

JIMMY CARPER: He did one we're going to play later on, which is "You Make Me Feel Mighty Real."

STEPHEN: Patti LaBelle, after she left Labelle and she went on a hiatus for a while, one of her-- I think it was her second album-- third album when she came back out, she did her first rendition of "You Are My Friend."

JIMMY CARPER: And that is just a classic.

STEPHEN: And she has turned it really into a classic.

JIMMY CARPER: She did a beautiful-- yes, beautiful job on that song.

STEPHEN: I think a few years ago on one of the award programs that year, where they gave Sylvester an honorary award, she did "You Are My Friend." And she brought it to a brand new level because she crossed it over even to gospel music--

JIMMY CARPER: That's right.

STEPHEN: --when she did "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" and hooked that onto it, and I'm like, OK.

JIMMY CARPER: That's when she had that wild-haired dude going.

STEPHEN: Uh-huh, yeah.

JIMMY CARPER: I don't know what that was, but it worked for her.

STEPHEN: That was the peacock hairstyle. That's when she had that peacock--

JIMMY CARPER: Woo, girl.

[LAUGHS]

STEPHEN: New attitude--

SPEAKER 1: That hair with the cone thing that she had. That was like the early use of that gel, mess, that thing, I mean, when they started using mousse and stuff.

JIMMY CARPER: See? You were talking--

SPEAKER 1: What was that thing?

JIMMY CARPER: At the beginning of this, you were talking about diva and that certainly fits Patti LaBelle.

SPEAKER 2: It really does.

STEPHEN: And we can say Patti is a diva. She paves the way and the rest of us walk behind it all. And I give that tribute not only to Sylvester and Patti, but really to our transgender community because so many times in the past, whilst butch brothers stood back in the corners, flexing out muscles, working out at the gym, buying that extra crown roll and Coke, there was the transgender who was out there marching the streets and protesting and saying, look, we want equal rights. As we all know, it wasn't the brothers who started this. Oh, well.

JIMMY CARPER: That's right.

STEPHEN: It was one of our sisters who went with two-tier pumps.

JIMMY CARPER: And I remember a saying back then-- that fit back then, it was, you've got to have balls to wear a dress in public.

STEPHEN: That's true.

[LAUGHTER]

SPEAKER 2: Feeling wise and all that.

JIMMY CARPER: That's right.

STEPHEN: Well, I guess I don't have--

JIMMY CARPER: You don't mess with those transgender girls on the street because they have seen it all, and they will bust your ass.

STEPHEN: Speaking of that, here's a quick little story, then we might pull up another song. A few years back in my younger days, when I had long hair, I know. I didn't have a dress. I don't know that.

[LAUGHTER]

In Baton Rouge, Baton Rouge had a law called a Public Masking Law. And basically, this law was against the drag queens and the transgender.

JIMMY CARPER: We had that, too. In Houston, it was-- you couldn't wear-- women could not wear fly front pants.

STEPHEN: Oh, OK. They got to zip them.

JIMMY CARPER: Yeah.

STEPHEN: I see the logic. Anyway--

[LAUGHTER]

I'm not going there.

JIMMY CARPER: Anyway, Baton Rouge, Baton Rouge.

STEPHEN: Well, what happened is so the police decided they wanted to try to clean up some of the blocks a few times. And so they decided to do a raid one night. And this particular corner that they raided was directly across the street from the police station. Well, everything was going OK. The drag queens, the transgender were cooperating with the police.

They had lined them up against the wall. After that, they did-- they were fine, no problem. All of a sudden, one of the young rookie cops, and that's exactly what he was, he decided he wanted to pull one of the drag queens' wig off.

JIMMY CARPER: Oh, you don't do that.

STEPHEN: Two days later, they changed the entire law.

[LAUGHTER]

They still have against public masking. But now they have that if a policeman would stop, they cannot pull their wig or anything off.

JIMMY CARPER: Really.

STEPHEN: Well, needless to say, he was, kind of, had a little whipping.

[LAUGHTER]

JIMMY CARPER: That's right.

STEPHEN: He received on-the-job diversity training right at that point because at that point is this very lovely drag queen turned into this 200-pound man.

JIMMY CARPER: Whoop, he's a bud.

STEPHEN: Man with balls, too.

[LAUGHTER]

JIMMY CARPER: That's right.

STEPHEN: So like the saying says, you really have to have balls to put a dress on. And I think if all of us have a certain-- like the way Patti LaBelle refers, she says, we all have drag.

JIMMY CARPER: Yes, I love that.

STEPHEN: I love clothes that are drag.

JIMMY CARPER: I love that, yes.

STEPHEN: It's just that without transgender, they bring it to the ultimate limb and say, hey, this is what I am. This is who I am. It crosses all those barriers.

JIMMY CARPER: It does. It does.

STEPHEN: Every once in a while, some of us will try to sneak in and maybe, oh, I like that bracelet and try to slide it upon on our suit or something, or wear that pin on our lapel even though we know we did buy that out at the ladies section. So we all have that in our lives, wanting to cross over to the other side and see what the other side of life is like.

To our ladies, other men do like to see, well, let's see what the ladies that side of life is like. But it takes extra courage to say, this is where I want to be in my life. This is how I identify myself. And let's not get transgender mixed up with sexual orientation.

JIMMY CARPER: That's right.

STEPHEN: We're talking about a gender identity, what I see myself on the inside, even though OK, I might see myself as the black Marlboro man. Well, my sister just sees herself as Lena Horne.

JIMMY CARPER: See?

STEPHEN: Hey, if she can afford Lena Horne's jewelry, hey, I'm going to buy tomorrow, but it's all OK. And like I said, with H-Block our tribute is to the transgender community for being a very vital part of the community. And I must say--

JIMMY CARPER: Yeah, they are.

STEPHEN: I also say those are working girls. I see them working all the time, rain, sunshine--

JIMMY CARPER: Out there.

STEPHEN: --even holidays, and I don't do holidays. I just don't. How religious is that? I don't do holidays. That's a day to take off. And to our transgenders, I would just, before we leave, say more. I want you to stop by and check out the H-Block offices. It's located in the Houston Lesbian and Gay Community Center on the second floor because we're trying to set up a lot of things for the transgender community, especially the Black transgender community.

JIMMY CARPER: You bet.

STEPHEN: We are in the works of trying to set up some type of trust so that we can build up money so that any transgender who may need financial assistance maybe with a bill, maybe with medication, or just whatever can come there, and that's a resource center for the Black transgender community. And that's why we want to make H-Block as a resource center for the Black community, for all of the Black community, and for, actually, all of the gay community also so that everybody understands well, this is what's going on.

JIMMY CARPER: Good. I would like to see it.

STEPHEN: I'm ready to jam some more. I feel young again, somewhere. I feel like I'm 19.

JIMMY CARPER: I got just a treasure here already queued up.

STEPHEN: Oh, Mighty Real, yeah. That was that song that used to have me sore the next day from dancing all night. This is one of those few songs I know that they used to get played all night in the club. It looked like each time they played it, it sounded totally new. I mean, they would play it four or five times in the club.

JIMMY CARPER: You bet.

STEPHEN: You're like, oh, that's that song. Let's go for it. And it was like a race for the dance floor. If you didn't get there--

JIMMY CARPER: I remember those days.

STEPHEN: --in time, you had to stand out on the side and watch till the next time around.

JIMMY CARPER: That's right because you couldn't get on the dance floor.

STEPHEN: So for all those real brothers and sisters who were out there, and you're feeling it right now, this is for you.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

JIMMY CARPER: Thank you, Sylvester.

STEPHEN: Anybody sweating out there?

JIMMY CARPER: Now that's the original, "You Make Me Feel Mighty Real."

STEPHEN: And here's a little bit of history for those who really like to keep up with your music. Sylvester's first album came out in 1973. And that was with the Hot Band, and it was called Scratch My Flower.

JIMMY CARPER: No kidding.

STEPHEN: Yeah. Sylvester put out two albums that year. The second one was Bizarre. Then Sylvester went to a hiatus for almost four years. Next album came out with Sylvester in 1977. Now from 1977 to 1984, Sylvester put out at least one album every year. And his final album was in 1987, which was called Mutual Attraction.

JIMMY CARPER: I have that. I thought I had all of his stuff. But I didn't know about the early stuff that he did.

STEPHEN: I didn't know about the '73 stuff. That lost me. I think I was still listening to classical music then.

JIMMY CARPER: Yeah or playing it.

STEPHEN: I sure was, no joke. And that's quite a accomplishment just in the music industry to last over 10 years. And you're looking at lasting almost 15 years. On top of that, to put an album out, a productive selling album because every album that Sylvester put out, sold. I think his last album-- strange as it sound, Mutual Attraction, which has some of this really great music. I love Mutual Attraction. It didn't sell quite that hot. But we were moving out of the disco era.

JIMMY CARPER: That's true at that time.

STEPHEN: We all had other things on our mind. I don't know what. But we had other stuff on our minds.

JIMMY CARPER: Yeah, a lot of other stuff on our minds. That changed everything.

STEPHEN: Not only Sylvester was very out there, very visible with outlandish, as some people said, the show, a lot of other artists took that from him also.

JIMMY CARPER: You bet.

STEPHEN: They took that cue, and they went with it.

JIMMY CARPER: He paved that road.

STEPHEN: We started seeing some really great shows that came out during that period of time. Among one of those where we did see was the Village People. They came out during that period. And it seemed like a lot of shows started going to more theatrics. We started seeing the dancers. But they could not surpass the show that Sylvester would put on.

JIMMY CARPER: You bet.

STEPHEN: I read somewhere that other stars-- or one time Sylvester was in Las Vegas, and they had at least 10 stars that were in that house that night. And the reason why because they were taking notes, like, hey, we got to see what's going on.

JIMMY CARPER: Exactly, yeah, for their next show.

[LAUGHS]

STEPHEN: But tonight, like I said, is we attribute to Sylvester. And now another great artist we'll probably feature later on is RuPaul. RuPaul also took a lot of his stuff-- some of his show stuff from original Sylvester shows. So Sylvester has paved a great way, not only for transgenders, but for Blacks and for gays.

JIMMY CARPER: And RuPaul was not always a blonde.

[LAUGHS]

STEPHEN: That's true.

JIMMY CARPER: Her first--

STEPHEN: Once, she had red hair.

JIMMY CARPER: Her first video, she had dark hair. She did it-- she was in a--

STEPHEN: It's like a dirty red.

JIMMY CARPER: Something like that. She was in a music video, just on screen for a couple of seconds. But it was darker hair.

STEPHEN: And you think about it, that was one of these so unique things about Sylvester. Sylvester always used his own hair.

JIMMY CARPER: Yes, yes, and there's one album-- where is it?

STEPHEN: I love that one. I mean, no matter what the drag that Sylvester was in, he still gave you that natural-- he let you know that hey, there was a man here.

JIMMY CARPER: There was one where he-- it was like he bleached it blonde. It was like, oh, my God.

STEPHEN: He had one of those moments like that.

JIMMY CARPER: Because he had long hair at that time.

STEPHEN: But he used his natural hair, and he was a naturalist in certain ways. He did play with your mind as in giving you different-- where I want to take you, of how he wants you to see him at certain times.

JIMMY CARPER: He almost recreated himself every album.

STEPHEN: He did.

JIMMY CARPER: It was just a total different look. And you didn't know where he was going from one album to the next.

STEPHEN: And even from the albums, a lot of people thought that Sylvester was such this flamboyant person, where actually in real life, he spent most of his life living in San Francisco, very quiet, very helpful, very loving person. He spent most of his life with his lover. I think they were together, like, 15 years.

JIMMY CARPER: Oh, I didn't know that.

STEPHEN: They have been together for years. So he led a very quiet, very domestic life, reminds you of maybe picturing Patti LaBelle or picturing Aretha Franklin out on the road. And then when they get home, pulling out the pots.

JIMMY CARPER: Yeah, exactly.

STEPHEN: And one thing, I mentioned pots, though, that's one of the things Sylvester-- in an early interview, he did like to do, cook.

JIMMY CARPER: Cook?

STEPHEN: He loved to cook. I guess it's just an also, hey, cook and sing. Give us a good man, and we'll cook and sing.

[LAUGHS]

I know Aretha once said that she doesn't sing when she's in love. And then when she's not in love, that's when she sings.

JIMMY CARPER: Is that true?

STEPHEN: And the other thing was that she didn't gain weight.

JIMMY CARPER: Oh, yeah.

STEPHEN: When she's in love, the girl cooks.

[LAUGHTER]

JIMMY CARPER: Well, we don't really care of the size of our divas. That has nothing to do with that.

STEPHEN: To be all big and--

JIMMY CARPER: That's right. It's the attitude--

STEPHEN: Which is like their recipes.

JIMMY CARPER: --because they got bigger than life.

STEPHEN: I want their recipes.

[LAUGHS]

All this good food and they're letting it go to waste and not sharing. But mentioning about divas, more so, not only do divas are forerunners, they paved the way for us. But divas are also very humble people. We don't see divas really getting-- true divas don't get out there and brag about what they've been doing or try to get up on top of a pedestal or anything.

We find our real true divas are hard at work, trying to make things change one thing at a time. And they do it quite ever so quietly. I know when I started really researching in on Sylvester, I started finding out all the stuff that Sylvester was doing as part of the community. Not only just in the gay community, but Sylvester played a large part just in the community in San Francisco, period.

Sylvester would do volunteer work. I found out, like helping with the elderly at certain different rest homes in the community. So Sylvester was involved with all parts of the community, not just the gay community, the community as it is. And one thing I think I noticed when we talk about divas, you see that love come out, that genuine love. And I think it's that love that gives them that energy to hey, open their mouth and just blow us away.

We're going to let Sylvester do as we get ready to get out of here for tonight. We got a few more minutes, but we're going to let Sylvester really take you away. And since this is an early Sunday morning, and I'm not politically correct so I can do this, we're going to play a tune by Sylvester, "How Great--

JIMMY CARPER: "How Great Thou Art."

STEPHEN: --Thou Art."

JIMMY CARPER: That's what we're going to close this segment with.

STEPHEN: And tell you what, if you really like it, give us a call, drop us a donation here at KPFT. If you like me online, hey, drop us a donation. They're not going to pay me but drop the donation. They'll keep me on. They'll keep the lights on.

JIMMY CARPER: There you go. There you go.

STEPHEN: And let us know-- let us know that you like this segment of the show. Call Jimmy, wake him up, and then tell him, get up. Put it back on. But to all my chocolate brothers and sisters out there, before I turn you over into the immortal hands of Sylvester, I would like to say be sweet and treat everybody like you want to be treated, number one.

JIMMY CARPER: Stephen, thank you.

STEPHEN: Good night.

JIMMY CARPER: See you next month. Take care.

STEPHEN: Bye.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

I hope you enjoyed that. For those who's getting ready to get up in a few hours, attend the church if you want to. And that was our moment of inspiration. Next month, we will be featuring the music of Nona Hendryx, who was one of the members of Labelle. We will be looking at-- spotlighting some of the lesbian organizations, sisters here in Houston and talking about issues dealing with our sisters.

So until next week. I hope you have a blessed day and a wonderful week. I'll see you next month.

JIMMY CARPER: And now we mentioned that Gladys Knight song and I was able to find it and give it to you, and here it is.