E. "Kix," III; Dunn, Ronnie G.; Guyton, Mickey; Krauss, Alison; Kristofferson, Kristoffer; Lovett, Lyle P.; Obama, Michelle; Paisley, Brad D.; Perry, Kimberly; Perry, Neil; Perry, Reid; Pride, Charley F.; Rucker, Darius; Suddeth, Lauren Alaina K.; Taylor, James V.

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