# Watch a “Flabbergasted” Elton John Receive a Medal for His HIV Advocacy

Biden surprised the iconic rocker during a White House concert by awarding him the National Humanities Medal for his HIV and AIDS work.

September 26, 2022 By Trent Straube

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Pop music legend and AIDS advocate Elton John certainly felt the love Friday night as he performed an intimate concert at the White House. During the set, President Joe Biden surprised the “Rocket Man” scribe by presenting him with the National Humanities Medal for his work advocating and fundraising for HIV and advancing “the simple truth that everyone deserves to be treated with dignity and respect.”

> In celebration of everyday history makers, Sir Elton John performed live at the White House.
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> pic.twitter.com/wgJibpLJUF
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> — The White House (@WhiteHouse) September 24, 2022

“I’m never flabbergasted,” John told the crowd on the South Lawn as he was moved to tears. “But I’m flabbergasted and humbled and honored by this incredible award from the United States of America. I will treasure this so much.”

John, a global celebrity since the 1970s, performed a mini-concert of his hits—including “Tiny Dancer,” “I’m Still Standing,” “Rocket Man” and “Your Song”—as part of the White House’s “A Night When Hope and History Rhyme,” which honored everyday history makers, including teachers and frontline workers.

PBS NewsHour broadcast the entire event, including John’s concert. You can watch it below:

A longtime advocate for HIV causes, John has tirelessly raised funds and shone a global spotlight on the epidemic through concerts, speeches and star-studded fundraisers, like his annual Oscars party, which this year brought in $8.6 million. In 1992, he established the Elton John AIDS Foundation, which has raised over $525 million worldwide and supported more than 3,000 projects.

To read more in POZ about his advocacy, click #Elton John. You'll find articles such as

> "Elton John on Who Inspired Him to Get Sober and Fight AIDS [VIDEO],"
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> "Elton John Streams Classic Concerts to Raise HIV and COVID-19 Funds [VIDEOS],"
>
> "Elton John and Lil Nas X Reign as Rock Stars of HIV Fundraisers" and
>
> "Rocketman Elton John Launches $1M COVID-19 Fund for HIV Care [VIDEO]."

John last performed at the White House in 1998 at a state dinner hosted by President Bill Clinton, according to NPR. President Donald Trump invited John to perform at his 2017 inauguration, but the singer-songwriter declined, saying he felt it was inappropriate for him, as someone from Britain, to play at the event.

Below is an excerpt of the White House transcript from Friday's event, starting after the concert, when Biden surprised John with the award:

> THE PRESIDENT: Well, tonight it's my great honor—and I mean this sincerely—to present the National Humanities Medal to Sir Elton John. (Applause.)
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> Major Yang, please read the citation.
>
> MILITARY AIDE: Honored, sir.
>
> Good evening, everyone. The President of the United States awards this National Humanities Medal to Sir Elton John for moving our souls with his powerful voice in one of the defining songbooks of all time. An enduring icon and advocate with absolutely courage, who found purpose to challenge convention, shatter stigma, and advance the simple truth that everyone deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. (Applause.)
>
> (President Biden presents the National Humanities Medal to Sir Elton John.)
>
> THE PRESIDENT: I think we surprised him.
>
> SIR ELTON JOHN: I just said to the First Lady: I'm never flabbergasted, but I'm flabbergasted—(laughter)—and humbled and honored by this incredible award from the United States of America. I will treasure this so much—(applause)—and it will make me double my

efforts to make sure this disease goes away.

Your kindness—America's kindness to me as a musician is second to none. But in the war against AIDS and HIV, it's even bigger. And I can't thank you enough. I'm really—I'm really emotional about this. (Applause.) And thank you. (Applause.)

THE PRESIDENT: And, by the way, it's all his fault that we're spending $6 billion in taxpayer money this month to help AIDS—fight HIV/AIDS. (Applause.)

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