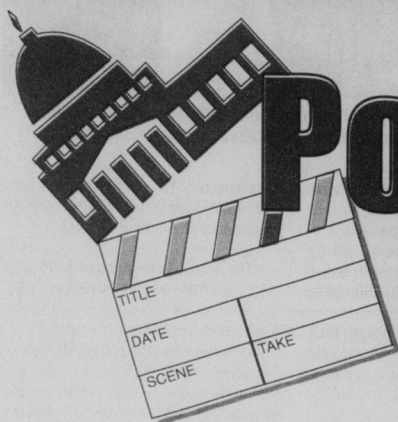


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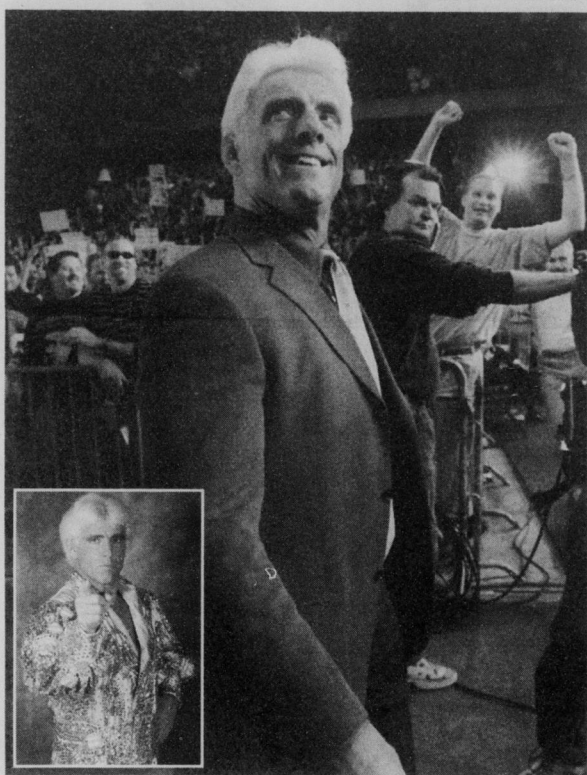
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## Political Performance

### Stars Strip Stage Costumes to Put on Suits Entertainers Cash In Their Money-Making Images for Election-Winning Votes



Ric Flair, who once topped popularity charts as a professional wrestler, is considering running for governor of North Carolina.

By MATT MANSFIELD  
Staff Writer

Ever since movie star Ronald Reagan stopped acting to perform the duties of California governor and then of leader of the free world, an influx of entertainers have bombarded the political scene.

"The central reason is that every politician needs two qualities to make a good candidate — name recognition and positive image," UNC political science professor Jim Stimson said. "And celebrities have those things there to begin with."

Those two qualities helped Sonny Bono, a high school dropout that had not voted until the age 53, become a congressman from California's 44th district.

After a stint as mayor of Palm Springs from 1988 to 1992, Bono became a popular congressman, being the second most requested guest at House Republican fund raisers in 1996.

And infamy could prove just as effective as a positive image in getting elected to office if Jerry Springer wins the U.S. Senate seat from Ohio. He announced the possibility of his running on "The Daily Show."

Skeptics should beware because Springer had political experience as mayor of Cincinnati; that is, until they kicked him out of office for reportedly soliciting a prostitute.

Stimson said some celebrities like Bono had virtually no political experience before running for office.

But UNC political science Professor Thad Beyle said celebrities developed as politicians in unconventional avenues before they ran for office.

"I think some of these people have experience," he said. "It may not be politically relevant experience, but it is some form of it."

For instance, Beyle said Reagan used to conduct speeches on behalf of General Electric, where he spoke on issues of democracy. Eventually he formed enough concrete views to run for office.

By writing and appearing in politically charged movies like "Bulworth," Warren Beatty has also made his political views concrete. Beatty wrote "Red," a film dealing with communism. Taking an even more active political stance, he announced his interest in running for president in August 1999.

Of all celebrities who hold political office, Jesse "The Mind" Ventura has the most experience as a politician. Originally named Jon Janos, the former wrestler and Navy Seal thought of his new name while riding on the Ventura Highway with his former motorcycle gang.

Before running for governor of Minnesota, Ventura was mayor of Brooklyn Park, a suburb of the twin cities. He also hosted a talk radio show aired on two stations for a couple years.

"He wanted to make things different," said Paul Moore, a spokesman for Gov. Ventura. "And I think he's a good example of how everyone should get involved and run for political office if they want to."

Ventura's uniqueness extends beyond being the only governor of a state to represent the Reform Party. He also has "Jesse Net," a Web site that keeps citizens abreast of political issues and asks for their opinions.

"I know the Internet was big in his campaign,"

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### Performers, Entertainers Invade Political Offices

Since actor Ronald Reagan entered the oval office, numerous entertainment personalities have taken their opinions to the voters.



RIC FLAIR  
Professional Wrestler  
Possible Gubernatorial Candidate



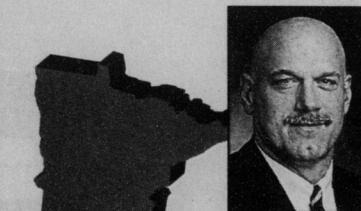
SONNY BONO  
Former Singer/Actor  
Former U.S. Rep., R-Calif.



JERRY SPRINGER  
Talk Show Host  
Former Mayor of Cincinnati



RONALD REAGAN  
Former Actor  
Former U.S. President



JESSE VENTURA  
Former Professional Wrestler  
Governor of Minnesota

### Performers Push Political Agenda, Stir Controversy

By ALLISON ROST  
Staff Writer

The fame that comes with being a successful entertainer has turned many a celebrity into a felon or worse, but there are many who choose to use the spotlight to help solve some of the world's problems.

Historically, musicians such as Bob Dylan and Buffalo Springfield protested the Vietnam War through their song lyrics, and hardly a celebrity went to a major event without the requisite AIDS red ribbon in the early 1990s.

The Beastie Boys have invested a lot of time into a hot issue, the political occupation of Tibet by the Chinese government. They founded a pro-Tibet group called the Milarepa Fund and organized a series of concerts to raise money for the cause.

Andrew Bryson, executive director of the Milarepa Fund, said the Beastie Boys' interest in the Tibet issue stemmed from a personal encounter.

"In 1994," says Bryson, "Adam Youch was trekking into Nepal and ran into a group of escaping refugees."

After conversations with those refugees and others in Kathmandu, the Beastie Boys decided "the easiest way to help out would be to start their own organization."

Their 1994 album, "Ill Communication," sampled monks on several songs, and the royalties raised from those tracks went to a Tibetan group.

The Milarepa Fund has also organized the Tibetan Freedom Concert series, which began in 1996, and has grown to include numerous musicians and international locales.

Despite the controversy surrounding the

Tibetan freedom struggle, the effect the Beastie Boys' involvement had on their image was never really a concern.

Bryson said, "They have always done what they wanted to do."

U2's Bono and the rock band Rage Against the Machine have also tested the activist waters.

Bono's extensive political involvement began in 1985 with his performance in Live Aid, a benefit concert for famine relief in Africa.

In November of last year, Bono lobbied Congress to expunge \$6 billion in Third World debt. Two weeks later, a sufficient number of Congressmen had been persuaded to join the cause, and President Clinton signed the pledge.

Rage Against the Machine has also been involved in various political struggles. They have performed benefit concerts for Rock the Choice, an abortion rights group, and Friends and Family of Mumia Abu-Jamal, a group supporting a former journalist who is on death row for a 1981 murder.

But this activism does not come without opposition. Various police groups now boycott Rage Against the Machine because of their support of a convicted murderer.

Political science Professor James Stimson said

political activism was usually sincere because the costs of involvement might outweigh the benefits of any publicity.

"If you want to maximize your box-office appeal, offending half of your audience might not be the best thing



Alt-rock band Rage Against the Machine pushes its political agenda with benefit concerts and organization lists on its CDs.

to do," he said. The Beastie Boys and Rage Against the Machine are not the only ones subject to controversy for their political agendas.

Actor Charlton Heston has taken a lot of heat since being elected as president of the National Rifle Association, especially around the time of the Columbine incident.

Bill Powers, director of Public Affairs with the NRA, said Heston's involvement was just a nat-

ural extension of his lifelong commitment to the preservation of civil rights.

Powers said Heston marched with Martin Luther King Jr. in the 1960s, and his interest with the right to bear arms began with a gun control issue in California in the early 1980s.

The NRA's cause and lobbying efforts have been greatly helped by the fame of some of their backers. "It certainly helps with respect to gaining attention with the media and folks who might not have known us," said Powers.

However, the stigmas involved with some political causes can become as much of an entertainer's image as their box-office hits or platinum records.

Actor Tom Selleck appeared in an advertisement for the NRA last year. When he was on the Rosie O'Donnell Show to promote a movie, O'Donnell, who is in favor of gun control, loudly criticized Selleck's stance.

Powers said that while the NRA was concerned for him after that incident, Selleck indicated that it had actually made his commitment to the NRA's goals stronger.

Along with openly announcing her political opinions on air, O'Donnell is deeply involved in philanthropic work. The talk show host began the For All Kids Foundation in 1997, a group that supports children with medical, educational and housing needs.

Endless numbers of entertainers like

O'Donnell support humanitarian organizations, and sometimes their involvement pushes them into the political arena. Actor Michael J. Fox, who suffers from Parkinson's Syndrome, recently announced his intention to leave the cast of "Spin City" to concentrate on fighting the disease and raising awareness.

His agenda landed him in front of Congress, testifying in support of an increase in research grants for Parkinson's.

Entertainers can bring a lot of recognition to a cause, but at the same time, what they do outside of their work can affect their image in a positive or negative way, depending on how their cause is perceived by the public.

As Stimson said, "Taking sides has costs as well as benefits."

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