

On the occasion of the CINEMA FOR PEACE Honorary Dinner for President Gorbachev on 8 November 2009, China Club Berlin:

Thank you very much.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is extraordinary, to understand that we can sit in the same room with an individual who will be remembered long, long into history. The achievement of this man sometimes seems to be undervalued, and in fact the only country in which his bravery is genuinely acknowledged is in Germany. But I will speak as an Irishman, who understands only too well what walls create. But then I speak as a European, as someone who understands also too well, what the breaking down of these walls can do.

Bill Roedy mentioned Mikhail being a singer, the point he is making is that the President is a human being. The point is that he is filled with Life. His love of his wife radiated through all his political decisions, the loss of his wife radiates through his post-political life. His love of his children and other people's children, his sensitivity to the creative, and his understanding of it. In politics, sometimes that is critically missing. This is why I have just asked Mikhail what working with Brezhnev was like. Did Brezhnev have any imagination? Because we didn't see it! I travelled through the Russia of Brezhnev, it was miserable, I travelled through the Europe at times of the Soviet Empire, it was intimidating. That man here, in this room with us, he got rid of that. That's extraordinary!

Ironically, in the whole Bolshevik experiment with humanity, there are only three people who will be remembered in history: Lenin, the instigator and revolutionary leader, Stalin, the enabler and revolutionary leader, and Gorbachev, the terminator. But equally a revolutionary, but unlike Lenin or Stalin, and in my view greater. In Russia there is at least ambivalence about this man. But in time, the Russians will understand that they did not lose an empire, they gained a nation. Gorbachev gave Russia back its soul. Maestro Domingo just talked of singing Tschaikowski, and he talked of how he had used Perestroika and brought it into the classical canon of Russian Art. That's what I mean by Gorbachov returning the soul of Russia to its proper place - the nation and the people of Russia.

We are lucky because we can look now at end of tyranny. In my life I travelled and worked throughout this tyranny but we are in Germany and we must also speak of that other great 20 century evil. For it was not Stalin who defeated Nazism but the vast huge courage, genius and bravery of the Russian people and their generals. So in this room the echoes of history are tremendous tonight. For people of my age and my generation they determined our time. Living on that small island off the coast of Europe, in Ireland, I simply accepted that my father had fought the Nazis and that maybe one day in turn I too would have to fight the Soviets. This was the terrible accepted existential reality of our times. I thought this would never change. And then suddenly, one moment, unbelievably, a person whom we could relate to in all his humanity emerges and changes everything. And although Mr Gorbachev doesn't know this, in a bizarre way, I was able to begin using the opportunity of this new creative political imagination for talking about the problems in Africa.

Gorbachev was meeting George Bush Snr in the warship in the Mediterranean. There was a problem in Sudan. The Americans had the food and the Soviets had the planes. But to get to the hungry people of Darfur we needed the Soviet pilots to take the American grain. So I called the Pope who would be meeting the President before he went to meet Bush. And I suggested that as an opportunity to demonstrate perestroika and glasnost the Soviet planes should take the US grain to the people of Darfur, and they did. I had been watching "Dynasty", Do you remember "Dynasty"? Anyway, I was watching "Dynasty" in London when the Pope called, as you do. And in a strange world where pop singers can talk to Popes and Popes to Presidents, somebody in Darfur got some food.

I have witnessed this man on several occasions and I am deeply honored to be here with him tonight and I must talk about his immense bravery. How did he persuade the military? How did he have the courage to stand up against the politbureau and the apparatchiks? How was that possible in that

system? The Soviet Union was suddenly and clearly bankrupt, economically as well as morally. What happened when Gorbachev had to confront this reality? History confronted him and asked: Well, what now? Mikhail Gorbachev took history by the hand and said let's work on this together. Let's cooperate. And in the 21st century cooperation rather than competition must be the paradigm of our time. This man here tonight did that and while events move faster than people imagine or can manage, in the end his elegance and his human dignity triumphed.

As Plácido said, we have seen the unification of Germany, but as an Irishman, as a European, Ladies and Gentleman, we saw the liberation of Europe. Finally, the end of this century of monstrous tyranny.

And because we are in Germany, I think of Goethe, the great voice of European civilization. You might know this great couplet, this great work of Goethe. "Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, magic and power in it." We saw his genius, we saw his boldness, and Ladies and Gentleman, we are all of us, in this room and in the world tonight, enjoying the power and the magic of what he did.