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Review by **Charles S. Maier**, Harvard University

Consider musical diplomacy as a part of cultural or public diplomacy – a resource for the international projection of state power, deployed less for specific negotiations than as an instrument of what we've grown used to calling, after Joseph Nye, soft power, or the aura of influence that a country can mobilize outside its borders. SHAFR's flagship journal, *Diplomatic History*, has devoted a "special forum" to this activity organized primarily by Professor Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht of the University of Cologne, an active participant in SHAFR meetings, whose recent book *Sound Diplomacy* examined the role of European music and performers in the United States during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹ In the lead article of the forum, Gienow-Hecht asks "Why do policymakers in

¹ *Sound Diplomacy: Music and Emotions in Transatlantic Relations, 1850-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

Washington, Carácas, Teheran, and elsewhere believe that touring symphonies playing mostly music by dead white European males can somehow sweeten relations gone sour?” (18) Forget the gratuitous slap at great composers for their mortality -- a broadly shared limitation, after all, and since the invention of notation, usually irrelevant for their legacy – or their inherited skin color, or Y chromosomes; we know that the elite circles from whom symphony audiences are mostly drawn enjoy much of these dead composers’ music; and it may be equally germane to remember that in fact they are listening to live, often female, performers frequently of non-Caucasian background. The issue is in what sense their pleasure at hearing live performers from abroad contributes to the prestige or influence of the countries that are indulging their taste.

Gienow-Hecht suggests that symphony orchestras sent on tour “perform the nation”: conductors and orchestras “on stage symbolize a nation’s legitimacy as prominent international actor.” (18) She finds much of the performative power lies in the general condition under which classical music is played; the audience sits passively in an enclosed arena while an authority figure controls their reaction: “...there is no doubt who determines silence and sound, performance, and behavior in any given concert hall in the world: players perform at the conductor’s will; audiences listen and express praise or disdain when he or she allows them to do so;” (27) “It was this very capacity to perform past cultural celebrations on stage that gave U.S. symphony orchestras a new face in the early stages of the Cold War;” (22) “The political function of symphony orchestras on tour abroad is not just that they play beautiful music trying to establish dialogue but that they seek to display leadership and symbolize the authority behind the orchestra in a foreign environment while audiences remain quiet and attentive.” (26)

Gienow-Hecht may be our leading historian of orchestral internationalism, immensely informed about a century of performers who crossed the Atlantic both ways, and a sophisticated consumer of performance theory. Her continuing output has compelled her readers to interrogate the political potential of transnational art and culture. Still, I think that trying to find the power of orchestra tours in the performative conventions of the authoritative conductor and the self-imposed passivity of an elite audience is off the mark. The prestige of the ensemble may count for more although she finds it ironic that such a ritualized canon of performance and work should evoke such enthusiasm. (22-23) As her material suggests, what made the tours valuable was that they demonstrated that the new Western hegemon was not a nation of *nekulturni* materialists. She follows in particular Leonard Bernstein and the New York Philharmonic’s Russian tour in 1959, and Bernstein, had charisma, showmanship, and musical talent.

Of course the history of musical and cultural tours in the Cold War involved more than just great symphony orchestras. American audiences watched the Russian folkloric ballets that Sol Hurok repeatedly imported. From the 1960s on pop and rock stars powerfully enthused young audiences across the Iron Curtain. In the year before their state collapsed, GDR leaders in East Germany aspired to arrange a major Bruce Springsteen concert. Successful musical diplomacy operates across genres. Professor Gienow-Hecht

has done us all a service by documenting the symphonic tours, but I think she has the mechanics of influence wrong: if musical diplomacy represents the nation, it is not because the symphonic performance provides an analog of authority and control to the benefit of the country that sends the authority figure. The Russians who wept at a Bernstein concert did so because music provided its continuing Dionysian hope that art might dissolve boundaries, control and contention. Such an expectation must certainly have been illusory but for a few hours it allowed the United States to sponsor a force that, more even than universal markets or capitalism, promised a world beyond politics.

Jennifer L. Campbell's contribution ("Creating Something out of Nothing: The Office of Inter-American Affairs Music Committee (1940-41) and the Inception of a Policy for Musical Diplomacy" reminds us that American musical diplomacy did not begin with the Cold War. She follows the vigorous efforts at musical exchange with Latin America that sprang up with the "Good Neighbor Policy" and the establishment of the Division of Cultural Relations in 1938, an initiative that would be subsumed after November 1940 by the Music Committee of Nelson Rockefeller's Office of Inter-American Affairs (OIAA). The OIAA's Music Committee defined its mission as sending the best music and musicians the United States could offer. Soon enough it was debating what would serve as good representative music, which turned out to be largely "highbrow" or serious pieces by North and South American composers, possibly folk music, but not jazz, which they found as too commercially tainted, and nothing too "elitist" or avant-garde and atonal. (33) The Yale Glee Club, the League of Composers Wind Quintet, and the American Ballet Caravan passed muster in 1941 after agreeing to a significant ration of American works. Indeed, the Committee seems to have admirably encouraged the performance of South American music and ensembles in the United States, even as Rockefeller helped organize tours by Louis Armstrong, Benny Goodman, the BSO, Martha Graham and the New York City ballet. The democratic sponsorship of culture could have worse outcomes.

Emily Abrams Ansari, who continues a similar story for the Eisenhower administration, ("Shaping the Policies of Cold War Musical Diplomacy: An Epistemic Community of American Composers) apparently believes it did. Ike himself understood, as he wrote his brother Edgar, that music could counteract the stereotype of Americans as "bombastic, jingoistic, and totally devoted to the theories of force and power." (41) Ansari follows the Musical Advisory Panel for the Cultural Presentations Program of the American National Theater and Academy (ANTA), which she analyzes as an example of a so-called "epistemic community," or a network of professionals with recognized expertise, who in this case came to control the ANTA. (43) I don't think that this concept borrowed from political science helps very much. The troika of Howard Hanson, William Schuman and Virgil Thomson might have been smug about their tastes, but did they and other mainstream authorities from the music world really claim the same quasi-scientific expertise that political scientists attribute to "epistemic community?" The parallel, of course, depends upon the facile view of expertise as mere ideology. (52) When, say, a medical community urges a campaign against diabetes is their recommendation really to be dismissed as mere ideology?

Ansari's reading of the Musical Advisory Panel minutes does, however, reveal the narrow spectrum of what musical culture its members thought appropriate to send abroad. Thomson and Schuman resisted the State Department's push for jazz tours – believing that in Europe jazz “would encourage Soviet-exploited stereotypes of American culture as entirely market-driven,” and that the Boston Pops was a “middle-brow cultural venture.”² So, too, they turned down performances of George Gershwin and Bernstein although they approved of performances by the Boston Symphonic Orchestra, the Juilliard String Quartet and Leontyne Price. In effect they tried to steer between the accessibility of Adam Copland's ballets, say, and the further shores of serialism, hoping “to rescue contemporary nonserial concert music from its Communist associations and transform it into a politically neutral exemplar of American cultural achievement.” (49) Outside dissenters finally managed to reduce the influence of these American cultural commissars under the Kennedy Administration.

I find Ansari's conclusion overdrawn. She thinks it ironic that a program designed for the Cold War against Communism should play into the hands of cultural guardians who wanted to purge American tonal music of its associations with Communism. But why does this spill-over effect seem curious? Personalities from the world of movies and drama behaved even more egregiously in disavowing leftwing taints. Ansari suggests that her ANTA mandarins sought to hijack U.S. foreign policy for selfish purposes. “While their government sought to create a program that served foreign policy interests, this small group of men turned their nation's Cold War agenda to their own advantage.” (52) But it was the USIA that pleaded against American works on the grounds Europeans did not think them good enough, even as Ansari's Musical Advisory Panel had a voice in the successful concert missions that Gienow-Hecht describes.

Danielle Fosler-Lussier seeks to raise the issue to a more theoretical level in “Music Pushed, Music Pulled: Cultural Diplomacy, Globalization, and Imperialism” as she also examines the Cultural Representations Program. Focusing on the milieus and exchanges that surrounded the performances, she proposes – in contradistinction to Gienow-Hecht – that not the structured performances, but the spontaneous exchange of ideas and musical tips that accompanied them were what made the American ventures effective. Of course Gienow-Hecht focuses on the tightly-scheduled orchestral appearances in Western Europe and the Soviet Union, whereas Fosler-Lussier cites smaller groups in the global South. Celebrating the “feeling of connectedness that came from interaction with American musicians” she asks “to what extent did this channel foster empire?” (59) Not much, she implies: music created reciprocal ties, hence “the pull” as well as “the push.” By emphasizing the “pull” or thirst for musical contacts on the part of the receiving nation, Fosler-Lussier wants to deny the instrumentalist role of musical diplomacy in

² Ansari, p. 45, note 22 and p. 31, n.47; these are direct quotes from the minutes of the Music Advisory Panel, now held at the University of Arkansas.

favor of a reciprocal globalization – an “ever densening network of interconnections and interdependences,” as she quotes John Tomlinson³ -- “gradually transforming the capacity of individuals to imagine themselves in relationship with each other, redefining their perception of their roles in the world.” (64) In short, she offers a lovely sense of musical internationalism, beyond soft power and cold-war conflict. Yet she concedes that even if political imposition was not the result, those who organized the tours were motivated by considerations beyond the fraternity of art. (62) Alas, the idea of “pull” as opposed to “push” cannot simply eliminate what she terms the question of empire. Skilled empire builders have known that “pulls” yield the most resilient structures of control. What seems valid to conclude is that musical exchange had a different agenda for different agents – those playing and sharing the enthusiasms of art across borders valued the experience in a framework different from those organizing their visits. Ultimately the pleasures of music making and listening redeem the experience from the agendas imposed by ideological or national competition for those who can directly participate, whether as performers or listeners.

The forum concludes with an excellent probing set of summaries and questions by Jonathan Rosenberg and Kathryn Statler, who characterizes the articles as an “opening movement,” and asks for further analysis of the state –private partnership. As she observes, “The cultural imperialism framework has lost decided ground as historians increasingly focus on issues of reception as well how weaker states, substate actors, domestic publics, and nongovernmental organizations have used cultural diplomacy to influence or challenge the U.S. government.” (p.74, n. 5) A question remains about music itself. Is this art – so readily communicable since it is not dependent on words – special with respect to cultural diplomacy? Does the same power inhere in other art forms – theater or poetry, cinema and the visual arts? Government sponsors found exhibitions of American abstract expressionist painting impressed West European if not Russian audiences; and it would be wonderful to have a systematic comparison between the two branches of art diplomacy. Music brings the wonderful communicative excitement of the performance; painting exhibits allow longer exposure. Can the Dionysian effect of dissolving structures and boundaries be created by non-Dionysian arts? Perhaps, but music does bring a special set of qualities and powers. It is less the control of the performative arena that establishes the potential of music for cultural diplomacy than the fugitive autonomy of art, its apparent lack of a competitive dimension and its evasion of empire. This became clearer when rock music became powerful beyond the Iron Curtain. Musical diplomacy means surrendering a conventional agenda to Dionysus not in the hope that it will foster subservience but that it will overcome suspicion. If it’s going to perform for the nation, musical diplomacy must give a glimpse or a tone beyond the nation: it must for a time perform not the nation, but the transnational.

³John Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 2, cited 64.

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