

[ Music ]

>> This is Matt Raymond at the Library of Congress. Each year thousands of booklovers of all ages visit the nation's capital to celebrate the joys of reading and lifelong literacy at the National Book Festival sponsored by the Library of Congress and hosted by First Lady Laura Bush. Now in its eighth year, this free event held on the National Mall Saturday, September 27th, will spark readers' passion for learning as they interact with the nation's bestselling authors, illustrators and poets. Even if you can't attend the festival in person, you can still participate online. These podcasts with well-known authors and other materials are available through the National Book Festival website at [www.loc.gov/bookfest](http://www.loc.gov/bookfest).

[ Music ]

It's now my honor to talk with internationally recognized music legend, humanitarian and now children's author, Dionne Warwick. Ms. Warwick is an acclaimed five-time Grammy award-winning singer who has also devoted countless hours to humanitarian efforts, serving as a United Nations Global Ambassador for Food and Agriculture and for several years as the U.S. Ambassador for Health. She's an inspiration to millions, and her new book released this month, *Say a Little Prayer*, encourages kids to find their best talent in life and embrace it. Ms. Warwick, thank you so much for joining us.

>> It's a pleasure. Thank you for having me.

>> And thank you for making the time. We're very much looking forward to your appearance on September 27th. What can folks expect to hear from you?

>> Well, basically anything they want to hear with regards to the book, of course. I am pretty new at this, but it seems to be striking a wonderful chord with people. They seem to be enjoying what they're seeing and reading and that was the object of writing the book.

>> Tell us a little bit about the book, *Say a Little Prayer*.

>> I look at it as an inspirational type of a book where you follow little Dee, who happens to be me, through a period of time and how she knew her neighbors and interacted with them and had a dream and followed it. And that is basically what this is about: inspiring. And I can't think of any better group of people to inspire than children to follow their dream and to know that everything is absolutely possible.

>> What motivated you to write this book?

>> Actually a friend of mine did, Dave Wooley, who is also a part of the writing of the book. He knew that an autobiography was just not something I was really interested in doing based on the fact that most publishers want a book that is just not in me to write. He said to me one afternoon, "Why don't you just write about what you know, like children?" And that sparked an interest and I said, "Okay, I think I can do that." And the

inspiration, of course, came from my childhood and how wonderful it was. And my mantra -- "If you can think it, you can do it" -- was something my grandfather used to tell me all the time. And I feel it's something that our kids need to hear now.

>> Did you, when you were growing up, did you have any mentors or any people that encouraged you?

>> My family. Yes, my family has always and will always be a mainstay in my life.

>> Did you learn anything about yourself, maybe anything -- something that was unexpected, when you went through the process of writing this book?

>> You know, no. You know what I did enjoy most of all, I think, was remembering, reminiscing and feeling the way that I felt when I was a child. I had an incredible childhood, and it's something that I would wish for every single child being born or those who are with us today could have. It was full of love and adventure and information. It was just a wonderful childhood.

>> With obviously your career as a creative artist, is it a natural transition to write a book?

>> No, I don't know, because I'm so new at this. I would think that most people do want to know about you, but I don't know if writing is the next evolution. In my case, my next step will be, hopefully, Broadway.

>> Oh, wonderful. Well, I'm certainly looking forward to that.

>> Thank you.

>> And I assume with writing this book, it's a chance to introduce new generations to you. What do you tell young people when they look to you for inspiration, perhaps following your own career path or following their own dreams?

>> Well, that's basically what I tell them: that that is their dream to follow, not mine. If you really want it, then you go for it. You know, dreams are something that we all have, and to bring them to fruition, you have to work at it. It isn't given to you. You earn it.

>> I want to talk about some other areas of your life if we could. Obviously you're a pioneer in music, a hit-maker. Tell us a little bit about how you got started.

>> Well, I met Burt Bacharach and Hal David. First of all, let me tell you this. I've been singing all of my life, so singing is nothing new to me. I come from a singing family. My professional career began as a background singer doing those lovely oohs and aahs and yeah-yeahs behind recording artists, and that is where and how I met Burt Bacharach first. He had written a song for the Drifters and my group was doing background for that particular session, and he approached and asked me if I would be

interested in doing more demonstration records and songs that he would be writing with a songwriting partner named Hal David. And I said, "Certainly, as long as it didn't interfere with my education," because my mother just would not stand for that. And one thing led to another, and I recorded and the demonstration record was presented to Scepter Records and Scepter wanted the voice and that was the song, and so it began.

>> Now, for folks who don't know, you have achieved a record-setting number of hits on the Billboard Hot 100. What has kept you motivated and inspired you musically over the course of your career?

>> I think more than anything else doing what I really love and enjoy doing and seeing the results of it by looking into an audience and seeing a bunch of smiling faces and also hearing some wonderful sounds coming from the audience singing with me.

>> You received your first Grammy in 1968 and, in doing so, you became the first African-American solo female artist of your generation to win the award for Best Contemporary Female Vocal Performance. How important was that to you personally, and how relevant is that for that particular moment in your life?

>> Well, looking back, first of all, it was very exciting to win a Grammy. But looking at it today and thinking about it, which I never did until recently, that it kind of opened a door for African-American recording artists that there was room in the contemporary areas of the Grammys or anywhere else on the charts for African-American music, musicians and recording artists that they were not completely kept in that little box called R&B.

>> You are often considered a pioneer in that your career has cultivated pop music that infuses rhythm and blues and soul and gospel elements, while also challenging, I guess, audiences' notions of culture and generation and race. Were you aware or has it been a conscious effort on your part, I guess, to break these boundaries?

>> Not really. I just happened to be singing a type of music that crossed all barriers.

>> Now, it's been four decades since you came onto the scene as a music artist. How far do you think the industry has come since you first begun?

>> Oh, my. Well, now with the advent of the computer, it's taken a complete 360. A lot of musicians are almost obsolete, which is a shame. That's where most inspirations happen in a studio when you have interaction between what's going on in a live vernacular. Once you put it in a computer, there's very little you can do to change anything. It's a progressive time that we're in and, of course, music is of a progressive nature, so it's changed tremendously.

>> Do you prefer live performances to recording in a studio, or do you favor one over the other?

>> No, they're two different arenas altogether. And when you're in the studio, you're singing to a microphone, not to an audience. And when you're singing to an audience, you get immediate reaction. And they're both enjoyable.

>> I think some singers are, you know, reluctant I guess to sometimes appear in front of an audience but you, I guess, you draw energy and inspiration from that feedback?

>> Right, and you know, people only come see you when they want to. And I've been so truly blessed that I'm still able to give people what they come to see and hear.

>> Now, again, the word "pioneer" I think is used a lot for you.

>> Yes, it is.

>> I want to talk about your work with humanitarian efforts as well. We talked a little bit about some of your work with the United Nations and your work as U.S. Ambassador for Health. Talk about that a little bit, if you could.

>> I was appointed U.S. Ambassador of Health for the United States during the Reagan administration, and I served in that capacity until the first year of the Clinton administration. My mandate was a personal mandate that I gave myself and that was the AIDS issue at that time, which was running rampant, and I felt that my mission was to not only make people aware but to educate. I think I did a pretty good job. And I'm still very, very much involved, not inside of the government any longer, but as an advocate for those who are still servicing and providing information and aid to those who are in need.

>> You, again, very early I think in efforts to raise AIDS awareness, thinking in particular of your recording of "That's What Friends Are For." Was there a particular personal reason behind why you became so involved in those particular efforts, or?

>> Yes, it was. Losing a lot of people, people that I didn't know and some that I did, and not really knowing why kind of piqued my interest in what's going on. And as a result of that, I was always the one who wanted to know everything and nosy enough to ask questions. And I think that probably led to my becoming Ambassador of Health of the United States for this particular purpose. I think we lost first within my industry some brilliant talents in all vernaculars -- in hair, make-up, light, sound, cameramen, camerawomen. It just became so crazy that I think making people aware that something really bad was going on that we could do something about was primarily my mandate. So I set about doing that.

>> And I assume as the title Global Ambassador for Food and Agriculture implies that must deal with hunger and perhaps poverty issues?

>> Yes, it does. You know, and it's the same thing. You know, keeping people's minds focused on why we were really put here on this Earth was to be of service to each other.

>> And I'd assume there was a lot of international travel involved with that. What are some of the types of things you've seen? And have you seen things that have given you cause for hope, I think, rather than despair?

>> Yes, I have. You know, fortunately, enough people have now shown how much they really do care and have gone far and wide to teach people how to clear water, how to grow food, how to take care of their health and, you know, these are primary issues that we learned as children that a lot of people are not given the privilege of learning or at least putting into practice. So I have seen some wonderful improvements but there's still so much left to do.

>> Now, you've also spearheaded the development and production of a history book that will detail African and African-American history for use in schools, libraries and bookstores throughout the world. What can you tell me about that project?

>> Well, you know, it's like everything else. While I was in school growing up, I was required to learn about European history and American history, and it was quite noticeable, especially within the American history, that the African-American, as -- I mean, there are so many names that we have now, there was basically nothing. We basically sprouted up out of the ground like a beautiful tree as opposed to having history, and yet there is so much that there is to learn about me. So I felt that if I had to learn about other nationalities, then it was time for them to understand and learn about me and those that look like me.

>> Do you think the educational system is evolving and sort of taking that more inclusive approach?

>> If they're not, they well should be.

>> And presumably this project would help with that.

>> No doubt. I think having the history book as a part of the curriculum in all schools, not only in the primary grades, but taking it straight up through and to the secondary levels of education and into our colleges, and not only in the United States, but worldwide.

>> Dionne Warwick, we appreciate you taking time to talk with us. Before we let you go, what's next for you? What's coming up?

>> Well, I have a new CD out. It's a gospel CD entitled, Why We Sing, which I'm extremely proud of. I consider it a family affair. I'm doing duets with BeBe Winans, and with my son, David Elliot, with my sister, Dee Dee Warwick, and with my church choir. So it was a bundle of joy to do, and I think, without a doubt, it's probably some of my best work.

>> You mentioned Broadway earlier. Might we be seeing you on the stage?

>> I certainly hope so. You know, that's something that I've always wanted to do and you know, that kind of will fulfill another portion of my dream: the Oscar, the Emmy and the Tony.

>> And are there any future books that we might be able to look forward to?

>> Yes, there will be another book next year.

>> Another children's book?

>> It will be a book as little Dee grows up.

>> Well, wonderful, a sequel.

>> Mm-hmm.

>> Well, Dionne Warwick, once again, thank you, and we appreciate your speaking with us tonight.

>> My pleasure.

>> And we are excited to hear more from you and that's at the National Book Festival on Saturday, September 27th on the National Mall from 10:00 AM. to 5:30 PM. The event is always free and open to the public. For more details and a complete list of participating authors visit [www.loc.gov/bookfest](http://www.loc.gov/bookfest). From the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., this is Matt Raymond. Thank you for listening.

[ Music ]