DRAFT - President Clinton remarks for Isaac Stern Tribute, January 28, 1997

Good Evening, Isaac, ladies and gentleman.

Isaac, you have lifted our hearts with your music. You have used this international language to communicate with people throughout the United States and around the world, inspiring countless others to use their own talent to spread beauty and joy. You have performed on the national American stage as well as the concert stage, as one of the founders of the National Endowment for the Arts. My predecessor, President Bush, awarded you the highest honor our nation can bestow a civilian--the Presidential Medal of Freedom. President Johnson once said that the Medal of Freedom was a "means of national thanks and encouragement for the selfless effort and the brilliant task." You exemplify both ideals through the brilliance of your art, and the selflessness of your work as an unofficial ambassador of music and culture. And I am proud to have appointed you to the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities.

You have taught innumerable young people the preciousness of God's gift of talent, encouraging them to learn and grow, to reach outward beyond their own perceived limits. You have that rare ability, both in music and in words, to communicate with people at the most basic, honest, down-to-earth level, while still focusing on what is most noble, what is most uplifting. You have spoken of the stars while standing on the ground, and the range of people from all walks of life you've personally influenced and touched is extraordinary.

Your work for Carnegie Hall exemplifies this vision. My entire life, Carnegie Hall has been more than a building. It has been a kind of shorthand or symbol of excellence in performance, among millions who have never entered its doors. So it's sobering to think that you and your perseverance are responsible for the survival of this glorious cornerstone of American concert halls. Without your help, the very building that surrounds you would have been turned to rubble. The history-rich stage that lies beneath your feet would have disappeared.

And you saved more than just its physical life. Without you, the wonderful concerts and artists that has filled the Hall and enriched the lives of so many would have been silenced. And under your own Presidency, Carnegie Hall has become a national forum for musical education, recordings and nationwide broadcasts. Carnegie Hall has passed into our American language as the highest echelon of personal achievement. It is a place where hard work and talent are recognized. It represents the goals and high standards to which every person in our democratic country can aspire.

I understand that more than fifteen million dollars has been raised in your honor for this special night. This remarkable outpouring of support from the private sector shows just how much love and affection this country holds for you, personally, and for the Carnegie Hall you hold so dear. It is an example of how a shared love of excellence can inspire a diverse community like New York.

Isaac, I am so pleased to be able to congratulate you on this special night, where so many people have joined to pay you tribute. And for all your wonderful, precious gifts to the United States and the world, I thank you.