

Press conference with Jimmy Stewart, recipient of the first Distinguished Pennsylvania Artist Award, the governor and chair of the Arts Council, Diane Rose, Harrisburg, May 1, 1980 (16:47)

[Applause]

>> Thornburgh: I needn't take note of the fact that the warmth that all Pennsylvanians feel for our distinguished guest has been expressed from the very moment that he arrived here, and it's our great pleasure to visit with you this morning briefly in connection with the conference on the Pennsylvania arts, which begins today. The commitment that this state has historically made to the arts has been an important component in improving the quality of life for all Pennsylvanians. Today, as you know, begins a two-day concentrated examination of the arts in Pennsylvania, Issues for the 1980s. And this examination will take place in context of the awards to be given to outstanding Pennsylvania artists in recognition of the specific contributions that they have made to the quality of life in our state and to the improvement of the artistic climate in Pennsylvania. No little credit for that effort should be recognized as being shortchanged with my friend, Diana Rose, who serves as chairperson of the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts. She is with us this morning as the chairman of the council and as the organizer of this conference. Later today I will be presenting this evening, at the forum, the first Pennsylvania Distinguished Artist's Award to Jimmy Stewart, a native Pennsylvanian from Indiana, Pa., who appropriately enough won his Academy Award for the movie "The Philadelphia Story." And we are just as proud as can be that he is with us, back home again in Pennsylvania, to receive this award. The award, as you know, bears the name of the late Theodore Hazlett, an old friend of Ginny's and mine, the first chairman of the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts and one of the major contributors worldwide to progress in the arts in his longtime chairmanship of the A.W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust. And with us this morning is Sue Hazlett, who has been kind enough with members of her family to join us on this happy occasion, and I'm sure she shares the pride that we do in the fact that this important award bears the name of the great Ted Hazlett. And, Sue, we're glad to have you. On my far right, of course, is the first lady of Pennsylvania and the number-one Jimmy Stewart fan in Pennsylvania, my wife, Ginny. This is a happy occasion. It's an occasion that makes us very proud to be Pennsylvanians and very happy to welcome one of our great Pennsylvania citizens home again. Jimmy, welcome again to Pennsylvania. We're delighted to have you here.

[Applause]

The title of this performance is "Mr. Stewart Goes to Harrisburg."

[Laughter]

>> Stewart: Well, thank you, Governor. It's a great privilege for me to be back here. The award, and of course you know that Hollywood has been on sort of an award kick since as long as I can remember. And that's going back -- been out there quite a while. But I don't know. This award and everything that has to do with this award has a very great, special significance to me. And I am very proud to be here to receive this, and also it's a wonderful privilege and a pleasure for me to be back in Pennsylvania. Thank you very much.

[Applause]

>> Thornburgh: We will, of course, be having the formal ceremony, the presentation, later this evening. This get-together this morning was really just planned as a more informal chance for you to meet our honoree and to meet those who are responsible for the progress that we're making in the arts and to share with you our joy and our pleasure at being able to participate with so many outstanding Pennsylvanians in programs of importance to the arts. I know we have members of the press who are here, and we would be glad to entertain any questions, any of us, if you would.

>> Reporter: Governor, Mr. Stewart kept me up till 2:30 a.m. Saturday morning on a rerun of "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington." The filibuster scene -- how long did it take to film that? That was a classic.

>> Stewart: The filibuster scene? I was about three weeks talking.

[Laughter]

I talked -- I think I talked more in those three weeks than I have since.

[Laughter]

>> Reporter: Says you went completely hoarse. Is that a fact?

>> Stewart: No, and then I got hoarse, supposedly, and about the last two days of it, Frank Capra, the director, came and said, "I

don't believe that you're hoarse. It just is like you're trying to do it like that. And it doesn't sound right." And it worried me, and on my way home from work that day, I stopped at an eye, ear, nose, and throat man that I knew, and I said, "Can you give me a sore throat?"

[Laughter]

And he looked at me, and he said, "You Hollywood people -- I've heard that you're crazy, but this is the worst thing I've ever heard. I've spent 35 years learning to cure sore throats, and you want me to give you one." He said, "I'll give you the sorest throat you ever had." Well, he did. This really isn't art of acting, Governor. He dropped several drops of bichloride of mercury right around my vocal cords, and I had a sore throat. But he came the next day. I don't know what happened to his practice. He came the next day, and I would talk for a while, and then I'd come and "Doctor, it's getting better again."

[Laughter]

>> Thornburgh: I'm glad to know I wasn't the only one up till 1:30 the other night. How many people here watched that? I'll bet a lot of people did. I know.

>> Reporter: Mr. Stewart, have you considered going back to Washington now that we need you? [Laughter]

>> Stewart: I didn't hear.

>> Thornburgh: He said, "Are you considering going back to Washington now that we need you?"

>> Stewart: No, as I say, I don't think I talk fast enough.

[Laughter]

>> Reporter: Do you have any reflections on the passing of a very good friend of yours, Alfred Hitchcock?

>> Thornburgh: The death of Alfred Hitchcock. He asked about the death of Alfred Hitchcock.

>> Stewart: Well, it's just -- they called me about it, and I talked to his daughter. It's a great loss, but, again, he's had a great, productive, wonderful life. I don't think there's ever been anybody like him, and I don't think he'll be replaced. I think

he's sort of a very, very special thing in the history of motion pictures, and, as I say, I don't think he'll be replaced. I've lost a wonderful friend, but he's a man that's made a great contribution to film all over the world.

>> Reporter: Mr. Stewart, I'm from the Indiana Evening Gazette, in Indiana, Pennsylvania, and many of your friends send their love. Do you have relatives still in Indiana?

>> Stewart: Aunt Carolyn. Aunt Carolyn is the only one.

[Laughter]

>> Thornburgh: Mike?

>> Reporter: Mr. Stewart, again, is there anything in Hollywood today, for example, that you wish would change, as opposed to the time that you were in the prime of life?

>> Thornburgh: Still in the prime of life.

[Laughter]

>> Stewart: Yes, but, of course, when I get in on this -- I love to talk about it and everything, but when I get in on this, you tend to say, "Give me the good, old days," which is a sort of a fruitless type sort of answer to the question that you gave. Yes, I think there can be some improvement. I've always felt, or felt for the last five, six, seven years, that we're not taking advantage of the capability that film has. In other words, there isn't enough variety in the type of film that comes out of Hollywood these days. A film is capable of telling all sorts of stories -- telling adventure stories, disaster stories, history stories, biographical stories, comedies. And I don't think that today they're taking advantage of that capability of pictures to present variety. I think there's too much done about the hopelessness of today, about the grim aspects of our world. This is all right every once in a while, but, as I say, we need more variety. We need more comedy. We need more wonderful biographical stories. That's -- give me the good, old days. I could talk forever on that, but that's my opinion on that.

>> Reporter: Mr. Stewart, have you met state Senator Henry Hager of Williamsport? He does a very convincing voice imitation of Jimmy Stewart.

[Laughter]

>> Thornburgh: You should hear Mr. Stewart do Henry Hager.

[Laughter]

>> Reporter: Mr. Stewart, the theme for the conference -- Issues Facing the Arts in the '80s. Are the issues different, new, more significant than they were, say, a few years back, or are the issues facing the artists still pretty much the same?

>> Thornburgh: Are the issues facing the artists in the 1980s - is the theme of the conference.

>> Stewart: No, I --

>> Thornburgh: Are they different?

>> Stewart: I don't think particularly, no. I think there's sort of a foundation in the arts from which development comes in all forms. I don't think there's a particular difference.

>> Reporter: Mr. Stewart, you reflected a moment ago on the good, old days. Would you reflect a moment about some of your early days in Indiana, Pennsylvania, and some of your remembrances of growing up in Pennsylvania, selling hardware?

>> Stewart: It seems to me I remember every minute of it.

[Laughter]

>> Reporter: Did your dad have a hardware store there?

>> Thornburgh: Hardware store -- asking about the hardware store.

>> Stewart: Well, the hardware store -- I grew up in the hardware store. I've sort of -- my father, with his hardware store, I think he made me an expert on hardware stores. I'm appalled at the inroads that -- I won't mention the names; you know who they are -- have made on the real hardware store. I'm appalled that you go into one of these stores and say, "I want a 1 1/2 inch screw with 3/8 of screw, and they give you a cellophane-covered thing with six screws. You just want one. You've got to take six.

[Laughter]

[Applause]

In a real hardware store, you have a whole bank of small drawers, like this, and if you're a good clerk in a real hardware store, you can almost with your eyes closed pick up a 3/8, 2 1/2-inch screw and sell one screw.

[Laughter]

>> Reporter: Mr. Stewart, I think all of us would agree that you never were in a bad movie. Is there any one in particular that sort of is close to you? Do you have one preference out of all of the good ones that you made?

>> Stewart: Do I have a favorite? Yes, I have a favorite -- "It's a Wonderful Life," the Frank Capra picture. Maybe it's a little sentimental. It's the first picture both of us did after the War. But I think there's more to it than that. It's a sort of pure movie. In other words, it's not a movie taken from a play or a book or an actual happening or a biography. It's a movie based on a very simple single premise, and that's very simply that nobody's born to be a failure. And I don't know. This appealed to me and to Frank.

>> Thornburgh: Well, thank you all for joining us this morning. We're going to have a very busy two days. I hope you'll join us this evening, when it will be my honor to officially extend Pennsylvania's highest artistic honor to our guest, Jimmy Stewart. There is one problem.

>> Reporter: This is the award that you're going to be giving to him later.

>> Thornburgh: Yeah. You're not allowed to get it at this point, but you can look at it. Isn't that handsome?

[Camera shutters click]

Diana, you might describe it.

>> Diana Rose: This is a piece of contemporary sculpture, highly polished bronze. It's called a leaf by an artist in Pittsburgh named Ron Bennett. So this will be reproduced whenever we find someone, which we probably never will, that's also deserving of this.

>> Thornburgh: Pure Pennsylvania.

>> Diana Rose: Pure Pennsylvania. That's right.

It's a sneak preview for you. Yes, you'll get it tonight.
My goodness. Does this happen all the time? You'll go blind.

>> Thornburgh: Let me carefully return that to you...

Diana Rose: It's heavy. It's really heavy.

>> Thornburgh: and officially put it in your hands this evening.
Has anybody seen a 6-foot rabbit around here this morning?