

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH BILLY JOEL

SUBJECT: GRAMMY-AWARD WINNING ARTIST WILL ADDRESS A LUNCHEON

MODERATOR: SYLVIA SMITH, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

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SYLVIA SMITH: (Sounds gavel.) Good afternoon. My name is Sylvia Smith and I'm the Washington editor of the Ft. Wayne *Journal Gazette*. And I'm president of the National Press Club.

We're the world's leading professional organization for journalists. And on behalf of our 3,500 members worldwide, I'd like to welcome our speaker and our guests in the audience today. I'd also like to welcome those who are watching on C-Span or listening on XM Satellite Radio.

We're celebrating our 100th anniversary this year, and we've rededicated ourselves to a commitment to a future of journalism through informative programming, journalism education, and fostering a free press worldwide. For more information about the Press Club, please visit our website at www.press.org.

We're looking forward to today's speech, and afterward, I'll ask as many questions from the audience as time permits. Please hold your applause during the speech so that we have as much time for questions as possible.

I'd like to explain that if you do hear applause, it may be from the guests and members of the general public who attend our luncheons, not necessarily from the working press, a caveat I usually say about politicians.

I'd now like to introduce our head table guests and ask them to stand briefly when their names are called. From you're right, Jonathan Salant, a reporter with Bloomberg News and a past president of the Press Club; Marilou Donahue, producer, editor, and host of *Artistically Speaking*; Tammy Lytle, a freelancer and another past president of the National Press Club; Neisa Condemaita, a producer of the Washington bureau at Azteca America Television; Jeff Dufour, columnist with *The Washington Examiner*; Edwin London, business advisor to Billy Joel and one of our speaker's guests; Angela Greiling-Keane of Bloomberg News and chairwoman of the Speakers Committee. And we'll skip over our speaker for just a minute.

Andrew Schneider, associate editor of Kiplinger Washington Editors, and organizer of today's luncheon. Thank you very much Andrew. Lee Eastman of Eastman & Eastman, one of our speaker's guests; Maureen Groppe, Gannett News Service and secretary of the National Press Club; Eleanor Herman, an author; and Arlen Withers, a consultant. Welcome everyone. (Applause.)

Anyone who needs an introduction to today's speaker has probably not listened to the radio for the past four decades. It would be hard to overstate the impact Billy Joel has had on popular music, both as a performer and a composer. He has shown his versatility in music, ranging from ballads and love songs to hard driving rock, to classical piano.

In his songs, he has spoken to topics ranging from the plight of factory communities, commercial fisherman, and Vietnam veterans, to the broad sweep of the baby boomers' life experience. His concert touring schedule would exhaust even the most seasoned foreign correspondent. In 1987, he became the first U.S. rockstar to bring a full production to the Soviet Union. In the past two years alone, he has played to capacity crowds in The United Kingdom, Ireland, Italy, South Africa, Australia, and Japan, not to mention audiences across the U.S.

And to cap his diplomatic career, he can now forever claim the mantle of the only artist to play both Yankee Stadium and Shea Stadium. Between recording and touring, he has given generously of his time and talents in support of a plethora of worthy causes – the environment, troubled farmers, music education, famine relief, disaster relief, soldiers in the field, and the victims of the 9/11 attack.

For his work, he has been widely and justly honored. Sixteen of his albums have gone platinum or multi-platinum with U.S. sales of a million or more. He is the winner of six Grammy Awards, including the prestigious Grammy Legend Award for his ongoing contributions in the recording field. He was inducted into the rock and roll hall of fame in 1999 and given a star on the

Hollywood Walk of Fame in 2005. His record 12 sold-out concerts at New York's Madison Square Garden earned him the first retired number (that is 12) by a non-athlete in that arena's history.

And Washington, too, has recognized his contributions. In 2000, the Smithsonian Institution awarded him with the James Smithson bicentennial medal of honor.

Fame does not exist in a vacuum, though. Achieving and sustaining it requires people who spread the word of who you are and what you've accomplished. That can sometimes lead to a rocky relationship between a celebrity and the press, particularly when coverage steps over the line from career to private life. Our guest has had his share of such treatment, but members of the media have also had an undeniably positive affect on his life. They range from Press Club member Louellen King(?), a friend of our guest's family since the early 1960s, to his wife, Katie Lee, a chef and regular contributor to The Huffington Post. Please join me in giving a warm National Press Club welcome to the Piano Man, Billy Joel. (Applause.)

MR. BILLY JOEL: Thank you for that intro. I was wondering why you guys wanted me here. And now I know, I guess. Actually it was three stadiums. You forgot Giant Stadium. That's okay. No. It's a hat trick. We did the hat trick. Anyway, I didn't really come prepared with a speech. This is the first time I was asked to speech-ify here.

I did have an idea. I was trying to think of something timely for the press, especially in Washington, D.C. The premise that I thought I might try to talk about, which would be timely now was going to be why I have studiously avoided political endorsements in my career. And a week ago, I did a fundraiser for one of the presidential candidates. I kind of blew that one out of the water. So might be something that comes up in a question, but--

But anyway, I'm not going to get up on a soapbox here. I am a piano player, and not all that good, despite what people might think. The guy in the lobby is probably a better pianist than I am. I happen to be able to figure out how to write songs and I can sing in key when I try. And since we only have an hour, I might as well just jump right to the questions. That's my speech. That was it.

MS. SMITH: Brilliant speech. Thank you. (Applause.)

MR. JOEL: Vote for me. Keep it short.

MS. SMITH: We can tell you're not a politician. But you are a celebrity. And, as you pointed out, celebrities often involve themselves in the political

process. Except for the fact that you did do that concert on behalf of Obama, tell me a little bit about your thinking about celebrities who involve themselves in electoral politics.

MR. JOEL: Well, I was asked to do a fundraiser. And I've never discussed my political views to an audience. You know, people pay for tickets. I don't think they want to hear what you-- who you're going to vote for, how you think they should vote. (Applause.) I just-- I don't know.

I get insulted when I'm at a show and somebody starts talking to me about political stuff. You know, I didn't come here to hear that song, you know? In a way, it's condescending. You know, my politics have been my own in the sanctity of the voting booth. But over the last few months, you know, just-- There's a quote that keeps occurring to me. And it's a Dante quote. And it says, "The darkest places in hell are reserved for those who maintain their neutrality in times of moral crisis." I thought, oh, okay. (Laughter.) All-righty. I don't want to be in that place, so. So I did this fundraiser.

But, you know, it's bad for business too, you know? Half your audience may disagree with you and then, "I'm not gonna come see him again. The hell with him." So, you know, your political views-- And there's also the-- What if I'm wrong? What if I'm wrong? It's possible. It's possible I could be wrong. And if someone is not-- hasn't decided, is weak-minded enough to allow me to make the decision for them, then we've got a real problem. What is it that Groucho Marx said? Anybody who would want me as a member of their club, I don't want to belong to in the first place. So there's a little bit of that. Anyway, so. That's how I feel about that stuff.

MS. SMITH: Some of your songs like "Goodnight Saigon" are quite political in their message. What's the one song of yours that you feel is most political in its message and meaning? Or maybe you can play a bar or two.

MR. JOEL: You know, in a way, everything's political. I mean, love is political. There's a lot of politics involved in relationships. There's politics with friendships. There's politics with family. I don't know when we're ever not being political. Overtly political, having to do with geopolitics would probably-- There was a song called "Leningrad" which was written about an encounter I had with a guy in Russia when we were in the Soviet Union.

For me, the Cold War ended when I met this guy. He was a clown in a circus and he made my daughter laugh. He was doing things to make her laugh. And I realized, I said, "We're not going to-- I'm not going to fight with these people. We're not going to have a war with these people." The Cold War ended for me right then. I wrote a song about it. I took some liberties with dates and

stuff, but I wanted to kind of encompass the Cold War, which was-- The defining geopolitical climate in my lifetime was the Cold War. It amazed me to this day that there's a lot of younger people who don't even know what I'm talking about.

But I remember hiding under the desk, waiting for the mushroom cloud. The teacher would say, "Okay, if you hide under the desk, and you put your hands over your head"-- We all though, "Eh, kiss your ass goodbye," you know? Like, that's really going to stop that radiation from burning us all up. We knew when we were children. And I think we were terrified about the potential of a nuclear war.

So that was my way of addressing that particular situation. I know there's a song, "We Didn't Start The Fire" which a lot of schoolchildren learned. And that wasn't really an attempt to write a political song. That was just a bunch of headlines and a terrible melody. That's an example of writing the lyrics first. Because I usually write the music first. But the melody goes like this (Playing piano.). Terrible melody--

MS. SMITH: You're right. It does sound much better with the lyrics.

MR. JOEL: Well, yeah, the lyrics, you get away with a lot when you can throw a whole bunch of lyrics into a song, and-- '49 through '89, and I realized I was running out of time. And I'm jumped through the '70s in, like, three sentences, and that was it.

And I'm not really trying to write a political song when I write these kinds of things. I'm trying to talk about people. Even the song you mentioned, "Goodnight Saigon", was about my friends who had gone to Vietnam. They asked me to write this song. And I said, "I can't write a song about Vietnam. I wasn't there." And they said, "We'll tell you what happened to us. We'll tell you what to write, and you write it."

I realized the definitive novel about the Civil War is written by a man who wasn't even in the war. His name was Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage*. And I said, "Well I guess maybe it can be done." And we sat down and we talked. And really what I wanted to talk about was how people felt, the situations people found themselves in, real human beings, how they react to things, how they feel, how they respond. I never really tried to sit down and, "Hmm, I'll write a political barnburner now." I never thought like that.

MS. SMITH: Tell me a little more about that conversation or series of conversations you had with your friends. What kind of questions-- You weren't in Vietnam. What kind of questions did you ask them? How did you draw them out?

MR. JOEL: Well, they had never really been welcomed home. There weren't a lot of parades. There wasn't a lot of celebration when these guys came back. We were all the same age. And they went through a terrible time coming home and trying to make that adjustment from the trauma of war to normal life again. And they really never got the welcome they should have gotten. They put their lives at stake. And some of them didn't come back.

And we spent the night. I took notes, listening to them, what they were saying. You know, it wasn't about what was wrong and what was right. It wasn't about-- was America and what was-- It was about you and your friends, you know, trying to hold onto each other and, you know, trying to survive. And at the time, it was all about us against them, just to be able to stay alive.

It's hard for us who haven't been through, tempered by war to understand, you know, how basic survival, how much basic survival, how much you depend on each other and your comrades at arms. And that's what struck me the most about that.

MS. SMITH: Just forward then to last year when you wrote "Christmas in Fallujah". How would you contrast those two songs and the experiences of writing those two songs?

MR. JOEL: Well, I just thought it was-- It's strange that I found-- that we were involved in another war again. You know, there were young people being sent off to a foreign land to risk their lives and some of them weren't going to come back. I didn't sing that song-- I made a demo of it when I wrote it. I heard my voice. When I wrote it, was 58 years-old. And I said, "Eh, it can't be a 58 year-old guy singing this song." It's got to be somebody about 19 or 20, a soldier's age.

And my guitar player had been working with a younger artist. And we asked him to come in and sing this song. I said, "That's the voice. That's the voice." I actually did want to try to help somebody else's career. I've had a lot of success in the recording industry and hit records. Although I have to give Columbia Records the credit because I wouldn't pick a hit if it bit me in the butt. I have no idea. I hand in an album. I do an album's worth of material. I give it to the record company. I say, "Here. Now it's your turkey. You figure it out." Then they do their study groups and their demographic focus stuff and hocus-pocus. And then they come up with the one they want for the singles. People think I'm picking these things. I ain't pickin' 'em. They're pickin' 'em, so. I got to give them credit. Columbia's got a lot of good hit-pickers.

MS. SMITH: What's been the reaction of Iraq veterans to that song? Do you have a sense of that?

MR. JOEL: There was an appreciation by some people. Some people didn't like it. Some people took offense. Some people, you know, just said, "Well, you have a right to express how you feel." Some people appreciated it. It was all over the place.

MS. SMITH: Talk about those hit-pickers. What would you have chosen? What's a song, example of a song that you didn't think would be a hit, besides this one, and one--

MR. JOEL: Oh, "Piano Man." I didn't think "Piano Man" would be a hit.

MS. SMITH: Really?

MR. JOEL: It's a waltz. (Playing piano.) It's in six/eight time where you can waltz to it. You know, there's a harmonica. It's kind of a limerick more than a lyric, "John at the bar is a friend of mine/He gets me my drinks for free/He's quick with a joke/Or light up your smoke/da dib-a dah-dib-a dah-bee." (Laughter.) "There once was a girl from Nantucket/Dah dah-dah dah dah-dah dah-dah." (Laughter.) Had no idea that this would be a hit single. It wasn't like anything else on the radio.

You know, it's funny. I walk into, like, a lobby in a hotel or at a restaurant where there's a piano. And they recognize me. And I'm like the patron saint of piano bar guys. And they start playing the song, you know (Playing piano.)-- And I'm thinking to myself, "He doesn't realize the song doesn't go anywhere." (Playing piano.) And, you know (Playing piano.). Thank god for that little part that goes (Playing piano.)

And then I look at him, I go (Laughter.)-- I'm as surprised-- (Applause.) I think all of 'em; I've been surprised at every record that was a hit. "Uptown Girl", some people can't stand me for that song. I'm just trying to sound like Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons (Singing.) like somebody's got a-hold of your-- (Laughter.)(Singing.)

And it was kind of an homage, but kind of a tongue in cheek homage to Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons. You know, they had a song called "Rag Doll" like, the guy was the rich guy and the girl (Singing.). I said, "Okay, I'll flip it the other way around. Now *I'm* the guy, the downtown guy. She's the uptown girl." And it became a hit, a hit record. It's kind of a joke. I'm surprised at any of 'em being hits, honestly.

MS. SMITH: Is this a commentary on American kids' taste?

MR. JOEL: Well, it's airplay. You know, you play something enough on the radio, people are going to get used to it or like it or want it or-- It's airplay [simultaneous conversation]--

MS. SMITH: ...(inaudible)?

MR. JOEL: Any ad(?). You know, who's that guy? Billy Mays? "Billy Mays!" Like, I have to turn the TV volume off, because, "Billy Mays! Buy"-- shut up! But they keep hiring the guy, so they must be buying this stuff. You know? If there's enough airplay, you know, people-- I guess, I don't know, they just want to buy it.

MS. SMITH: Well, somebody's desperate to ask this question. What's the story behind, "Still Rock 'N' Roll To Me" or does it speak to itself? And then in giant, Billy May's voice, "Play it!"

MR. JOEL: Well, that's kind of hard to do on a piano. That's a guitar song (Mimics a guitar.) like that. On a piano, it's (Playing piano.) doesn't really make it (Playing piano.) What's the story behind "Still Rock 'N' Roll To Me"....? I don't even think there is one. (Singing.) The chord progression might sound familiar. (Playing piano, singing.) I'm going to get sued by Bob now. (Laughter.) But yeah, it was just a commentary on, you know, the changing fashions. The more things change, the more they stay the same. That's pretty much it.

MS. SMITH: Well, that brings up a variation of many questions we have about your influences, people who have been influences on you. This one says, you've listed some of your own musical influences such as Beethoven, The Beatles, Ray Charles, Pete Seeger, Jackson Browne, The Rolling Stones, Wilson Pickett, Gordon Lightfoot, Elvis Presley, and I'm sure more. You've played with some of these greats over the years. Which musician was the most rewarding for you to perform or collaborate with?

MR. JOEL: Wow, I don't want to leave anybody out. If Ray Charles was probably the single most intense recording session I ever did. I heard that he wanted to do a recording with me. He worked with Quincy Jones, who was a friend of my producer, Phil Ramone. And the word came back, "Ray would like to do something with you." And I said, "Fantastic. Ray Charles, my idol. What are we looking to write? What am I going to write about?"

My daughter had just been born around the same time. And I'm thinking, "What do I have in common with Ray Charles? I'm this little nebbish from

Levittown. He's this African-American man from Georgia. What are we going to have in common?" The piano. I just had a baby, baby grand. Okay, so we wrote the song called "Baby Grand." And I'm waiting on pins and needles to hear if he likes the song. What if he doesn't like it? What if Ray doesn't like it, Ray hates it? Oh, what did I do? I really let myself, you know, be-- I'm gonna get crunched by this guy.

There's a call: "Mr. Charles on the phone." "Mr. Charles, what do you think?" "I like it. I want to do the song." He likes it! He likes it! Yeah. He likes my kid, you know? And I'm in the recording studio. This is a very expensive recording session, entire orchestra, Los Angeles rhythm section, bass guitars, drum, two pianos, video crews, you know, dive bombers, everything. It was very expensive, Hollywood recording session. And I'm sitting there, you know, waiting. And in walks Ray Charles.

And it was, like, you're seeing the Washington Monument walk in. It's, "He's actually going to do this. How am I going to do this?" I was kind of, like, paralyzed with fear. How are we going to get over it? And we played the piano. Phil Ramone had a great idea. He said, "Look — to break the ice, instead of trying to sing right at Ray Charles and him singing right at you, and you getting intimidated, why don't you relate as musicians?"

And we played. And here's what we-- Ray is-- He's got these great blues chops. And I just played the basic chords (Playing piano.) And Ray was going (Playing piano.) And we just started having a dialogue as musicians, as piano players, which was what the song was about (Playing piano, singing.) And then Ray kicks in (Playing piano, singing.) Then we went on from there. (Applause.)

And it worked out. I was able to break the ice with him, just by playing the piano. And then he started singing. And he was doing Ray. And I said, "I'll throw in a little Ray myself." And by the time we get to the end, we were just having a blast.

The most recent thing I did with someone, we played at Shea Stadium. (Applause.) And those of you who know the history of Shea, know that the first rock 'n' roll concert done in the stadium was done by The Beatles in 1965. So here we are. We're at Shea Stadium. It ended up, we did two nights at Shea. We're thinking, what you would call it? *To-Shea?* (Laughter.) You know? Shea...(inaudible). You know, the booking agents, they always like to have a name for something. So we said, "Okay, 'The Last Play at Shea'."

Then it turns out, a lot of people get aced out of tickets by scalpers. So we added another night. Now the people who thought they got, you know, the only night at Shea are, like-- They're all buggin'. And it's, oh, you can't please

everybody. What are you going to do? So we were gonna call it, 'The Last Play at Shea'. And then I thought, 'The Last *Double* Play at Shea.' And people were still bugged. But the second night-- We had lined up some guest artists to come to Shea — John Mellencamp, Don Henly, Tony Bennett, Steven Tyler from Aerosmith, Roger Daltry, Mellencamp I said-- Who? Garth Brooks, John Mayer.

Well, at the end of the show, somebody comes up and goes, "Paul's here," the second night. And I said, "*Paul Paul?*" (Laughter.) "*Paul Paul*" And he comes onstage and he's got that left-handed Hofner bass that he got out of the Smithsonian. I don't know how he pulled this together. And he walks onstage and it's, you know, Paul McCartney, the Beatle guy.

And at the end of the night-- You know, usually we'd end with "Piano Man". I said, "No, no, no, no, no. You end it. What do you want to end with?" And he said, "Let It Be." I said, "Of course." And it looked like we planned it all, but it was completely spontaneous. We had no idea that was going to happen. So that was an intense collaboration. (Applause.)

MS. SMITH: Are there any musicians that would dearly love to perform with that you haven't had an opportunity to perform with?

MR. JOEL: I've had some terrific opportunities to work with other musicians. I just did a show with Springsteen a week ago. That was a hoot. I had to learn his stuff. He had to learn my stuff. (Imitation of Springsteen.) He's trying to sing like me. We had to kind of deconstruct each other's material.

A guy I haven't worked with yet, who I would dearly love to work with is Eric Clapton. I think he's a terrific musician. And he's just got such a great technique on guitar. That would be someone I would like to work with eventually.

MS. SMITH: If you could bring any musician back from the dead to play with, who would it be?

MR. JOEL: To play with or just to bring the musician back from the dead?

MS. SMITH: Naw, to play with.

MR. JOEL: To play with....? Probably Jimi Hendrix, I think, yeah. I love Hendrix. To collaborate with, it'd be-- I actually tried to write songs like Hendrix. I'll show you. I had this idea for a song and I was thinking of Hendrix (Playing piano, singing.) "Electric Ladyland" kind of guitars (Imitating guitar.) And then Garth Brooks does the song and he does it like a cowboy (Playing

piano, singing.) And he makes it a hit. So-- Which is great. I never considered the song being a country-western song. But he had a hit with it.

But I would say Jimi. I would also, like, John Lennon, I would love to have done something with John Lennon, terrific songwriter. Oh, there's so many of 'em. If I was going to bring back one musician, I would bring back Beethoven, but probably wouldn't get along with him, you know? I understand he couldn't get along with anybody very well.

MS. SMITH: Do you know Sign?

MR. JOEL: Do I know Sign?

MS. SMITH: Yeah. (Laughter.) What would be the question you would ask [simultaneous conversation]--

MR. JOEL: Everybody in New York signs.

MS. SMITH: That's true. (Laughter.) What would be the question you'd ask him?

MR. JOEL: Beethoven?

MS. SMITH: Yeah.

MR. JOEL: Oh, what would I ask him....? Hmmm. There's too many things I would ask him. The Third Symphony, which was this revolutionary-- It was an ode to Napoleon Bonaparte originally. It was a famous symphony, "The Eroica" you know (Playing piano.) sort of like a trumpet call (Imitating a trumpet.) Everybody was thrilled with Napoleon at the time because he was going to knock off all the kings and all the aristocrats and every-- The American Revolution inspired all these artists in Europe at the time. And then Bonaparte, he crowns himself Emperor. So Beethoven had written this whole symphony, the Bonaparte symphony. And he's so furious that this guy who was his hero turned himself into, you know, an Emperor. He was going to rip up the symphony. And then he starts to rip the title page up and he calls it "The Eroica."

So I would have liked to have asked him, like, "So really, how did you feel when the guy put the crown on his head? You know? Did you end it different? Did you decide to put in a different movement?" Yeah, there's a lot of questions I'd like to ask him.

MS. SMITH: Somebody wants to know, says, you performed a memorable duet with Tony Bennett. Did you ever get the chance to meet or perform with Frank Sinatra?

MR. JOEL: I met Frank Sinatra. I got a letter from Frank Sinatra, which I have in my office. And it says-- I had done an interview where I was talking about singing. And I said, "Frank Sinatra is a singer who phrases like a great saxophone player phrases his sax part." And Frank wrote me a note, "Thanks for the kind words. And if you ever have 16 bars laying around that you don't want to record, send them to me." And I said, "Frank Sinatra wants me to write a song for him."

And then he passed away. I only got to meet him once. It was in Australia. There's this hotel in Sydney, Australia, the Park Hyatt. And everybody wants to get this one room at the Park Hyatt because it's got a beautiful view of the bridge. And Frank got the room. We were playing, like, ten nights at this venue. Frank was playing, like, one night. But he got the room. So I'm not going to argue. It's Frank, you know? You don't argue with Frank. Frank wants the room, Frank gets the room.

So his wife Barbara is down in the lobby. She goes, "Come on up. Billy, he'd love to see you. He's doing a show tonight in Brisbane. Come on up to the room. He'd love to see you." So, oh, okay. We go up to the room and it's all this food — antipasto, and pepperoni and, you know, *vino*, and all this stuff. And we were just hanging around, picking at the food.

And, "He'll be here any minute." He comes in and he's not happy with the show in Brisbane. He comes in the door and he goes, "Who the hell are these people?" So we look at Barbara, "Maybe we should go. It's probably not a good time." "No, no. It's okay. It's okay. We'll just have a little chat." And they go in the room next door and you hear glasses breaking, smash, yelling and screaming: "Maybe we should go. It's not a good time." She said, "No, no. Hang out. Hang out. It's going to be fine."

He just wasn't feeling it that night. Wasn't feeling it. But the next night, he was down in the bar. I didn't go down there. But my ex number two, Christie, was there. And-- She's ex two. She's down in the bar and he's feeling pretty good (Imitation of Sinatra.) And they're calling me up from the bar. Brian, you remember this. My sound guy was, "He's down in the bar. He's singing to Christie." "Yeah, sure he is," you know? I never got to follow up, but I would have liked to.

MS. SMITH: You mentioned the room that he got that you didn't get, the big one. How do musicians compete with each other? What do you do that gives you a little rush when you do it better or different than somebody else?

MR. JOEL: You know what? It's really not a matter of better. I don't think it's a competition, like, somebody wins and somebody loses. It's fun to spark off another musician's energy, and to work with somebody and get a completely different dynamic of how to do something. Everybody's got their own dynamic. Everybody's got their own energy. And that's what's the most fun, is-- Like, playing with Bruce the other day, it's, like, oh, wow, that's kind of a guitar player's way of doing it. Or onstage, he'll, like, stop and he'll go (Imitation of Bruce Springsteen.) (Singing.) I don't even know how it goes. But I winged it. You know? There's a lot of winging and improvising. And there's a lot of spontaneity with a good musician.

I worked with Elton. And Elton sometimes will just go off on a tangent and you kind of go with him. And it's like going on a journey, like a magical voyage: "Hey, where are we going?" "I don't know. Just go with him. Here's the senior partner. We'll stay with it," you know?

MS. SMITH: Really? The senior partner?

MR. JOEL: Well, yeah, he's the senior partner. You don't break into an argument with Elton. He gets all huffy and (Laughter.)

MS. SMITH: How's that go?

MR. JOEL: He'll admit it. He has a hissy fit. He's got that English way of doing it, which (Imitation of Elton John.) "Oh, okay. Fine."

MS. SMITH: We've got some questions about the evolution in your career, the changes in your career from rock 'n' roll and country influences and classical. How have your fans reacted particularly as you're doing more classical music.

MR. JOEL: They're not thrilled with it. You know, I really never have tried to second guess what an audience wants. I don't write for fans. I write for me. I don't write for the record company. I don't write for the radio. I don't write for critics. I write for me, or I'll write a song to a friend or I'll write a song to a woman I'm in a relationship with, or a woman I want to be in a relationship with. Because that always-- It works great. Yeah.

MS. SMITH: Which songs were love poems? Which songs were courting songs?

MR. JOEL: Oh, most of ‘em. (Laughter.) It was all about, you know, meeting girls. I remember the first gig I ever did. It was at a church dance. I was about 14 or 15. And I’m playing with these other guys in the band. And this girl, who I had a crush on-- Her name was Virginia, by the way. “Come out Virginia,” you know? She was looking at me, first time she ever looked at me. And I’m, “She’s looking at me. She’s looking-- This is working. This is cool.”

And then at the end of the night, the priest gives us each, like, \$15 dollars, which, in 1964, was, like, \$1,500 dollars. And you go, “You mean we get paid for this?” And that was it. I was just-- That was it. I was in. And yeah, you know, it’s a great way of communicating with people. Music is-- It’s been a terrific way to live your life.

MS. SMITH: Describe to me the differences in writing lyrics--

MR. JOEL: Are these questions written down? Or are you just winging this-- (Laughter.)

MS. SMITH: I’m winging it. I’m winging it. I forgot about them.

MR. JOEL: This is the press, you can’t-- (Laughter.)

MS. SMITH: Tell me the differences between writing lyrics as a young, struggling artist and a rich, older guy.

MR. JOEL: Well, I haven’t written any lyrics in about 15 years. I’m too rich and I’m too old.

MS. SMITH: Are you serious? I mean, how does that affect the creative process?

MR. JOEL: I can’t speak for everybody. I can just speak for me. I got to a point where I kind of grew tired of the song form. I became more comfortable with writing in a more abstract form. I don’t want to call it classical music. Let’s call it instrumental music for the sake of giving it a name. You know, rock ‘n’ roll, pop music, those kind of records, they’re all short. You have to jam it all in within three and a half minutes. You go longer than three and a half, four minutes, you’re kind of out of the box. Nobody’s going to hear it. They won’t play it on the radio. The attention span of people seems to have changed drastically.

And I said, “I want to see where I can go with this piece of music.” I don’t just want to jam it all into three minutes. I want to try to do some variations on it. I want to see how I can expand on it. Where will it take me? Where will I go?

And it ended up-- I ended up writing more instrumental music, most of the people haven't heard. I don't play it very well. I can write it, but I can't play it. Some of it may end up being orchestral music. Some of it may end up being movie soundtrack music. Some of it might end up being songs. I have no idea. For me, it's important that I'm just writing.

MS. SMITH: Somebody wants to know, what's the motivation for writing the song "Movin' Out". And how did you like the Broadway experience?

MR. JOEL: Okay, well the song came way before the Broadway show. I started to write a song. This is interesting. I wrote this song and I wrote lyrics for it. I first write the music. I always write music first. And then I came up-- And then I wrote a whole lyric to it, which is kind of the backwards way of songwriting. Usually people have a poem and they set it to music. I write the other way around. I write a piece of music, and then I jam words on top of the notes.

So I wrote this song. And you'll recognize what melody this was. (Playing piano, singing.) The band says, "That's 'Laughter In The Rain' by Neil Sedaka, you idiot." I didn't write the laughter in the rain part, I just wrote the (Singing.) You mean I wrote a whole lyric and now I can't use it? So I got really ticked off and I said, "Okay, I'll write another lyric-- another piece of music." (Playing piano, singing.) I wasn't going to throw away a whole lyric after I killed myself writing it.

So I finished the song and it became, "Movin' Out". Twyla Tharp comes to me. She says, "I want to do a dance show based on your music." And I-- Okay. Sounded like it could be a complete catastrophe. It appealed to the perverseness of, you know, wire-walking that I like to do. I said, "This could be an abysmal failure." And I just: "Let's go. Let's do it." I got that thing: "Okay, this could be horrific. Great."

And she showed me some choreography she had done to my songs. She had picked up all these inner rhythms, counter rhythms, syncopations that musicians use when they're writing and had put it into dance. And I didn't know how people were going to respond to it. I was never like a guy that went to the ballet all the time, you know? I saw a ballet when I was a kid and: "Okay. All-righty. I like the music. I don't get what they're doing."

But she was able to bring all that stuff out of the music with dance. So that was a thrill. People have asked me, what's the extent of my collaboration with Twyla Tharp? I said, "Go ahead." That was it, "Go right ahead." And she had the vision. She did all the work. The only thing I insisted on was that the guys playing

on Broadway would be rock 'n' roll musicians, not your standard Broadway pit band. I wanted real road dogs to play this stuff. I didn't want it to sound like, you know, cocktail lounge music. And that was it. And she really put it all together. She did it all. I just said, "Yes."

MS. SMITH: Would you be open to another Broadway production involving your music? Do you have something in mind?

MR. JOEL: Sure.

MS. SMITH: Would you ever produce, do one yourself, write music for something like that?

MR. JOEL: I thought about doing a show based on the premise that death is a good career move in the music industry. It was called, you know, "Good Career Move". What are the record labels going to do with these artists? You know, Michael Jackson, he's fooling around with kids and stuff. Prince won't give us anything. And this guy's not-- Billy Joel won't write anything. What are we doing?

And somebody ...(inaudible) says, "We kill him." You know, it's black humor. It's a dark comedy. But it's true, you know? There's nothing like death for a career. Look at Elvis. You know, *foom*, he dies, sells gazillions of records. So it was the premise of show I was going to do. And then I just left it as a premise--

MS. SMITH: Is there a theme song for that? Got some tunes for it?

MR. JOEL: Well, it was called "Good Career Move" but haven't written the song yet.

MS. SMITH: Who's on your iPod?

MR. JOEL: I don't have an iPod.

MS. SMITH: Really?

MR. JOEL: Yeah.

MS. SMITH: You a luddite?

MR. JOEL: A luddite?

MS. SMITH: Do you not get up-- cozy with modern technology?

MR. JOEL: No, no. I'm very 20th Century. I'm an analog kind of guy. I listen to CDs and sometimes vinyl. I'm most programming classical music — Beethoven, Chopin, Rachmaninoff, Debussy. It's the stuff I like to listen-- I'll listen to the radio if I'm in the car with my wife. And actually her father is here today, Steve. Hey, Steve. How you doing? (Applause.) You young whippersnapper. I'm older than you are. (Laughter.) She'll say, "All right. Let's turn on the car radio and listen to some modern, popular music."

And my daughter will do the same thing. She'll say, "Enough with this classical junk. Let's listen to some rock 'n' roll." And that's how I get exposed to new music these days.

MS. SMITH: Well, I was curious as to why you use a digital piano instead of one with strings.

MR. JOEL: Well, let's show 'em Wayne. Where are you, Wayne? I'll show you. Okay. It's a little inside show biz bit. "New York State of Mind" was originally written in the key of C. Let's go to the people's key. Now I am 59 years-old. I wrote this song when I was 24, 25. And your voice is higher when you're younger, so (Playing piano, singing.) Now, show you why I use this. He's gonna knock this down. (Playing piano, singing.) I'm playing in the same key. But you're hearing a different key. (Playing piano, singing.) See I can drop a whole tone without having to change keys. He just turns a button. Do it again. Okay, change key again. I'm going to hit the same chord. Watch what you hear. (Playing piano.) That's up? That's down. See, that's why I have somebody else do it. (Laughter.) It's how technology-unfriendly I am. I don't even know how to do that on the piano. I gotta have a guy doing it. That's real 20th Century. You do it.

MS. SMITH: Well, there is a 21st Century question here. One of the biggest issues in the entertainment industry today is the question of intellectual property rights. How do artists continue to own their material in the digital age? And how have these intellectual property developments affected your work? And how do you see the music industry coping with it?

MR. JOEL: Sounds like a question for my attorney. (Laughter.)

MS. SMITH: Or we could ask you to play another song [simultaneous conversation]--

MR. JOEL: He's right here. I brought him. It's very difficult to protect intellectual property now. It's so easily disseminated. And I understand it. You know, kids, if they can get something for nothing, that's how they're going to get it. I think the music business actually got very, very greedy and priced itself right out of the business. There are some little kids, some little rats somewhere figuring

out how to beat the system. It's always going to be like that. There gnawing away at the machine. And if we can get it for nothing, that's how we're going to get it.

And I think in a way that's reflected in a lot of modern songwriting right now. If you're not going to get paid for it, then you're not going to really devote your whole life to doing it. You've got to make a few quid, you know what I mean? So I think people have found it not to be as lucrative as it used to be. And that's what we're getting right now. We're getting kind of crap.

MS. SMITH: Is there anybody who is writing good--

MR. JOEL: There's many, many talented people out there. I don't know how much exposure they get. There's a lot of good artists. There will always be good people who have talent who know how to do it well. But they should be compensated for it. If your ability to earn your living, you know, based on your craft is taken away from you, what's going to happen to the craft? How's that for-- ?

MS. SMITH: Perfect.

MR. JOEL: Just gotta check with my attorney.

MS. SMITH: Questioner says, which song is most technically challenging to perform live? And which one is the most emotionally challenging? Although having done them many, many times, do you still have an emotional reaction to the songs you're performing?

MR. JOEL: Oh yeah. Yeah, yeah. Probably the most challenging songs for me to do emotionally are the songs-- There's a lullaby I wrote for my daughter. And I can't think about the lyric when I'm-- I can't. I have to, like, look at people in the coliseum going to the bathroom, and just, like, "Don't think about these lyrics, 'cause you're gonna lose it. You're gonna lose it." Because I wrote the song, my marriage was coming apart. And I was worried, "When am I going to see my kid?" I wrote the song for her to let her know, "I will never leave you. I will always be there."

And I'm singing and I'm thinking. I'm remembering writing the song. And I can't think of the lyrics. I have to look at people going to the bathroom, while I'm saying the lyric and get mad at the people going to the bathroom, so I don't think about what I really was feeling when I wrote the song. Otherwise, I'll lose it.

So that's a little inside show biz thing. We do things like that. You know, I'm thankful that people do go to the bathroom during that song, or else I'm

unable to get through it: “Where’s he going?” And then the technically most challenging...? I don’t know. Brian? What do you think is the technically-- Where’s Brian? You’re up in the booth? He’s my sound man. He’s been with me 40, 50, 60 years now. What’s the most technically challenging? What do you think?

___: “Uptown Girl”

MR. JOEL: Yeah, because I can’t hit those notes anymore. People want to know why we don’t do “Uptown Girl”. They think it’s because I’m mad at Christie or I’m mad at ex two. No. It’s because it’s a pain in the ass to sing it (Singing.) It’s that the people’s key? Wayne? (Playing piano, singing.) You have to sing it, like, at the edge of your voice. You have to really push your voice and scream it out (Playing piano, singing.) See? (Playing piano, singing.) like Frankie Valli. But after that song, I can’t sing any other songs, because (Choking noises.) You have to shred your voice.

Elton used to do it, but he would do an-- He lowered the key (Playing piano, singing.) I said, “That’s too low. It sounds terrible that low.” But technically, you can do it.

MS. SMITH: There’s a little baby in the audience with a tuxedo on. He’s just a couple months-old. He wants to know, what songs did you sing your kid to sleep?

MR. JOEL: Well, let’s see.

MS. SMITH: There’s the baby. (Laughter.)

MR. JOEL: What songs did I sing my daughter...? There’s so many songs. Sometimes they weren’t even songs, they were just melodies that were-- You know, you sing (Singing.) rock-a-bye, goodnight. What’s the other-- the famous Brahms lullaby, how does that go....? (Playing piano.) And sometimes I wouldn’t even-- I’d play the piano, and that put her to sleep. Yeah. It works with girls, the piano thing. I don’t know what it is.

MS. SMITH: Well, talking about your daughter, she’s grown up to be a critically acclaimed rock/blues singer herself. What’s it like for you to follow her career and seeing her enter the music business?

MR. JOEL: There’s a Yiddish word, it’s called *kvelling*. You know the word? Some Yiddish words you just can’t replace ‘em, like, *kvetch* and *schlep*, *mishigas*, *tsuris* and *verklemp*. And, *kvelling*, I see my kid and I: “That’s my baby. That’s my kid.” I get very, very proud. And I’m always a little bit nervous

before she goes on. And then she steps up to the plate and just knocks it out of the-- And I just start laughing: "Of course. Of course."

MS. SMITH: --"...she's mine..." Well, keeping in the familial theme, tell us a bit about your grandfather and how he shaped you as a musician.

MR. JOEL: Which one? The English one or the German one?

MS. SMITH: I don't know. Did they both?

MR. JOEL: Well, the German grandfather, his name was Karl Joel. And he-- My father's father, they were German Jews in the '20s and '30s living in Nuremburg, which, as some of you may know, was the headquarters of the Nazi party back then. And he had the most successful mail order textile business in Germany. It was like Sears. And the business was doing great. And they had to leave, right around Kristallnacht, 1938. They had to leave Germany.

They went to Cuba. And he was a music aficionado, Karl was. He played the piano. And my father learned how to play the piano. My mother's family was English. And my mother was in Gilbert & Sullivan operettas. I learned a lot of Gilbert & Sullivan when I was a kid. You know, Gilbert & Sullivan's (Playing piano, singing.)(Applause.)

Now, my mother's parents met at Albert Hall in London at a Gilbert & Sullivan operetta. They went separately and they met each other there. My mother met my father at CCNY in New York in the early '40s at a production of a Gilbert & Sullivan operetta. I think it was *The Pirates of Penzance*. So I owe a lot to Gilbert & Sullivan--

MS. SMITH: You do.

MR. JOEL: --or else I wouldn't be here. But her father was an English, very intellectual man, an Englishman who really couldn't hold a job. My mother's mother was the one who did all the work. She was an English nanny. She was always taking care of babies. My grandfather would hang around with his intellectual friends and play chess and discuss logarithms. I'd hear him chuckling at night. He'd be reading equations (Laughing.) you know, a student of Bertrand Russell, all this crazy stuff.

The predominant male figure in my life was my mother's father, this English, happy go lucky guy. And he would sing these songs at our parties, these English musical songs (Singing.) embarrass the hell out of me. But my friends loved him, "Get your grandfather out here," the straw hat and the cane, and he'd

do that whole bit, you know? The relative that embarrasses you, that's the one your friends like the most, because they love to see you get embarrassed.

MS. SMITH: Well, we're almost out of time, unfortunately. And before asking the last question, I have a couple of things to tell members of. Let me remind you of our upcoming speakers. Tomorrow we have Dan Hesse, who's the CEO of Sprint. On November 5th, the day after the election, we'll have the party chairman of the Republican and Democratic National Committees. And on November 17th, we have Marin Alsop, who's the musical director at the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra. We're looking forward to that.

Second, let me present to our guest his very own coffee mug, National Press Club coffee mug. (Applause.) And for our last question-- I actually have two last questions. I'm sorry. I got to.

MR. JOEL: That's nice. That's good. That's good cup of coffee, cup of joe.

MS. SMITH: My last question is-- two last questions, which of your songs would you choose to be the theme song for each presidential campaign, or will you play us one whole song all the way through?

MR. JOEL: Which song for each presidential campaign?

MS. SMITH: Or pick one, I don't care.

___: Go with number two. (Laughter.) (Applause.)

MR. JOEL: What was the number two?

MS. SMITH: Play us a song all the way through.

MR. JOEL: Yeah, yeah. That's easier. (Applause.) I have to look through the master list here. Let's see. What do we got....? I could do that one, but this is a little more-- Okay. This is not called "Sadness or Euphoria". This is called "Summer, Highland Falls." (Performance.) (Applause.) Thank you.

MS. SMITH: Thank you very much. It was an absolute delight. (Applause.) Thank you. And we're going to ask everybody to remain seated. And we are adjourned. (Gavel sounds.)

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