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Jimmy Carter, Rock and Roll President, Revisited

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson

Another year has gone by, as another year has arrived offering promise and hope. As the late great Jimmy Carter has recently passed (December 29, 2024), I felt it apropos to revisit the 2020 AFI DOCS closing night film, *Jimmy Carter, Rock and Roll President* with hope and optimism for the coming year.



Jimmy Carter, left, and Willie Nelson

Jimmy Carter, Rock & Roll President featured testimonial interviews, poetry readings, and archival performances from musical legends Bob Dylan, Nile Rodgers, Roseanne Cash, Chuck Leavell, Willie Nelson, Johnny Cash, Dizzy Gillespie, Sarah Vaughn, Ray Charles, Mihaela Jackson, Tom T. Hall, Jimmy Buffet, Bono, Loretta Lynn, Dolly Parton, Trisha Yearwood, Garth Brooks, Charlie Daniels, and Gregg Allman and the Allman Brothers Band. Moreover, Ambassadors to the United Nations, Madeline Albright and Andrew Young, as well as Special Assistants to the President, Jim Free and Tom Beard, shared their respect and admiration for President Carter with direct interviews. Chip Carter, son and Presidential driver, added verisimilitude to the filmâ??s revelatory narrative.



Bob Dylan (center) and Jimmy Carter (right)

Jimmy Carter, Rock & Roll President, directed by Mary Wharton*,* provided an artistic view into the influence of music on Jimmy Carterâ??s upbringing and its influence on the Carter Presidency. The work also provides an intimate look inside the former United States President who made peace, human rights, and healing the nation a priority. Carter was swept into the Presidency after narrowly defeating Gerald Ford and Bob Dole and after Richard M. Nixon disgraced himself and the country with the Watergate scandal. Carter brought a sense of morality while giving the nation a sense of hope for the future pardoning Vietnam draft evaders on his second day in office. Carter would go on to create a new national energy policy using new technologies, price controls and conservation while establishing the Department of Energy. Furthermore, Carter secured peace with his Camp David Accords and the second Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (nuclear non-proliferation between the United States and the Former Soviet Union).

The filmâ??s producer, Chris Farrell, was researching and gathering artifacts for an Allman Brothers documentary, he was referred to a â??bunch of guysâ?• who began sharing stories of Gregg Allman and Jimmy Carter. Then Bob Dylan. Then Willie Nelson. And so it went. Ad Infinitum. Interestingly, Allman was the first guest of President Carter to dine in the White House. The two had become friends during Carterâ??s years as the Governor of the State of Georgia. In an archival interview, a clean and sober Allman tells the story of Jimmy coming out in front of a group of musicians and claiming the Presidency was his for the winning. Mr. Allman claims the pronouncement came as the two heavyweights put a large dent in a bottle of J & B Scotch Whiskey. Carter contested Allmanâ??s claim. Jimmy claimed to have limited himself to one drink a day at most!



Gregg Allman was one of many celebrities to appear at fundraiser for Jimmy Carter's presidential campaign on Feb. 14, 1976. (Jerome McClendon / AJC file)

And, Jimmy Carter did become President. The road wasnâ??t easy. He struggled immensely until musicians like the Allman Brothers and Jimmy Buffet put on concerts in Rhode Island and Oregon respectively, galvanizing the youth vote. Even gonzo journalist Hunter Thompson was impressed with Jimmy Carter. Thompson was covering Massachusetts Senator Ted Kennedyâ??s national campaign for the Democratic Party nomination when he witnessed the verve of Carter. Carter would go on to win the nomination and the election. Kennedy would go on to have one of the longest and most influential careers in the history of the United States Senate championing a wide-range of legislative issues including the civil rights of the disabled, immigration, education, and health care reform and would bear the moniker, Lion of the Senate, for his Senatorial prowess,

Once Jimmy Carter became President, White House Lawn gatherings became regular events organized by the First Lady Rosalynn Carter. And Wharton provides spot-on footage, voice-overs, and montages of stills photographs to perfection. Yet, all was not perfect in the Camelot of the South. The longtime U.S. friend and ally, the Shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, had been facing opposition demonstrations and civil resistance when he fled the country leaving the opposition partyâ??s Prime Minister in charge.

The Shah of Iran had cancer and sought exile and treatment in the United States. This would become the defining moment of the Carter Administration. Carter, the humanitarian, allowed the Shah into the U.S. for treatment. The Iranian government fell and was taken over by the religious Grand Ayatollah Khomeini. The country quickly became an Islamic republic with a theocratic-republican constitution while student radicals took 52 American hostages at the US Embassy in Tehran. Former President Richard Nixon and Republican foreign policy hawks wanted swift military action against Iran. President Carter chose peace and dialogue in negotiating a release.

The U.S. economy had inflation, exorbitant interest rates, and gasoline shortages that resulted in huge lines at the pumps when gas was available. The country was in a spiritual malaise. Carter would lose his re-election bid in a landslide to Ronald Reagan, the movie actor, and Governor of California. Carter states on camera if he had it all to do over again, heâ??d do it the same way. The day Reagan was sworn in all the hostages were released after being held captive for 444 days. Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter said their goodbyes, boarded Air Force One (where they received word of the hostages leaving

Iranian airspace) and returned to small-town life in Plains, Georgia. The Carter Administration had significant foreign policy and domestic achievements with the Camp David Accords, the Panama Canal Treaties, humanitarian work around the world and the new energy policies at home, including environmental protection, and major educational programs under the new Department of Education.

Jimmy Carter, the Naval Officer, author, poet, a nuclear physicist, and a peanut farmer from small-town Plains, Georgia, would go on to lead a life of service negotiating peace deals (winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002), advocating for voter rights, and building homes for the less fortunate following his White House years. Carter was 100 years old, the oldest living President, and the longest-lived President at the time of his passing.

Jimmy Carter, Rock and Roll President, is highly recommended and currently streaming on MAX and is available to rent on Apple TV.

Until next time, Iâ??ll see you at the cinema!

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