



[Culture Monster](#)

All the Arts, All the Time

Michelle Obama tells international audience why the arts matter

Michelle Obama hosted a concert this morning at the [Pittsburgh Creative & Performing Arts School](#) for its students and the spouses of international leaders deliberating at the G-20 economic summit. She gave an 11-minute address about the arts as a prelude to performances by guests Sara Bareilles, Yo-Yo Ma and Trisha Yearwood. Here are excerpts from her speech, from a transcript issued by the White House:

“We believe strongly that the arts aren't somehow an 'extra' part of our national life, but instead we feel that the arts are at the heart of our national life. It is through our music, our literature, our art, drama and dance that we tell the story of our past and we express our hopes for the future. Our artists challenge our assumptions in ways that many cannot and do not. They expand our understandings, and push us to view our world in new and very unexpected ways.....

"It's through this constant exchange -- this process of taking and giving, this process of borrowing and creating -- that we learn from each other and we inspire each other. It is a form of diplomacy in which we can all take part....

“[T]oday ... we're presenting the gifts of these wonderful American artists to our friends from all around the world. And these artists are passing on the gift of their magnificent example to these young people who are here today, studying in this school -- showing them that if they dream big enough, and work hard enough, and believe in themselves, that they can do and achieve some uncommon things in their lifetime....

"That is the core of my mission as first lady -- to share the gifts that come with life in the White House with as many of our young people as I possibly can find. That's why I've worked to make the White House a showcase of America's rich cultural life....

"[T]he truth is, is that even though many....kids are living in Washington, D.C. and in cities across the country, just minutes away from the centers of culture and power and prestige, many of them feel like these resources are really miles away, very far beyond their reach. That's something that I felt growing up.

"And my husband and I are determined to help to bridge that distance. It is critical that we begin to bridge that distance.

"We want to show these young people that they have a place in our world, in our museums, our theaters, our concert halls.... We want them to experience the richness of our nation's cultural heritage, one on one, up close and personal, not on TV. We want to show them that they can have a future in the arts community -- whether it's a hobby, or a profession, or simply as an appreciative observer....

"In the end, those efforts, and the performances we're enjoying today, and the work these artists do every day here in America and around the world -- all of that reminds us of a simple truth: that both individually and collectively, we all have a stake in the arts, every single one of us.

"And you don't need to be rich or powerful to lift your voice in song or get out of your seat and shake your groove thing. [Laughter.] You don't need to be a Van Gogh to paint a picture, or a Maya Angelou to write a poem. You don't need a Grammy or an Oscar or an Emmy to make your work on the cultural life of your community or your country a valuable one.

"And ... people who might not speak a single word of the same language, who might not have a single shared experience, might still be drawn together when their hearts are lifted by the notes of a song, or their souls are stirred by a vision on a canvas.

"That is the power of the arts -- to remind us of what we each have to offer, and what we all have in common; to help us understand our history and imagine our future; to give us hope in the moments of struggle; and to bring us together when nothing else will. That is what we celebrate here today."

-- Mike Boehm