**R.E.S.P.E.C.T: What Madonna Means to Me**

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It has been noted that Madonna has gotten a lot of flack in the media lately; especially regarding her tribute to the late Aretha Franklin at the VMAs. However, depending on where the audience gets their information from, the reactions are quite different. Yes, it would seem that Madonna’s “tribute” was all about her and what Aretha Franklin did to inspire and make her career possible; it almost comes across as self-centered. But; if you look at the response Madonna gave to the media regarding it, it begins to make sense. I quote:

“Just to clarify: I was asked to present video of the year by MTV! And then they asked me to share any anecdotes I had in my career connected to Aretha Franklin! I shared a part of my journey and thanked Aretha for inspiring me along the way. I did not intend to do a tribute to her! That would be impossible in 2 minutes with all the noise and tinsel of an award show. I could never do her justice in this context or environment. Unfortunately, most people have short attention spans, and are so quick to judge. I love Aretha! R.E.S.P.E.C.T…”

Aretha Franklin’s family isn’t even upset by her response or her so called tribute, here’s what her nephew Tim had to say about it; “Aretha's far bigger than any kind of tribute, and her fans shouldn't be so sensitive. She wouldn't have been." If Aretha’s family can see past the MTV snippet, why can’t we?

Now then, there is still a lot left we can learn from Madonna. First of all, she’s still releasing music at the age of 60! Not many pop stars that have come before or even after can say that. Who knows if any of the current pop stars will still be doing anywhere near what she’s been able to accomplish so far when they reach that age?

We owe a lot to Madonna if you really think about it. Before her Blond Ambition tour in 1990, concerts were dull and not the flashy interesting shows we have come to love today. She gave extravagant and revolutionary light shows, projections on screen, costume changes, highly choreographed dances and a microphone on a headset that allowed her to dance handsfree across the stage.

Madonna grew up in a multi-racial neighbourhood in Detroit and as a result has not only featured many black and Latino characters in her videos, she also makes a point to have many gay/lesbian characters in there as well. Showing that she is a very big supporter of Diversity. She’s also always surrounded herself with multicultural collaborators for every music video she’s done while pushing the boundaries of technology of the time (early 80s-90s), and paving the way for the modern music video.

Madonna has also been fighting her entire career against “ageism” in the industry. She was considered “old” when she started at the age of 25; as many of her fellow superstars got their break much younger than her. Now that she is 60, she’s still fighting against it. She gave a speech back in 2016 at the Billboard Women in Music event; stating that in the world of music “to age is a sin. People say I’m controversial…but I think the most controversial thing that I’ve done is stick around.”

By the sounds of things, she’s not planning on going anywhere any time soon. To this day, despite everything the media and industry has thrown at her, she is the iconic image of female empowerment. Wearing costumes of armour on stage, showing just how stubborn she can be and of course fighting that double-standard of men being able to show their sexuality while women were (and still are for the most part) encouraged to hide theirs. She shines with control, drive and fierce independence that women today can still learn from.

If you think about it, I mean really think about it, the entertainment world would be so much different if not for Madonna. Heck it would be different if we had never had Aretha Franklin. She gave the world Soul and was the first woman to ever be inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame! Her songs though unintentional, became anthems for women everywhere. This still rings true today. She passed on a legacy to the popstars and female artists that got their big breaks after hers.

One of the lines that she has said, in regards to her reinterpretation of R.E.S.P.E.C.T, still rings very true today. **“I think it’s quite natural that we all want respect – and should get it.”** This is a lesson we should all take to heart and remember.

Aretha Franklin and Madonna are two very well-known Queens of the music world. Though one was the Queen of Soul and one is the Queen of Pop, they’ve made their mark on the music and entertainment industry that we all know today. How different would things be if neither of these women had gotten their breaks? Signed those record deals or hadn’t sold a single album? Personally, I think it would be a very different place and I am grateful for everything these two and others like them have done for us.

Despite everything that Madonna has been through with the media lately, despite Aretha Franklin losing her battle with cancer earlier this year; let’s remember the amazing milestones they hit, paving the way for the new stars of today.

One final remark from Aretha Franklin, that I think would have been her answer to the backlash Madonna got over her tribute is this:

**“We can all learn a little something from each other, so whatever they can be inspired by where my music is concerned, is great.”**