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## **Smithsonian Presents Great Americans Medal to Honoree Paul Simon** *National Museum of American History to Honor Simon in Sept. 18 Program*

The Smithsonian's National Museum of American History will present its Great Americans medal to composer, musician and philanthropist Paul Simon Sept. 18. The presentation of the medal is part of the "Great Americans Award Program," the museum's emergent and signature honor. Simon will be the sixth honoree and the first musician to receive the award..

The "Great Americans Award Program" supported by David M. Rubenstein, chair of the Smithsonian's Board of Regents, features a conversation between Rubenstein and the recipient followed by a presentation of the Great Americans Medal for lifetime contributions embodying American ideas and ideals. Since its inception in 2016, the "Great Americans Award Program" has honored those who have not only made a lasting impact in their fields but those whose philanthropic and humanitarian endeavors set them apart.

"Paul Simon has achieved something truly remarkable," said Anthea M. Hartig, the Elizabeth MacMillan Director of the National Museum of American History. "Through the timelessness and poignancy of his music and his parallel dedication to understanding the beliefs and values of all peoples, Paul Simon has bridged cultures and generations in a way that beautifully exemplifies what it means to be a Great American."

An accomplished musician and songwriter, over his six-decade career, Simon has produced such masterpieces as "Bridge Over Troubled Water," "Sounds of Silence," and "Graceland." Simon has received 16 Grammy Awards, including a Lifetime Achievement Award for his work as half of the duo Simon and Garfunkel. He was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 1990 as a duo, and as a solo artist in 2001, and inducted to the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 1982. "Mrs. Robinson," his song from the film "The Graduate," was named to the top 10 of the American Film Institute's "100 Years, 100 Songs."

Simon's musical honors include the Library of Congress' inaugural Gershwin Prize for Popular Song, which recognizes the profound and positive effect of popular music on the world's culture. In 2006, *Time* magazine called him one of the "100 People Who Shape Our World." Simon is also a recipient of the Kennedy Center Honors and a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

"For more than half a century, Paul Simon has been one of the music world's most talented songwriters, recording artists and live performers. He has also been one of the music world's most committed philanthropists," said Rubenstein. "The National Museum of American History is thus honored to present Paul Simon with its Great Americans Award."

In June 2017, Simon donated the net proceeds from his U.S. concert tour to the Half-Earth Project, an initiative of the E.O. Wilson Biodiversity Foundation, which is committed to stopping the species extinction crisis. During Simon's "Homeward Bound–The Farewell Tour" in 2018, he thanked each tour city he visited with a financial gift to benefit local youth and environmental organizations. He continues his commitment to perform for charity, donating to organizations dedicated to environmental welfare and species biodiversity.

Simon's varied philanthropic work includes co-founding the Children's Health Fund, which donates and staffs mobile medical units that bring health care to low-income children and their families around the United States. Since its inception in 1987, CHF has provided over five million doctor/patient visits and created a primary health care source for communities affected by Hurricanes Andrew and Katrina.

### **About the Great Americans Medal**

The museum will present Simon with a specially minted medal struck in Wisconsin from 1.85 ounces of fine gold. It features an American eagle with rays of the sun on the obverse or "head's side" with the words "Great Americans" and "National Museum of American History" engraved around the edge. The reverse side honors one of the museum's most important treasures, the Star-Spangled Banner, and includes the mission of the Smithsonian: "For the increase and diffusion of knowledge." It measures approximately 1 1/2 inches in diameter and was inspired by the rare Double Eagle coins in the museum's National Numismatic Collection, which were designed by famed sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens for the \$20 gold piece. The medal was made possible by museum board member Jeff Garrett and designed by Michael Guilfoyle, an international designer of coins and medals.

The "Great Americans" medal is presented annually to up to two recipients and includes an interview with the awardee by Rubenstein. Honorees' accomplishments and influence on American

history connect to the museum's collections and exhibitions, including the impact of American giving. Previous honorees include Madeleine K. Albright, General Colin L. Powell, USA (Ret.), Thomas J. Brokaw, Cal Ripken Jr., and Billie Jean King

Currently the museum is working on a permanent exhibition that will look at history through the power of entertainment. Videos of the recipients and additional information can be found at <https://americanhistory.si.edu/great-americans>. Explore the museum's social media on Twitter @amhistorymuseum; on Facebook at @National Museum of American History and on Instagram @amhistorymuseum.

Through incomparable collections, rigorous research and dynamic public outreach, the National Museum of American History explores the infinite richness and complexity of American history. It is located on Constitution Avenue N.W., between 12th and 14th streets, and is open daily (except Dec. 25) from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Admission is free. For more information, visit <http://americanhistory.si.edu>. For Smithsonian information, the public may call (202) 633-1000.

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