

The Constant Charmer: Bono, Time Magazine's Person of the Year

By Josh Tyrangiel, Time Magazine

The G-8 summit is an annual gathering of the world's most powerful people at which two things are always accomplished: an awkward group photo is taken and no one has any fun. On the July night that this year's summit began in Gleneagles, Scotland, Bono thought it might be nice to change things up a bit. U2 had scheduled a concert at a stadium in nearby Edinburgh, and Bono, as is his custom, invited pretty much everyone he thought would be interesting to drop by, which explains how George Clooney, Hollywood's leading lefty, and Paul Wolfowitz, president of the World Bank and an architect of the Iraq war, ended up in the same room backstage. "It could have been a little uncomfortable," says Clooney. "In fact, I was kind of expecting it to be."

A few minutes before U2 was due to perform, Bono strolled in and plopped himself down—not on the couch or near it but on top of it, like a household pet. Then he began talking about the one interest that Clooney, Wolfowitz and almost everyone else who had come to Scotland that day had in common: persuading developed nations to help lift 1 billion people out of extreme poverty. Bono's precise words on the subject are lost to history. "I couldn't stop looking at him," says Clooney. "He's so affectless. You felt like you're in the living room with your buddy who just happens to be a global rock star and has the world's best interests at heart." Says Wolfowitz: "Pomposity and arrogance are the enemies of getting things done. And Bono knows how to get things done."

Those kinds of pleasant collisions happen a lot when Bono is around. Ashley Judd mixes in the greenroom at a U2 show with Dean Kamen, inventor of the Segway scooter and an aborning machine that makes even the filthiest water drinkable. Bill Gates goes to a nightclub, gets called a "bad mother_____" by Diddy and understands that it is intended as a compliment. Of course,

if Bono were to rely solely on his ability to get powerful people in a room with famous people and then hit them with a speech about moral obligations, he would be little more than the lead singer in the war on global poverty—a nice title but limited in its power. "If you really want to be effective, you have to bring something to the table beyond just charisma," says Rick Santorum, a conservative Republican Senator from Pennsylvania. "The important thing is, Bono understands his issues better than 99% of members of Congress."

Knowing the facts is crucial—"Everybody hates a dilettante," says Bono—but so is knowing your audience. When he lunches with President Bush, as he did most recently in October, Bono quotes Scripture and talks about small projects in Africa that have specific metrics for success. Then he asks for more money to fund them.



In the office of Senator Dick Durbin, a Democrat from Illinois, he speaks of multilateralism and how development aid reminds the rest of the world of America's greatness. Then he asks for more money. In stadiums, he tells people that if they join together, they have a chance to make poverty history. Then U2 plays One.

Bono's great gift is to take what has made him famous—charm, clarity of voice, an ability to touch people in their secret heart—combine those traits with a keen grasp of the political game and obsessive attention to detail, and channel it all toward getting everyone, from world leaders to music lovers, to engage with something overwhelming in its complexity. Although it's tempting for some to cast his global road show as the vanity project of a pampered celebrity, the fact is that Bono gets results. At Gleneagles—where Bono and his policy-and-advocacy body, data, met with five of the eight heads of state at the summit—the G-8 approved an unprecedented \$50 billion aid package—including \$25 billion for Africa—and pledged near universal access to antiretroviral drugs for almost 10 million impoverished people with HIV.

Bono technically didn't achieve any of those things on his own, "but it's hard to imagine much of it would have been done without him," says Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin. Although politicians, academics and activists continue to differ over the best way to tackle poverty and disease in the developing world, Bono's contribution has been to forge, over the past decade, a surprisingly durable consensus on the need to do something. "The only thing that balances how preposterous it is to have to listen to an Irish rock star talk about these subjects," says Bono, "is the weight of the subjects themselves."

Ballast is not an attribute commonly attributed to pop stars. Bono, 45, spends his evenings lifting people to their feet, but offstage, he can be almost aggressively grounded. One morning a few days before the 25th anniversary of John Lennon's death, Bono stands on the balcony of his New York City apartment overlooking Central Park. "You know what my least favorite John Lennon song is?" he says. "Imagine. At the root of it is some rigorous thinking about the way things could be, but people have stolen the idea and made it an anthem for wishful thinking. I'm against wishful thinking. I hate it."

Bono is prone to large pronouncements, but a significant part of his charisma stems from the fact that it isn't intimidating. There are rock stars who enter a room with the kind of sex display the Discovery Channel saves for sweeps weeks, but Bono is not one of them. He's handsome but short—5 ft. 7 in. in thick-soled shoes—and swings his arms wide when he walks, so he looks open and soft, like a pillow in a cowboy hat. It's not at all what people expect, and it sets them at ease.

Today, with U2 in town for a show at Madison Square Garden, Bono has the rare treat of staying in one of his homes, a three-story penthouse he purchased from Steve Jobs. (He also has places in Dublin and the south of France.) He lounges beneath a giant Christo drawing of The Gates (not Bill and Melinda but the Central Park installation), surrounded by art books. It's a lovely day to do nothing, but that's not really an option. "I get very little time entirely alone," he says, moments before six people appear in the living room with videoconferencing equipment to discuss a soon-to-be-announced consumer campaign for African development. Tom Lantos, a Democratic Representative from California, swings by with his granddaughter. Bono and Lantos are close enough that the Congressman, a Holocaust survivor, has encouraged Bono to reference worldwide indifference to the genocide when describing governments' apathetic response to the spread of aids across Africa. "I am very sensitive to people abusing the analogy," says Lantos. "He's convinced me it's legitimate."

More than two decades since Bono entered the world stage as a mullet-haired front man, he commands attention like no other cultural figure alive. When he visits Capitol Hill, his movement through the halls is split-timed. His lobbyists feed him tips so he knows, for instance, that Kentucky's Mitch McConnell has a thing for Burmese dissident Aung San Suu Kyi, a Nobel Peace Prize winner who inspired U2's song Walk On. The rest is intuitive. Bono arrives with no security, takes gifts (a leather-bound volume of Seamus Heaney for Patrick Leahy, a framed copy of the Marshall Plan speech for Colin Powell) to suit his host's taste. He poses for every staff picture, and his thank-you notes are handwritten and prompt. He wears whatever he pleases. "I refuse to be anything other than what I am," he says. "I literally get into the clothes at the end of the bed. If somebody doesn't take them off and wash them, things would probably get a bit high."

Twenty years ago, the notion of Bono as a political player was almost unimaginable. In 1985, U2 played Live Aid, the Bob Geldof–organized concert for African famine relief. At the time, it was hailed as a massive success, and in the sense that it got people to briefly engage with another part of the world while watching Tina Turner dance with Mick Jagger, it was. After the concert, Bono and his wife Ali Hewson spent six weeks working at an orphanage in Wello, Ethiopia. The weight of famine, war and corruption—as well as the resentment many capable Africans feel toward uninformed foreigners with messiah complexes—overwhelmed him. As did the foolishness of thinking a day of singing was enough. But U2 was on its way to becoming the biggest band in the world, and Bono stuffed a deeper engagement with Africa into the warehouse of good intentions.

Then in 1997 he received a brief from a development advocate, Jamie Drummond, that pointed out that although Live Aid raised \$200 million, Ethiopia alone paid \$500 million in annual debt service to the world’s lending institutions. After contacting Drummond, Bono signed on as a spokesman for Jubilee 2000, a church-based campaign born in England that asked governments to use the millennium as an occasion to cancel Third World debt. Bono, who spends most of his nontouring time in Dublin with Hewson and their four children, started flying to Washington for weekends at the World Bank with his friend Bobby Shriver, a son of Eunice and Sargent Shriver. Eventually, Bono’s education was taken over by economist Jeffrey Sachs. After Bono’s understanding of the issue went from fluency to mastery, he started speaking out, lobbying Bill Clinton’s Administration to make debt relief a core aim of U.S. policy toward the developing world. It worked: midway through his presidency, Clinton agreed to erase \$6 billion in debt.

Bono was very pleased with himself until he learned that he hadn’t actually accomplished anything. Congress hadn’t signed off. “When I first arrived in Washington,” says Bono, “I asked, Who’s Elvis here? Who do I have to speak to to change the world? Then I find out that even though the President says yes and even though he speaks with a twang, he’s not Elvis. Congress is Elvis in America. No, Congress is Colonel Parker.”

Through Shriver’s brother-in-law Arnold Schwarzeneg-

ger, Bono met Ohio Republican John Kasich, a fiscal conservative known for his love of jam bands. “Our first rabbi on the right” is how Bono describes Kasich. Still, it took dozens of visits to the Hill for Bono to gain influence. At first, even Democrats wouldn’t clear their schedules. House minority leader Nancy Pelosi offered some time while she waited for a flight at the mordantly depressing Dulles Airport. “In a short period, I saw a depth of knowledge that was hugely impressive and a depth of commitment to match,” says Pelosi. “I mean, he came to Dulles.” Republicans tended to be more skeptical, so Bono courted their staff members, most of whom were his age or younger and had grown up loving U2. “Washington is very hierarchical,” he says. “It’s all principal-to-principal meetings, but I’m from rock ‘n’ roll. If I want to have a drink with someone, they sound interesting, they’re fun, I’m going to have a drink.”

At that point, Bono was relying on an improvised staff of Drummond and Lucy Matthew, another Brit from the nonprofit world, who would meet him wherever U2 was playing and open a policy desk at the local Kinko’s. “He told us he was in this cause for life,” says Matthew, “and it was time to become a real organization.” Bob Geldof, one of Bono’s closest friends, came up with the name data, a double acronym meant to position the group as a nexus between the nonprofit development world (debt, aids, trade, Africa) and the results-oriented political world (democracy, accountability, transparency in Africa.) The name was also directed inward: no wishful thinking, just facts in all their nasty complexity.

To ensure that data was divorced from the stigma of vanity, Bono refused to bankroll it. After coaxing \$1 million grants out of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, George Soros and software businessman Ed Scott, data got real office space and hired lobbyists—Tom Sheridan, a Democrat who had been a star of the domestic aids lobby, and Scott Hatch, a former Tom DeLay aide who ran the National Republican Campaign Committee. data employees churned out policy papers, while Hatch, Sheridan and Shriver organized intimate, bipartisan dinner parties (sample guest list: Senators Jesse Helms, Patrick Leahy and Orrin Hatch; former World Bank president Jim Wolfensohn; Clinton Treasury Secretary Larry Summers) to cement relationships and encourage the sense that at least on one issue, everyone could break bread. Spouses were invited, and to spice things up, Bono might ask a friend from another

sphere, like Jordan's Queen Noor, to drop by. "Your first responsibility is not to be dull," he says. "Why don't the poor deserve flash in their representation?"

All that helped prepare Bono for the most daunting challenge to his powers of persuasion: the Administration of George W. Bush. When Bush took office in 2001, development groups presumed that debt, aids and trade for Africa would be at the bottom of his agenda, largely because Bush said they would be. But Bono had forged too many productive odd pairings to simply give up. And as it turned out, a few White House doors were already open.

"The key to some extent is faith," says Mike Gerson, the President's assistant for policy and strategic planning. Gerson and Budget Director Josh Bolten are evangelical Christians who believe there's a biblical imperative to help the world's poor. Along with then National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, they opened a dialogue with Bono and ultimately persuaded Bush to meet him. "I took my boys, 8 and 10, to their first rock concert—U2 here in Washington," says Gerson. "We met Bono beforehand, and he says, 'I'm so honored that you would pick me for your first concert. I'm a little hoarse tonight. I need you to do me a favor. If you hear my voice going out, I want you to pray for me.' He's just obviously a good guy."

Born to a Protestant mother and a Catholic father, Bono describes his faith as "promiscuous." He quotes Scripture and counts meetings with Pope John Paul II and Billy Graham among the most significant of his life. "I try to live it rather than talk about it because there are enough secondhand-car salesmen for God," he says. "But I cannot escape my conviction that God is interested in the progress of mankind, individually and collectively."

Even as he softened Bush by appealing to his religiosity, Bono also began to talk about debt relief and poverty eradication in hardheaded, national-interest terms. After 9/11, data seized the opportunity to lobby for new policy. Africa is 40% Muslim, and Tom Hart, data's director of government relations, argued that it might be nice to make some friends there. When the Administration said money was tight, the policy experts scoured the ngo world and came back touting small programs with clear ways to measure progress. When the issue of corruption was raised, data proposed a scheme to nurture good

governance. ("Start-up funds for new democracies, sir," was how Bono pitched it to the President.) In its relentlessness and flexibility, data had assumed the personality of its founder. Bono's network of contacts didn't hurt either. In 2003, when President Bush visited an aids clinic in Entebbe, Uganda, he was welcomed by a children's choir singing America the Beautiful. Then a woman named Agnes Nyamayarwo told the story of how she was unknowingly infected with HIV and passed the virus on to her son during his birth. aids drugs cost \$40 a month in Uganda, but the government spends just \$7 per person per year on health care; Nyamayarwo, a nurse, could not afford to keep her son alive. When she finished speaking, Bush embraced her. Nyamayarwo, it turns out, has been close friends with Bono since they met several years ago. Says Bono: "We've got people jumping out of the bushes at the Bushes!"

With advocates on the inside and in Congress, and not-so-gentle prodding elsewhere, the Bush Administration in 2003 launched the President's Emergency Plan for aids Relief (pepfar) and the Millennium Challenge Corporation (mcc). In two years, pepfar has paid for antiretroviral drugs for 400,000 Africans with HIV, while the mcc aims to dispense foreign aid by rewarding countries for being accountable. Bono stood by the President when he unveiled the mcc, and complained loudly when he thought it was underfunded. (Soon after, mcc administrator Paul Applegarth was replaced; data swears it played no role.) "These are more than baby steps," says Bono, "but to get them to be strides we need more than applause or hisses from me. We need a movement."

<--pagebreak--> One of the ways to spark a movement is to create a defining moment. "We've been doing this now for a few years—pretending this is the one, this is the leap. And in fact, this year was the one. We've had 2005 in mind for quite a while," he says. As early as 2003, Bono and others had picked out a number of unrelated political events—a G-8 meeting that was to have as hosts British Prime Minister Tony Blair and Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown (dubbed by Bono the "John and Paul of global development"), a meeting of the World Trade Organization, a U.N. summit to review progress toward the Millennium Development Goals—all relevant to lifting people out of poverty. But they needed to be tied together and pitched as potentially world changing. "Politicians are performers of a kind, but they're not great at dramatizing a situation," says

Bono. “These issues need tension, jeopardy and a sense of what-might-be to succeed. All of that is much more from our language than from theirs.”

What followed was a tour de force of syndicalism. Several NGOs in the habitually backbiting development community put aside their differences and launched integrated awareness campaigns (Make Poverty History in Britain, the ONE Campaign in the U.S.) aimed at educating people about global poverty and registering millions of supporters online. Blair announced a G-8 agenda with a goal of getting \$50 billion in aid and 100% debt cancellation, and data lobbied the White House to be an active partner, reminding it that Blair had stood by the Administration in the past. To their surprise, they didn’t have to do much pitching. Over beers with some friends from the Treasury Department, Drummond, Hart and policy director Erin Thornton actually heard the words “So, tell us why can’t we do 100% debt cancellation?” Debt had been presumed a dead issue—but all of a sudden these guys are telling us they think they’ve figured it out,” says Hart. “We’d completely flipped roles. Very weird.” There were details to iron out, and the Treasury guys insisted Bono not be told for a while (he is a poor secret keeper), but willingness proved 95% of the battle.

To cap it off, the G-8 would fall almost precisely on the 20th anniversary of Live Aid, and Bono wanted a concert to prove how far the movement had come. Bob Geldof “didn’t want to repeat himself,” says Bono, but six weeks before the summit he hit upon the idea of staging free concerts in each G-8 country. After a frenzy of persuasion, cities were lined up, sponsors found and bands, many of which already had concerts scheduled for the day, were persuaded to divert from their itineraries and play for free. “Charm, handsomeness and the fact that (Bono) wrote *Where the Streets Have No Name* goes you a long way,” says Coldplay’s Chris Martin, one of the headliners in London’s Hyde Park.

Bono, meanwhile, launched a final burst of back-room politicking, greasing countless surreal encounters with people who had no business being in the same room together. Days before the summit, he visited 10 Downing Street and learned that the G-8’s civil-servant negotiators, or “sherpas,” who put deals into precise language, were feuding over how to pay for the proposed \$50 billion aid package. “We were having a beer,” Blair told

Time, “and just decided we would talk to these people who’d done an incredible amount of work, to give them a sense of the importance of this.” After introducing himself, Bono asked them to “please go that bit further,” reminding them that “in 20 years, this week is one of the things you’ll be most proud of in your lives.” Says Blair: “These are all pretty hard-bitten people who have worked in international relations a long time, but they were very, very enthused by that spirit.”

Just before the end of the summit—which was disrupted by the July 7 terrorist attacks in London—Bono dropped by President Bush’s suite for a final nudge. “On so many issues it’s difficult to know what God wants from us,” Bono told Bush, “but on this issue, helping the desperately poor, we know God will bless it.” On July 8, the leaders agreed to cancel the debt of the 18 poorest African countries and to increase aid by \$50 billion by 2010. But some activists say it’s not nearly enough. Dr. Kumi Naidoo, the South African who chaired Make Poverty History’s international umbrella, felt that Geldof—who called the debt deal a “10 out of 10”—was too exuberant and pointed out that all the deal meant was that 50,000, the number of people dying unnecessarily each day, would drop to 37,000. Naidoo’s skepticism underlines the limits of Bono’s approach: all that was achieved at Gleneagles was a series of commitments—signed checks, not cashed ones.

What would help get some of those checks cashed is a sustainable political movement, and Bono knows that. “I once asked Bill Gates what his long-term goal was for data,” says Bono. “He said that one day he hoped people could run for office on this stuff.” Bono anticipates that the celebrity-studded ONE Campaign, which gained pledges of support to ending global poverty from 2 million people, will someday become “the n.r.a. for the world’s poor,” but for now it’s what economists call a risk-free choice; there’s no fee to join and interest tends to rise and fall based on world events. “I really believe the movement is our future,” says Bono, “but it’s not here yet.”

Which is why he can’t stop working, even if it means confronting the outer limits of his power. On an afternoon in late November, the rock star is idling in a car outside a Dunkin’ Donuts near Ottawa on his way to a round of arm twisting with Canadian lawmakers. Prime Minister Paul Martin, the only member of the G-8

running a budget surplus, has refused to do something Bono and data had long hoped he would: commit to giving 0.7% of Canada's gnp to development aid. Many European countries made formal commitments to that figure in 2005, adding billions to the future overall aid pot, but Martin has said the numbers don't add up yet for Canada. (The U.S. gives 0.1%). Bono was hoping to change Martin's mind before the end of the year.

During the two-hour drive from Montreal, where U2 played the previous night, Bono flips through manila folders full of briefing papers to prepare for meetings with Canada's opposition leaders. He fires a few croaky-throated questions at Drummond—"What is this soft-lumber argument between Canada and the U.S.?"—and tries out phrases for the media scrum that will start the day, imagining how they will play in the Canadian papers. "Make-or-break month for Martin, says Bono," he sighs. "Not exactly poetry."

Mostly, he's trying to find a reservoir of energy. "The day after a show, a giant hole opens up," he says between sips of coffee, "and if I'm not careful it swallows me." Outside Parliament, Bono signs autographs and meets briefly with leaders from Canadian ngos. Then he is led to a lectern and hit with the obvious: How does he feel about Martin's refusal to commit to boosting Canadian aid? Bono riffs a bit, hoping to stumble onto something inspirational. Then he says, "I'm crushed." Flashbulbs pop. "Crushed makes it personal," Drummond whispers in agony. "And it's past tense, like we've failed. It takes the air out of the room." In minutes the quote is on Canadian news websites. On the way out, Bono shakes his head. "Crushed. That was shite." A few days later, Martin says that as soon as he can find a responsible way to get to 0.7%, he will. He says he understands Bono's frustration. "He's doing what he ought to do. He's out there pushing."

At some point—perhaps soon—Bono may have to decide how hard he can keep pushing. Because he's one of the most energetic people on the planet, Bono rarely has a down moment, but on the rare occasions when he removes his sunglasses, thick scrolls of tissue are visible under his eyes. For months his exercise routine has been compromised by a prolapsed disk in his back. "It's annoying to me that I'm overweight now," he says. He speaks to his children every other day while he's on the road, a nontraditional arrangement but one they've

known all their lives. Still, he misses his family profoundly. The band, which was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in March and once again led the concert industry in gross revenues in 2005, has got used to his being an unpredictable presence. "The good news from our point of view is that he prefers working on music more than anything else," says guitarist the Edge. "And also he's unelectable."

For a man who expresses himself on a grand scale nightly, Bono is surprisingly stunted when it comes to talking about how he deals with the pressure he has brought upon himself. "I don't talk about this stuff to anybody," he says. "Of course, I don't talk about it to the band—it's boring enough for them onstage. When I go home, I don't want to talk about it. When I'm with my mates, I just don't. I think about it, and I allow occasionally enough time to think about it in moments of reflection. It's one of the things that's really unhealthy. It's been a very long year."

It might be possible to imagine Bono shedding his title as the world's greatest activist and reverting to his previous role as its biggest rock star—except that his happiness and peace of mind so obviously depend on being both. After the disappointment in Ottawa, Bono spent four days in Acapulco with absolutely nothing important to do and returned to the road a new man. "I'm like a camel. I store up sleep in my hump," he says. U2's never-ending Vertigo tour has come to Boston, and from his palatial suite he has the panorama of a city blanketed in snow and capped by an endless blue sky. After a quick trapeze through Boston Common, it's time to go to work.

One way to get leaders to keep a \$50 billion aid commitment is to protest in the streets. Another is to show them that aid has a logic. The schedule for the day is relatively low wattage; no world leaders, no movie stars, just discussions with academics and development experts at Harvard and M.I.T. who might feed data good policy ideas and catalytic facts. At Harvard, Bono is greeted by president Larry Summers, an early Bono skeptic while Treasury Secretary under Clinton but now a true believer. (It is something to see the president of Harvard greet a rock star with a soul hug and a "Hey, man, what's up?")

After lunch with professors and vague talk about col-

laborations down the road, Bono and his team head off to M.I.T. to meet with the Poverty Action Lab, a new group that specializes in objective modeling, one of Bono's turn-ons. Michael Kremer, a Gates (as in Bill and Melinda) Professor of Developing Sciences, opens with an example of the kinds of problems the lab examines: Why don't poor children go to school? Health, it turns out, is a major factor. One quarter of the world's children have worms. Treating them costs only \$3.50 a student. "So you treat every kid, and in areas where you do that, school absences fall by 25%. They fall in neighboring schools too," says Kremer, "because the worms don't spread. It's a fantastically good buy." Erin Thornton, data's policy director, asks how the lab directs its research. It doesn't, and that's why the lab is interested in finding partners who can offer guidance and channel the studies to decision makers.

Finally Bono can't restrain himself. "Do you know we've been chased down hallways with the words 'measurable results'? What you have here is the stuff that can change the world! What we need to do ..." and for a minute he is off. There are rhythmic pauses between his phrases, some of which have been rounded smooth by dozens of similar meetings, while others are hitting the air for the first time and are charged with tension. The overall effect is musical. Bono is taking a room filled with economists, mathematicians and policy experts and levitating it. When he finishes, the room hovers in silence for a moment. Then there is laughter, as if everyone had just got off an amusement-park ride. "Facts," he says, "are very beautiful." But only Bono can make them sing.