

3-19-1998

Opening Remarks, delivered at the Celebration of the Arts on March 19, 1998

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Presidential Speeches. 118.

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CELEBRATION OF THE ARTS

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MARCH 19, 1998

OPENING REMARKS

We are gathered today in the name of art and music. In the words of Charles B. Fairbanks, "Art is the surest and safest civilizer." If that is truly the case, we are gathered in a good cause. If we accept art, it becomes part of our daily life. Our perceptions of all, even minor events, are conditioned by it. Music becomes a prime stimulus for ideas and feelings. Art and music become as natural as breathing, and as essential for our living.

If then art and music are such permeating elements, they deserve high honor where learning, experiment, observation, practice, and performance take place. Certainly a university is such a place. New university facilities give cause to focus on and celebrate the arts. The facilities are both symbols of the university's commitment to the arts and the means to take them to higher levels of achievement. Occasions like this carry with them the enthusiasm to move us to greater accomplishments. The enclosure and rearrangement of space, all with inanimate materials, has the power to motivate the spirit and the mind to use that space in creative ways. Why not? After all, much creative art is expressed through inanimate materials.

We who experience these days of celebration will remember that they mark the advent of a new era in the arts at Grand Valley. Those who come after with no memory of what we do, will know only, that in the past people honored the arts. And because they did, Grand Valley students and faculty will continue in a long distinguished tradition of creation, performance, and learning in the field.

CELEBRATION OF THE ARTS**MARCH 19, 1998****CONFERRING OF HONORARY DEGREES**

We will proceed to the conferring of honorary degrees. The two distinguished scholar-artists who will receive them have enriched our dedication events. Dr. Stafford comes from the University of Chicago and Dr. Taruskin from the University of California-Berkley. We thank them for being here and welcome them as honorary alumni of our university, which they will become momentarily.

CELEBRATION OF THE ARTS

MARCH 19, 1998

INTRODUCTION OF PATRICIA CLARK

The program indicates that Professor Clark is Poet-in-Residence. That title is usually given to a visiting artist who is on campus for a semester or even a year or two. Pat is more in residence than that. We are establishing at the University the position of Poet Laureate, and Professor Clark is our first Poet Laureate. It is my understanding that among a Poet Laureate's responsibilities is the reflection of events, people, feelings and thoughts in the community that she represents. From time to time her poems will be read at University ceremonies, and published in University journals and papers.

Her book of poems, North of Wondering, to be published this fall, won the book competition by Women in Literature, Incorporated. Her poems have been published widely. Among the journals are the New England Review, The North American Review, Poetry, and The New Criterion. Her poem "Bill of Sale," was the co-winner of the Poetry Society of America's Lucille Medwick Memorial Award. Another award winner was a poem entitled "Dash Point." Since she has just assumed her position as Poet Laureate, she has not composed a work specifically for this occasion, but this occasion is an appropriate one to introduce our Poet Laureate and ask her to read to us. Recently she won the Mississippi Review's Poetry Prize. The winning poem is "The Only Body," which she will read to us now.

CELEBRATION OF THE ARTS**MARCH 19, 1998****INTRODUCTION OF HENRY MATTHEWS**

Henry Matthews is one of the best Art Museum Directors I have known, and he directs a museum that is one of the nation's gems. Cities the size of Muskegon are not expected to have distinguished art collections, but Muskegon does. It is here for us in west Michigan to savor, and others in good time to discover. Our artists have collaborated with the Muskegon Museum of Art often. A close relationship between the University and the Museum has existed for over twenty years.

Henry Matthews took his Bachelor's Degree in painting and sculpture at Alma College and his Masters in Art History from Wayne State University where I am sure he haunted the Detroit Institute for the Arts. He served as Assistant Director before becoming Director and has been the Curator of Collections and Exhibitions at Muskegon since 1985. Henry seems to us a part of the Grand Valley community. He advises us on matters concerning art purchases for the campus. He helps us with exhibitions and we help him. I am pleased to introduce our good friend, Henry Matthews, to discuss the Arts in West Michigan.

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CELEBRATION OF THE ARTS

MARCH 19, 1998

CLOSING REMARKS

You have noticed, I am sure, we have quietly moved Alexander Calder's name from the building we are in to the new building for the visual arts. That transfer was crowned by a loan of a Calder Sculpture that prominently introduces the building. This building, known now as the Performing Arts Center, though dedicated for music, has more renovation and additions in its future. This summer this hall will be redecorated and improved, along with theatre department facilities. An addition for the theatre department will be built to the south.

I want to call your attention to one more nationally recognized artist who is participating in our celebration. David Plowden has emerged as one of the nation's preeminent photographers. As an artist of Americana, the most preeminent. We are fortunate to have David as a visiting Professor for several years. At 5:30 p.m., in Room 176 Lake Michigan Hall, he is presenting a lecture/slide show. This will be special. You should make an effort to see it. After the lecture show and some food and drink, don't miss the NEXUS concert at 7:00 p.m.

Please move between this building and Alexander Calder Art Center. They are both open for tours and exhibitions. Supper receptions will be served in both buildings.

This brings our convocation to a close, almost. The recessional is special as well. Professor Pieter Snapper was commissioned to compose it. It is entitled

“Telos.” The piece is electroacoustic, made in the computer music studio here. He recorded construction sounds last summer and from this raw material, “Telos” was built. Its title, Pieter tells us, has to do with directions. I am confident it will lead us out. The main pulse (a cue for the recessional to begin) is the sound of the sand packer used in making the floor of the recital hall. The original sounds are transformed as the procession continues. I am relieved that it is the Marshall who has to pick up the cue and not me. I will be a good follower.