

Written by Forward Times Staff
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President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama were on hand to salute the 2011 class of Kennedy Center Honorees on Sunday at the Kennedy Center in Washington. CBS will broadcast the show on Dec. 27.

Actress Meryl Streep, pop singer Neil Diamond, Broadway singer Barbara Cook, famed cellist Yo-Yo Ma, and jazz saxophonist Sonny Rollins were all celebrated for receiving the nation's top award for those who have influenced American culture through the arts.

Caroline Kennedy, who hosts the show as part of a living memorial to her father, John F. Kennedy, acknowledged her personal connection to Diamond, calling him "a Brooklyn lad with a gift of melody who grew into a solitary man, 'reaching out, touching me.'" It drew big laughs as the crowd of celebrities and politicians recalled that Diamond's "Sweet Caroline" was named for her. "I'm going to have to thank her for that," Diamond said before the show, noting that the song is a story about him and his former wife. But he took the name from Kennedy.

Smokey Robinson sang "Sweet Caroline" with help from Kennedy and fans brought in from Boston's Fenway Park where it's a favorite anthem. Lionel Richie, who sang, "I am... I said," told the Associated Press he got into the music business because he wanted to be Diamond. "He's a great storyteller," Richie said. "He's not an acrobatic singer. Basically he told the story in a very simple voice."

Earlier President Obama lauded the actors and musicians at the White House. "They have different talents, and they've traveled different paths," Obama said. "And yet they belong here

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together because each of tonight's honorees has felt the need to express themselves and share that expression with the world."

He said everyone has that desire for self-expression in common. "That's why we dance, even if, as Michelle says, I look silly doing it," he added to laughter.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton flew home between visits to Myanmar and Germany to honor the artists with a dinner Saturday night. After visiting the isolated Southeast Asian country also known as Burma, Clinton said such U.S. artists have worldwide influence by using their freedom of creativity. "You may not know it, but somewhere in a little tiny room in Burma or even in North Korea, someone is desperately trying to hear you or to see you, to experience you," Clinton said. "And if they are lucky enough to make that connection, it can literally change lives and countries."

Rollins, 81, is a jazz saxophonist who has shared the stage with Miles Davis and Dizzy Gillespie, among others. "America is the home of jazz. It's what we started," he said. "By the way, hip hop music is a part of jazz, believe it or not."

Friend Bill Cosby marveled about how he has heard Rollins' distinctive sax around the world in Greece, Hong Kong, Italy — and found so many people who knew the musician's work. "All over the world, Sonny Rollins," Cosby said.

Benny Golson and Herbie Hancock joined in playing some of Rollins' tunes. Fellow sax player and former President Bill Clinton said earlier that he has been a fan since the age of 15 or 16 when he bought his first Rollins LP and played it until it was worn out. "His music can bend your mind, it can break your heart, and it can make you laugh out loud," Clinton said. "He has done things with improvisation that really no one has ever done."

Tiger Woods Wins First Tournament in Two Years

The fist pump is back.

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On Sunday, Tiger Woods ended a two year winning drought – that’s 749 days and 26 tournaments – with a birdie putt on the final hole of the Chevron World Challenge in Thousand Oaks, Calif.

When the final birdie putt from 6 feet disappeared into the cup, Woods swept his arm across the air, yelled through the din of the gallery and slammed his fist in a celebration that was a long time coming.

He birdied the last two holes for a 3-under 69 and won against an 18-man field at Sherwood Country Club. It was a two-man race against former Masters champion Zach Johnson over the final hour. Even so, winning is all that ever mattered to Woods—now perhaps more than ever before.

Any different?” Woods asked about his win. “It feels great. Kind of hard for me to elaborate beyond that. I know it’s been awhile, but for some reason, it feels like it hasn’t. As far as making the putt and the feeling afterward, I think I was screaming something. But it was just that I won the golf tournament. I pulled it off with one down, two to go.

“To go birdie-birdie is as good as it gets.”

The last time Woods won was Nov. 15, 2009, at the Australian Masters for his 82nd title worldwide, and his seventh win that year, back when winning at least looked routine for him. Twelve days later, Woods crashed his car into a fire hydrant outside his Florida home, and stunning revelations of extramarital affairs soon emerged. It cost him his impeccable image, his marriage and four major sponsors.

He has added three sponsors in the last five months. He showed signs of coming back with nine solid rounds in the wind in Australia, finishing third at the Australian Open and delivering the clinching point for the Americans in the Presidents Cup at Royal Melbourne.

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Woods won the Chevron World Challenge, which he hosts for his foundation, for the fifth time. He finished at 10-under 278 and donated the \$1.2 million to his foundation.

The win moved him from No. 52 to No. 21 in the world ranking, and likely will send expectations soaring for 2012. Woods will not play again until starting next season in Abu Dhabi at the end of January.

'All My Children' Alum to Replace Stacy Dash

*"Single Ladies" has found its replacement for Stacey Dash.

"All My Children" vet Denise Vasi will join the cast of VH1's breakout hit series, the network announced this morning. Vasi will play Raquel, a businesswoman from a prominent Southern family.

"Denise is the perfect addition to the 'Single Ladies' cast," executive producer Queen Latifah said. "She is bringing a fun, new element to the show."

Dash announced her exit from the series in September.

"Single Ladies," VH1's first scripted program, is about three friends in the world of Atlanta fashion, fame and music. LisaRaye McCoy and Charity Shea also star.

Production on Season 2 begins in January; the series will return sometime in early summer.