

Ms. Rankin. What does it say to the public to have such important sort of star power behind a program like “VH1 Save The Music?”

The President. Well, I hope that it increases the public’s awareness. I hope it says, hey, this is really important. I mean, these people could all be doing something else. And I hope it says to them, if all these people who do music for a living think it’s important for all our kids to have access to music, maybe it is.

New York City Schools

Ms. Rankin. All right. These guys—do you go to this school, P.S. 96?

Audience members. Yes.

Ms. Rankin. All right, so the program and what’s happening with the New York City school boards and public education and music and what’s going on here today—can you talk a little bit about what’s being presented today and what’s going to—

The President. Yes. If you look at these students here, VH1 has given them these instruments, so they’re going to start a music program. Now, just a couple of years ago, this school had one of the worst performances in New York. And they’ve gone from having 80 percent of their kids not read at grade level to having three-quarters of their kids read at or above grade level in only 2 years. So they want this school to be one of the best schools in New York.

They have a school uniform policy, as you see, which is a very positive thing, I think. And now they want a music program. And what they

know is not only will these children learn music and they’ll enjoy it; it will further increase the academic performance of this school.

So I think they’re all excited about it, and they’re all proud of their school. Aren’t you?

Audience members. Yes.

Ms. Rankin. It’s just kind of exciting to have President Clinton here, too, right?

Audience members. Yes.

Ms. Rankin. Oh, yes, just a little.

Audience member. An honor.

Music in the President’s Life

Ms. Rankin. An honor. A big honor.

One last thing. TV moments, music moments on television—what stands out in your mind as a huge one growing up, present day?

The President. When the Beatles were on Ed Sullivan. When Elvis Presley was on Ed Sullivan. I think those two things, when I was very young, made a big impression on me.

Ms. Rankin. Cool. All right. Thank you very much. I think you have to go back downstairs, so—[laughter]. These are things—I can’t see what’s going on, but I think my 5 minutes are up.

Thank you so much. It was such an honor.

The President. Thank you.

NOTE: The interview was videotaped at 8:40 a.m. in Classroom 200 at the Joseph C. Lanzetta School (Public School 96) for later broadcast. In his remarks, the President referred to John Sykes, president, VH1; and musician Jon Bon Jovi.

Remarks on the “VH1 Save The Music Today” Campaign in New York City

June 16, 2000

The President. Thank you very much. Good morning.

Audience members. Good morning.

The President. I’d like to begin by thanking Barry Rosenblum and Time Warner; Sumner Redstone. Thank you, my long-time friend Billy Joel; and Brian McKnight, whom I admire so much. Thank you, Chancellor Levy.

I’d like to thank the student band over here from Dr. Susan McKinney Junior High School.

Thank you for being here. I see Comptroller Green, President Fields, Senator; thank you all for being here.

I’d like to thank Randi Weingarten and the people from the United Federation of Teachers who are here. I don’t know if any Members of the Congress are here. I think they’re still voting—[laughter]—which is not a bad thing.

So what I would like to do now is to begin with the important things. First, my long-time

friend John Sykes—I say “long-time friend”; we’ve only really known each other about 4 years, but I’ve spent more time with him in the last 4 years than anybody but Hillary, I think—[*laughter*]—because of our love for music and because of this project, which—there have been only a few days when I wondered if I made a mistake volunteering to help, because he took it seriously.

But I do love this, and I’ll say a little more about it in a moment. I love it because of the potential it has to transform the lives of these young people. And I would like to say, first of all, Kelvin, I thought you did a great job speaking up here. One of the reasons I like music is it gives young people self-confidence and a sense of the reward you get for disciplined effort, so more of them would be able to speak like you in public. That was good.

And I would like to say especially and most of all how much I appreciate the remarkable work that Victor Lopez, the principal, and the teachers and the parents have done on this school in the last few years. I can’t thank you enough.

This school, a couple of years ago, was identified by everybody as a low-performing school. Eighty percent of the kids weren’t reading at grade level. Enter Mr. Lopez and his team and the supportive parents: smaller classes; after-school programs; parental involvement; school uniforms; and now a commitment to music education.

In the last year alone, the number of P.S. 96 third graders reading at or above grade level has gone up more than 300 percent; in 2 years, student performance from 20 percent at or above grade level to 74 percent—in 2 years. This is astonishing for the school. And now they want music education. Why? Because it’s also good for academics, as you’ve already heard.

But I want to just—everybody stop and take a deep breath. Look at these kids. All children can learn, and all children deserve a chance to learn. And the teachers and the principal and the parents here have done this, so give them another hand. This is unbelievable. Bravo! [*Applause*]

You know, I often say that I might not have been President if it hadn’t been for school music. And it’s really true. I started playing an instrument when I was 9. I started singing in the school chorus when I was younger than that. And then when aging took my voice from three

octaves to about three notes—[*laughter*]—which, thankfully, didn’t happen to my buddies over here—I just had to concentrate more on my saxophone.

And I want to say to all of you who are fixing to start this program, the first music I made was not very nice to hear. But my mother tolerated it, and I just kept on working at it. And what I learned was that if you’re willing to have patience and discipline and you practice, pretty soon you can make something really beautiful, and it can help you be a better member of the team; it can help you be a happier person; it can make you a better person; and it can also be an awful lot of fun.

I still play my saxophone. A couple of years ago, Hillary made a music room for me in a little room on the top floor of the White House that we weren’t using, that was way at the end of a hall, and it had two doors, so no one could hear me when I was playing. [*Laughter*] And I still go in there.

I have musical instruments now I’ve collected from all over the world. I have saxophones from all over the world now, made in China and Russia and Japan and Poland and the Czech Republic and Germany and France and, of course, the United States. And I have lots of other instruments from every continent. And I just go in there, and I play. And no matter what else is going on, I can go in and play for 15 or 20 minutes, and I’m full of energy and ready to start again. That’s what you can have if you get into this music program.

But the other thing I want to emphasize is, one of the things that we know—and John Sykes mentioned this—is that learning improves in school environments where there are comprehensive music programs. It increases the ability of young people to do math. There is a lot of math in music. It increases the ability of young people to read, and as I said, most important of all, it’s a lot of fun.

The great scientist Albert Einstein once said—it might surprise you—“I get the most joy out of my violin. I often think in music. I see my life in terms of music.” Albert Einstein was the greatest scientist of the 20th century. Some people nominated him for Man of the Century and thought he should have been determined to be the Man of the Century. No one believes he was a great violin player. He didn’t care if he wasn’t a great violin player. I don’t care if I’m not a great saxophone player. It’s

enough to be able to do it and to get the benefits of it.

So that's what VH1 has done, getting contributions, getting these musical instruments. Now, I want to say—John Sykes made a joke about the warm environment on Capitol Hill—it's not as warm as it is up on this stage, under these lights. *[Laughter]* This is a good preparation to go back to Congress. *[Laughter]* But what he didn't tell you is that he and others developed a congressional resolution to stress the importance of music education, and just this week the House of Representatives passed it unanimously. I think he should start giving me lobbying advice. They passed it unanimously.

Now, what does that mean? Well, a couple of years ago, Hillary chaired this Commission on Arts and the Humanities, and they found that the most important factor in keeping music in the schools or getting music back into the schools was not a Federal program but whether the local people whose kids were in the schools wanted music in the schools. So we need to keep trying to provide money to the schools to hire teachers, to build or remodel buildings, to give more money to schools with a lot of low income students at the national level. And we need to keep supporting the "Save The Music" program.

But one of the things that John wants is for the "Save The Music" program to lead people at the community level to insist that music ought to be in all the schools, whether he gives them the instruments or not. And that's what I—that's the last point I want to make today. You have got to help us help all of our schools keep these music programs. Over the last 20 years, we've gotten rid of music, art, and physical education. The consequence is that in the places that don't have it, student achievement is lower than it ought to be, and the kids are not as healthy as they should be. We need to bring these things back to our schools, and I want you to help them. That's one of the reasons I came here.

I'll leave you with this thought: You are living in a world where all kinds of different people live in America and where Americans, through the Internet and travel, are going to have to relate to all kinds of different people around the world.

I just got back from Russia, where I had a dinner with the Russian President. And afterward he said, "We're going to go in to entertainment," so I thought they would have someone dancing Russian ballet. I thought they would have someone playing Rachmaninoff. But instead, because he knew what I liked, the President of Russia gave me a private concert from the biggest jazz band in Russia, the best student musicians in Russia, the age of some of the people here, who were unbelievable, and the man who may be the greatest living jazz saxophone player, who happens to be a Russian, who played for me.

It is a universal language. It is the music of the heart and the language of the heart. Thanks to John Sykes and all of his partners and all of you, maybe next year and the year after and the year after, there will be more and more children with the chance that you're going to have next year, until all of our kids have it again.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:42 a.m. in the Auditorium at the Joseph C. Lanzetta School (Public School 96) in East Harlem. In his remarks, he referred to Barry Rosenblum, president, Time Warner Cable of New York; Sumner M. Redstone, chairman and chief executive officer, Viacom; musicians Billy Joel and Brian McKnight; Harold O. Levy, chancellor, New York City Public Schools; C. Virginia Fields, president, Borough of Manhattan; Randi Weingarten, president, United Federation of Teachers; John Sykes, president, VH1; Victor Lopez, principal, and Kelvin Eusebio, student, Joseph C. Lanzetta School; and President Vladimir Putin of Russia.