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**Folder Title:** Nancy Reagan: Young Artists in  
Performance at the White House (Parvin/TD)

Nov. 22, 1981

**Box:** 435

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(Parvin/TD)  
November 17, 1981

MRS. REAGAN: YOUNG AMERICAN ARTISTS IN PERFORMANCE AT  
THE WHITE HOUSE, NOVEMBER 22, 1981

- Good evening and a warm welcome to the White House. Ever since this wonderful house was built, it has been filled with music. Thomas Jefferson played his violin and Harry Truman pounded his piano in these rooms. The Marine Band has serenaded countless foreign dignitaries at State dinners. And some of the world's most dazzling performers have appeared beneath these chandeliers.
- That tradition of music continues this evening and in the months ahead. We have invited to the White House between now and spring four of the greatest artists of our time. And we have asked them in turn to bring their nominees for future greatness. I am delighted we can use the White House as a showcase for this young talent.
- The East Room -- where we are holding these concerts -- has echoed over the years with the sounds of Beethoven, Bach, and Eubie Blake. Tonight, with the participation of public television, the East Room becomes a concert hall for the entire Nation.
- With us for the series is Beverly Sills, a great talent herself, who will introduce our artists and the young

performers they have brought with them. Now I am going to join our guests and invite you at home to join us as well for this marvelous hour of music. Beverly. . .

Mary...

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(Parvin)

Mrs Reagan: Young American Artists in Performance  
At the White House, November 22, 1961

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## THE EAST ROOM

The East Room, scene of many historic White House events, was designated by Hoban as the "Public Audience Room." It normally contains little furniture and traditionally is used for large gatherings of many different kinds, including dances, after-dinner entertainments, concerts, weddings, funerals, church services, press conferences, and bill-signing ceremonies.

Today the East Room retains the early 19th-century classical style to which it was restored by architects McKim, Mead & White during the Roosevelt renovation of 1902. An oak floor of Fontainebleau parquetry was installed at that time as were the bronze electric-light standards, upholstered benches, and three Bohemian cut-glass chandeliers. The walls were paneled in wood with classical fluted pilasters and eight relief insets illustrating Aesop's fables. The paneling was painted white, and delicate plaster decoration was added to the ceiling.

New marble mantels were installed over the four fireplaces during the Truman renovation of 1948-52. (The room was originally designed with two fireplaces in the west wall and five windows in the east wall. Latrobe's 1807 plan to wall in four of the five windows was adopted in the first quarter of the 19th century, and two new fireplaces were added.) In the early 1960's the mantels were painted off-white to match the walls, and in 1965 gold damask draperies from France were hung at the windows. The gold-and-white color scheme was chosen by Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt although Charles McKim originally had envisioned crimson draperies. Red draperies were later substituted during the Franklin D. Roosevelt Administration, but the Truman renovation returned the East Room to the gold-and-white theme. The Steinway grand piano with gilt American eagle supports was given to the White House in 1938.

The full-length portrait of George Washington which hangs in the East Room is one of several copies that Gilbert Stuart made of his original "Lansdowne" portrait of 1796 commissioned by Senator William Bingham. It is the only object known to have remained in the White House since 1800—except for a period after the British burned the mansion during the War of 1812. Then Dolley Madison had refused to abandon the portrait as she fled; she wrote to her sister on the day of the fire: "Our kind friend, Mr. Carroll, has come to hasten my departure, and is in a very bad humor with me because I insist on waiting until the large

*The East Room, largest and most formal of the state reception rooms, remained unfinished until 1829. The present classical decor dates largely from the 1902 renovation; Martha Washington's portrait hangs on the east wall.*

picture of Gen. Washington is secured, and it requires to be unscrewed from the wall. This process was found too tedious for these perilous moments; I have ordered the frame to be broken, and the canvas taken out; it is done,—and the precious portrait placed in the hands of two gentlemen of New York, for safe keeping. And now, dear sister, I must leave this house, or the retreating army will make me a prisoner in it, by filling up the road I am directed to take. . . ." Her efforts were successful, and the portrait was returned to the White House when the rebuilding was completed. The companion portrait of Martha Washington was painted by E. F. Andrews in 1878.

Although intended by Hoban to be the most elegant of the state reception rooms, the East Room remained unfinished for 29 years. It was here that the John Adams family, first occupants of the White House, dried their laundry, presumably with the help of two "Ten Plate" stoves listed in an inventory of February 26, 1801.

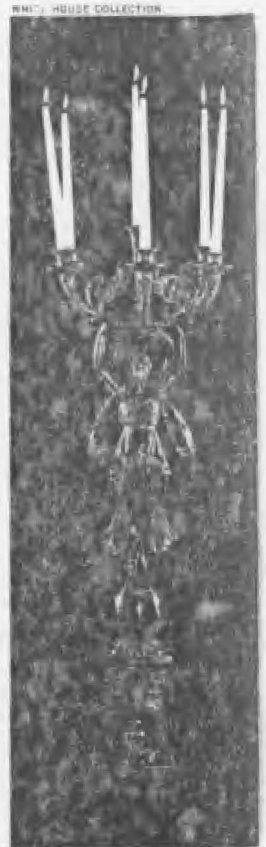
Thomas Jefferson partitioned the space to create two rooms for his secretary, Meriwether Lewis—later co-leader of the Lewis and Clark expedition—who had to move his quarters when the East Room ceiling fell in. Architect Benjamin Latrobe, appointed by Jefferson as Surveyor of Public Buildings, noted on a floor plan executed in 1803: "Public Audience Chamber—entirely unfinished, the ceiling has given way." Jefferson's inventory of 1809 lists "34 armed Chairs black and Gold" in the "Large Unfinished Room," and "1 Table & Kettles for washing Tumblers," indicating that the room may have been used as a makeshift butler's pantry as well as a storage area. James Madison met with his Cabinet in the south end of the East Room; but whatever furnishings the room might have contained were destroyed in the fire of 1814, and no record of them remains.

After the fire, restoration of the White House included work on the "principal drawing room"; by November 21, 1818, Hoban reported that the floor had been laid, the walls and ceiling plastered, and the cornice, frieze, architrave, and decorative woodwork nearly finished. The appropriations, however, were not adequate to furnish the East Room properly. Four sofas and two dozen chairs were placed in the room, but their upholstery was unfinished.

President John Quincy Adams opened the room to provide space for the large New Year's Day receptions during his term; the furniture remained unupholstered. It was not until 1829 that Andrew Jackson finally decorated the room in grand style, at a cost to the taxpayer of more than \$9,000.

Jackson's purchases included "three 18-light" chandeliers with cut glass of "remarkable brilliancy," a "3-light centre lamp supported by female figures," eight "5-light" gilded wall brackets, and various table lamps. Four fireplaces were fitted with black-marble mantels with "Italian black and gold fronts"; four huge gilt-frame mirrors were placed above these mantels. Almost 500 yards of red-bordered Brussels carpet was purchased for the floor, and lemon-yellow paper covered the walls.

## THE EAST ROOM



Two pairs of candelabra displayed on the mantels on the west wall were originally purchased in 1817 by President Monroe for the "elliptic saloon" which became the Blue Room. Made of gilded bronze, they are thought to be the work of Pierre-Philippe Thomire, a French bronze caster.

A clergyman from New England found this "great levee apartment . . . truly magnificent," carefully noting the "light-blue satin-silk" on the sofas and chairs and the "white, blue, and light-yellow commingled" hues of the curtains. Even if the ladies of his party agreed that the rich carpet "needed the cleansing effect of tea-leaves," he concluded that: "On the whole it is a seat worthy of the people's idol."

During the Civil War years and the Administration of Abraham Lincoln there was much activity in the East Room. At one time during the war Union troops occupied the room. In 1864 the East Room was the scene of a large reception given by President Lincoln in honor of Ulysses S. Grant shortly before his appointment as head of all the Union armies. In April of 1865 the East Room was again filled with people, but this time they were mourners surrounding the body of President Lincoln as he lay in state on a black-draped catafalque. He had been assassinated by John Wilkes Booth, much as he had foreseen in a dream a few weeks earlier. Seven Presidents have lain in state in the East Room, including John F. Kennedy in November 1963.

Furnishings in the East Room had become shabby and worn by the time General Grant became President. In 1873 a drastic renovation transformed the East Room into a salon decorated in the Victorian style. The ceiling was divided into three sections with ornate false beams supported by gilded columns. Large gas chandeliers, patterned carpeting and wall coverings, heavy mirrors, and rich fabrics created what sometimes has been referred to as "steamboat palace" decor. In this setting President Grant's daughter, Nellie, was married in 1874 under a huge bell of roses. An elaborate wedding breakfast followed in the State Dining Room. (The next wedding to take place in the East Room was that of Alice Roosevelt and Congressman Nicholas Longworth in 1906. By that time, the room had been restored to the classic simplicity of the early 19th century.)

When President Arthur redecorated the White House in 1882, Louis C. Tiffany found it necessary only to install silver paper on the ceiling of the East Room and to increase the number of potted plants. All of these heavy Victorian adornments were swept away in the 1902 restoration. During the Theodore Roosevelt Administration, this room became the scene of some rather unusual activities, including a wrestling match arranged to entertain some 50 to 80 guests of the President. The exuberant Roosevelt children are also known to have used the East Room for

WHITE HOUSE COLLECTION



*Gilbert Stuart's 1796 portrait of George Washington was rescued by Dolley Madison shortly before the British burned the White House on August 24, 1814. The painting has been the property of the mansion since 1800.*