

1 **Classical Music and the Mediation of Prestige**

From the early days of the U.S. government's Cultural Presentations program, many of the musicians who were sent abroad played classical music—an American offshoot of a European tradition. The emphasis on classical music was not intended to be exclusive: State Department officials and the ACA recognized the danger of focusing on any one kind of music.¹ Still, ANTA's Music Advisory Panel comprised members chosen for their eminence in American art music circles, including Virgil Thomson, composer and critic; Howard Hanson, composer and director of the Eastman School of Music; William Schuman, composer and director of the Juilliard School; Milton Katims, violist and orchestral conductor; and Alfred Frankenstein, music critic. The panelists typically tried to be fair in evaluating projects, but on the basis of their personal preferences they steered musicians away from popular music. In 1955, for instance, the panel agreed that "show tunes and folk music should be discouraged, as there are no standards by which to judge 'light music' except 'charm,' and charm is hard to judge, and is not international in its acceptance."²

The prominence of classical music in the program was also a strategic choice. Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs Andrew H. Berding told the ACA in 1958 that the pressure of Soviet propaganda demanded a response that favored elite culture. As Berding explained it, the Soviets claimed "that only a nation that is a cultured nation is a mature nation; only a nation that is a mature nation can make the decisions that are now called for in the world of today." Presenting the "highest" forms of the arts could help the United States: "we have to show through our actions that the United States is a highly-cultured nation with real achievements in the arts, education, literature, etc. and make that manifest to other peoples."³

The usefulness of art music as a means for American diplomacy was not guaranteed, however. First, this musical tradition was not American in origin but European. Many of the most famous American performers were born in Europe (Rudolf Serkin, Isaac Stern, Eugene Ormandy), and many American composers were born in Europe or trained in Europe by European teachers (Kurt Weill, Aaron Copland). Robert Schnitzer, who coordinated U.S. cultural presentations through ANTA, called Leonard Bernstein “the answer to our prayers as an American born and trained conductor.”⁴ It was difficult for the United States to offer art music without drawing accusations that the music was not truly American.⁵ Furthermore, European classical music was not universally liked or even universally familiar. Not surprisingly, this music was known mainly to elite, mostly European-educated, minorities, their numbers constituting a small fraction of the people who might be reached through other means. Although American art music had occasionally impressed listeners elsewhere in the world, relatively little of it was known outside America’s borders.

Nevertheless, classical music played a vital role in establishing the power relationships that made the Cultural Presentations program effective. The program’s staff consciously chose elite members of society and opinion leaders as target audiences for musical diplomacy.⁶ According to Glenn Wolfe and Roy Larsen, who led a review of the Cultural Presentations program from 1961 to 1962, “audiences of this kind, wherever they can be gathered together, offer benefits in fulfilling the purpose of the program far greater than their size would indicate.”⁷ Despite the limited appeal of art music, it could attract members of this educated segment of the world’s population. Even the newest, most difficult music was useful in this regard. Evaluations by the posts and the State Department reveal that—just as in Europe and the United States—performances of avant-garde art music were extremely important to a small number of influential people.⁸

Crucially, the European tradition of classical music was imbued with social prestige—and its prestige was more widely recognized than the numbers of listeners would suggest. Comparatively few listeners worldwide were intimately familiar with classical music, but many more knew of its existence, and they associated it with Europe and high social class. Thus, the sending of classical music amounted to a gesture: it was not only the music that mattered but also the knowledge of its significance. One could make even more refined judgments among types of art music, distinguishing between the newest music in the most “advanced” avant-garde styles and more widely accepted styles. Nicolas Slonimsky, a Music Panel member who had traveled to the Soviet Union to evaluate possibilities for cultural

programming, remarked in 1970 that “countries are offended when less advanced composers, such as Barber and Copland, are offered to them.”⁹ Classical music and its avant-garde offshoot were part of a symbolic system in which the association with European elite culture was important to the value of the music. The very act of providing music that required listening expertise was meant to indicate a social judgment about its recipients. This music was evidence that the United States deemed these listeners worthy of a sophisticated cultural experience and estimated that they were equipped to enjoy it.

In some instances the compliment was taken in exactly those symbolic terms. When the Merce Cunningham Dance Company visited Latin America in August and September 1968 with a program of avant-garde music and dance, audience members expressed opinions ranging from “Marvelous!” to “Terrible!”¹⁰ In Caracas, Venezuela, some walked out on the performances. Nonetheless, the English-language *Daily Journal*, published in Caracas, reported that the Cunningham group was satisfied. According to this article, the dancers thought that “the Venezuelan audiences understood them better than all the others, were more sophisticated in their reactions and were more sympathetic to experimental and modern techniques—than the audiences in the great capitals of Mexico City, Rio and Buenos Aires.” The article’s author understood the compliment as elevating Caracas within the order of cities, but his words also reflect a humble willingness to take the Cunningham dancers’ opinion as definitive: “We are proud that the Caracas audiences struck them as their best.”¹¹ By making a claim that Venezuelan audiences understood music in the most difficult and up-to-date styles, the music critic asserted Venezuela’s place in a hierarchy of respect.

In the postcolonial world, many people had contact with European culture through education, the press, colonial institutions, or other means. For them, classical music had special prestige, its latest incarnation as avant-garde “new music” especially so.¹² If Venezuelans understood this music, and the American performers acknowledged their understanding, then Venezuelans could consider themselves participants in this prestige music: they mattered in the world this music represented. Christopher Small has noted that classical music “can often function as a vehicle for the social aspirations of upwardly mobile people—‘This is who I am,’ which can easily slip over into ‘This is who I want to be,’ and even, ‘This is who I want to be seen as being.’”¹³ It is apparent in this Venezuelan case that this aspiration could be mobilized not only on an individual scale but also on an international scale: wanting one’s city and one’s country to be taken seriously as part of a global music scene.

In this way classical music could offer a special sense of belonging to an elite musical community. International communication about cultural presentations typically included either expressions of joy over the implied compliment of receiving American musical performances or expressions of regret—even anger—if a country found itself neglected musically. Because news of American, Soviet, and Chinese cultural presentations was frequently printed in newspapers and discussed over the radio, citizens of potential host countries were well aware if they were being passed over.¹⁴ The desire to make populations feel “included” was especially pressing in Eastern Europe, where the aim of U.S. information programs was to keep citizens informed and “to let them know they are not forgotten.”¹⁵ When the Polish press reported that the Boston Symphony Orchestra had appeared in Moscow and Prague but omitted Warsaw, the U.S. ambassador to Poland requested an appearance by the Cleveland Orchestra to remedy hurt feelings.¹⁶ Emotions and beliefs about belonging were not merely ancillary to the program of offering music abroad. They were an essential part of the project.

Here we might borrow a term from anthropology, considering musicians’ tours under the Cultural Presentations program as a form of “gift economy.” The circulation of gifts delineates social relationships, including power relations. The recipient of a gift can incur particular obligations or a lowering of social status, and even gifts that appear to be free can be given in self-interest. A “gift” in this sense is far from altruistic: the giver expects reciprocity, and the recipient’s obligation can be weighty and lasting. The ephemeral nature of a musical performance makes it an unusual form of gift for consideration in these terms. As Annette Weiner has pointed out, however, some possessions can be given away and yet kept at the same time: these gifts “are imbued with the intrinsic and ineffable identities of their owners.”¹⁷ The vast geographical distances between givers and recipients and the fact that they were not personally acquainted also differentiate this situation from the typical gift economy, yet the gift of classical music defined social and power relationships among nations much as a gift might link neighbors. These relationships were not unilateral. The receivers had significant power to determine the value of the gift and even to make demands on the United States as giver.

A closer look at the relationships between givers and receivers will help us see more clearly how classical music carried prestige. The social value of any kind of music is not a given, static quantity; rather, it is assigned by the people who use that music and subject to change as their ideas about the music develop. We see in the situations described below that even as host countries demanded that the State Department send them prestigious

music, the public's opinion about that very music had to be actively cultivated through many media if the music was to be well received. Musical sounds did not travel unencumbered to new places. They were always accompanied by explanations, associations, and histories. Although these stories were usually treated as introductory or accompanying material distinct from "the music," they played an essential part in bringing the music across to others—that is, in mediating it. I use the term *mediated* in an expanded sense that includes not only the transmission of music via recording or broadcast technologies but also the ways in which writing, social interaction, and other forms of intervention influence listeners' attitudes toward what they hear. If, for example, a listener thinks well of a performance but reads in the newspaper the next morning that the local critic found the performance lacking, the news may color the listener's memory of the performance, reshaping the listener's experience in retrospect.¹⁸

A concert by musicians from the United States was usually presented as a straightforward gift, an opportunity for unmediated, face-to-face contact. Nevertheless, assertions of quality, explanations of historical value, compliments to the hosts as listeners, and countless other verbal qualifications surrounded the music and shaped perceptions of its value. In selecting music to send, State Department officials carefully weighed the quality of the music and its prestige, but listeners abroad determined these factors more conclusively, and their assessments were conveyed back to the State Department as reports of success or failure that then influenced the next round of choices.

QUALITY AND VALUE

Nowhere was the assessment of music's quality more stringent than in Japan. Japanese critics—quite a few of them European expatriates but some native-born—were fiercely skeptical of American performers. Japanese audiences demanded not only elite Western classical music but also impeccable performances by the most famous musicians America could offer. At one point competing music festivals in Osaka and Tokyo each sought to bring a top American symphony orchestra to Japan. The U.S. embassy sent a terse telegram to the secretary of state detailing the scrutiny with which American orchestras were judged:

Japanese regard Philadelphia only slightly below Boston but with New York definitely one of three great American orchestras. Possibility Boston visit widely known, and anything other than Philadelphia would be pronounced anti-climax. If Boston fails [to] come, Osaka festival

management will be most unhappy. Without consulting them, embassy predicts they would happily settle for Philadelphia. Rather [than] Cleveland or Chicago, however, predict festival would go back to Belgian orchestra they have on string. Japanese do not consider Cleveland or Chicago as top orchestras. New Orleans definitely not acceptable.¹⁹

Sending anything less than the best—that is, the best as perceived by the discerning Japanese audience—would compromise the effectiveness of the Cultural Presentations program. When the Little Orchestra Society, an accomplished chamber ensemble that revived neglected classical works, came to Japan from New York, Japanese critics who had never heard of the ensemble were unimpressed. The embassy reported, “Our experience with the Little Orchestra Society this past spring confirms our views that reputation is at least as important as quality. The Little Orchestra tour was unsuccessful simply because the sophisticated Tokyo critics were not prepared to accept the Little Orchestra as one of the world’s major symphony orchestras. I was not surprised.”²⁰

The Japanese press called the Cold War competition between the Soviet Union and the United States a “cultural battle,” with the Americans falling behind the Soviets in the number and quality of attractions presented.²¹ The Soviet Union routinely sent its most famous artists to Japan, and the Japanese public could compare the quality of American dancers with the Bolshoi Ballet, American actors with the Moscow Art Theatre, as well as with the most renowned European performers.²² Under these conditions it was not difficult for Japanese concert organizers to place the embassy and the State Department under duress: if the wrong attraction was sent, the State Department would lose the respect of the elite Japanese concertgoers it was courting. Classical music was not the only kind of music that could be regarded as “top” quality—a jazz performance by a famous artist such as Louis Armstrong or Dizzy Gillespie could also qualify—but the positive association between classical music and high social status wielded special power. This association was not sufficient to rescue a little-known group, as in the case of the Little Orchestra Society, but considerations of genre remained a factor in foreign publics’ assessment of the music they received.

Even in places where Western music was not widely preferred, audiences took careful note of the quality and prestige of the music they were offered. In Ethiopia, as in Japan, competition from Soviet and Chinese cultural presentations made it seem urgent that the United States send first-rate artists. The embassy in Addis Ababa firmly rejected the proposed visit of a collegiate theater ensemble, citing the inevitable comparisons with Soviet artists.²³ The prestige tours of the New York Philharmonic and the Boston

Symphony Orchestra to Europe and the USSR in 1955 and 1956 had received worldwide press: people in the developing world asked for comparable treatment.²⁴ The American embassy in Lima, Peru, received complaints "that the top U.S. performers are sent to Europe and other areas and the lesser known ones to Latin America."²⁵ The embassy in Baghdad reported similar comments from the public.²⁶ Because embassy staff served as mediators of information to and from the State Department, they were privy to complaints and requests from locals, and they developed a sensitivity to feelings of neglect among the populations where they served. Many of the staff also had a personal interest in hearing good music. As a result of all these factors, the State Department routinely received lobbying messages from its embassies all over the world, asking for more "top groups."

For some people, particularly in countries that did not regularly receive foreign performers, a gift of music from the United States was a significant affirmation. After Iraq received concerts by Metropolitan Opera star Eleanor Steber, the dean of a college said that "Baghdad now is on the musical map of the world, thanks to the Americans," and the embassy received "many calls from local citizenry expressing their deep appreciation."²⁷ Likewise, the American consul in Lahore counted "the boost to Lahore's pride due to its inclusion" as a significant outcome of the Minneapolis Symphony's performance there.²⁸ This combination of quality, prestige, and flattery was not merely about good feelings: it allowed musical diplomacy to function effectively by ensuring that the music would be seen as a positive intervention rather than propaganda. The PAO at the U.S. embassy in Rio de Janeiro, Aldo D'Alessandro, explained that "the average Port-Alegrian is more keenly aware of political implications of 'President's Program' performances than of their pure artistic value. This results in a partly flattered, partly suspicious attitude which, however, at the end has always been overcome by an overwhelming appreciation of quality. If that quality were lacking, however, the feeling of suspicion about political activity would predominate."²⁹ The perception of "quality" was not only a judgment about the appeal of the performance. As D'Alessandro implied, it was also a judgment about the perceived importance and significance of the artists on the world scene, itself a fluid and subjective category. It was only worthwhile for critics and audiences abroad to accept music sent by the United States if they would receive both excellent music and the signal that they were being taken seriously as listeners. In the absence of those elements the feeling of being subject to propaganda made the concerts unattractive.

When "nonprestige" groups came, no matter how excellent, audiences and critics were sometimes harsh in their comments and published reviews.

This happened frequently enough that embassy staff at some posts learned to anticipate criticism. The American embassy in Argentina expressed reservations about the National Symphony Orchestra, slated for a 1959 tour, because it was not known among Latin Americans as a top ensemble. The State Department responded to the embassy by staunchly defending the quality of the orchestra and of its selection process, standing by the Music Advisory Panel's judgment that the orchestra "is absolutely top quality."³⁰

When cellist Richard Kay, pianist Seymour Bernstein, and violist Kenneth Gordon toured Japan as the American Trio in 1955, students made pointed and critical comments to the musicians after a concert: "I don't think that the Trio played all movements of the piece as written." "I heard some unnatural sounds" (referring to a missed note). "I imagine you were surprised to see so many students here today. In America the young people are not nearly as interested in classical music as in Japan, are they?" Indeed, part of the musicians' task, like the State Department's, was to answer such charges against the United States. By the embassy's delighted report, "Bernstein, Gordon, and Kay in perfect harmony, but with solo breaks, performed a 10-minute USIS sonata, reciting statistics, recounting personal experiences, demonstrating quietly but surely that America is culturally-minded on a mass basis, with American youth sharing largely in the general devotion to the fine arts. The questioners were not prepared for such an eloquent, factual statement; and even the 'baiters' in the room were obviously impressed."³¹

Critics often took pleasure in putting the United States in its place, frequently asserting the stereotype that "the United States is a purely materialistic country lacking in both spiritual and intellectual development, without a culture of its own and without interest in the cultural achievements of other nations."³² Sometimes they used the stereotype indirectly by comparing American musical interpretations unfavorably with those of other artists. Japanese and European critics often commended American performers for their excellent ensemble technique and stunning precision.³³ By contrast, Europeans were generally praised for their delicacy of interpretation, which was regarded as an intellectual or spiritual rather than a technical achievement. Criticism of this kind was only secondarily about the performance: it was foremost an expression of concern about how peoples should relate to the United States and its offerings, cultural and otherwise.

AVANT-GARDE ART MUSIC

Although the early years of the Cultural Presentations program showcased high culture, avant-garde music was absent at first, in part because of con-

gressional opposition.³⁴ One official noted that “Congress hates to think that we are sending Cubist art to the Hottentots.”³⁵ Even the professional musicians on the Music Advisory Panel doubted the propaganda value of the most difficult music. When in 1955 the panel considered a proposal by John Cage, David Tudor, and the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, the composer William Schuman called them “too esoteric,” saying that “it would be a gamble to send them.”³⁶ Cunningham would wait until the 1960s for approval to tour under government auspices.³⁷ Likewise, the pianist Paul Jacobs, a passionate advocate for new art music, was rejected in 1960 because “his very limited repertory would appeal to a limited audience”: the panel simply did not envision an opportunity to use him.³⁸ With urgent propaganda needs to meet and limited funding available, it is remarkable that officials found a niche for avant-garde music in government-funded music programs.

The major impetus for using avant-garde music as propaganda was the need to improve the cultural reputation of the United States in Europe. Attempts to address this issue with more traditional art music during the 1950s had won over a portion of the European public but had profoundly alienated some intellectuals there.³⁹ In 1966 the American composer Gunther Schuller wrote to the U.S. Mission in Berlin that “official international exchange programs have tended to emphasize to the point of exclusivity the same dozen older and—by advancing standards—more conservative composers, who were the mainstay of American composition in the thirties and early forties, but who no longer represent current activity. Every time we present one of these composers to the exclusion of more recent trends, we damage our cultural image.”⁴⁰

State Department officials took such criticisms seriously, for they were well aware that European intellectuals valued avant-garde music. In 1967, when the composer Paul Creston wanted to lecture in Europe on American music under the auspices of the American Specialists program, the Music Advisory Panel rejected him as “very conservative” and not representative of current American trends.⁴¹ Some Foreign Service officers actively sought out avant-garde musicians in order to attract audiences of young intellectuals: the U.S. embassy in Vienna, for one, tried to secure visits from Schuller and Earle Brown during this period.⁴² These efforts aimed to compete with European music according to one of its most noticeable scales of musical value.

The other factor favoring American avant-garde music as propaganda was its embodiment of desirably American features. In 1966 the University of Illinois Contemporary Chamber Players, a student group, offered “a

Happening of assorted electronics, instrumental sounds, and vocal eruptions" in London after participating in the Darmstadt Summer Courses for New Music and the Warsaw Autumn Festival. A review from the London press emphasized the music's novelty and insouciance as positive American traits: "If hard pressed to search for the divergencies between the British and the American way of life there is always the University of Illinois to fall back on. The cheerful disregard for academic decorum shown by the Players is as yet unrivaled in music departments over here."⁴³ Even though the indecorousness of avant-garde music could also be construed as vulgarity, the flouting of conventions implied political or social freedom and could serve as a selling point for American experimental music.⁴⁴

In Eastern Europe, where avant-garde music was long the subject of diatribes and occasional state-ordered suppression, U.S. officials could use this music to challenge socialist musical standards and to connect with listeners, particularly young people, who wanted alternatives to socialist realism. In the course of the 1960s, more avant-garde music and jazz was permitted in Eastern Europe. As a result of previous suppression, these styles had acquired an appealing association with freedom that remained potent even after the music had begun to become officially acceptable again.⁴⁵ Including this music in cultural presentations connected the United States with ideas about freedom. As long as scores and recordings of new music remained difficult to obtain, USIA officials and traveling musicians provided them to conductors and composers in Eastern Europe, thereby encouraging the study, composition, and performance of music in unsanctioned styles.

American musicians who visited Eastern Europe typically found that some audience members were actively seeking modernist music, even of early vintage. When the La Salle Quartet traveled to Yugoslavia and Poland in 1962, Yugoslav musicians asked them to discuss techniques for performing the music of Austrian composers Alban Berg (d. 1935) and Anton Webern (d. 1945).⁴⁶ Likewise, William Sydeman, an American composer of atonal music, visited Eastern Europe on an American Specialist grant, bringing with him scores and recordings of modern American music. According to Sydeman, "the more avant-garde the music the better they liked it." Like Schuller, Sydeman criticized the State Department's musical conservatism: "I can guarantee that East European audiences (and I am equally sure West as well) are more than prepared for the work of our younger 'experimental' composers and would welcome it. They have heard the Barber and Copland Sonatas and the Gershwin Rhapsody and should not be led to believe that this is the only compositional activity occurring in

America."⁴⁷ As composers, of course, Sydeman and Schuller were far from disinterested. Their advocacy and that of composers on the Music Advisory Panel encouraged the State Department in its support of newly composed music.

By the late 1960s, American avant-garde performers not only had access to Eastern European stages but could even achieve acclaim in the local press. The Alwin Nikolais Dance Theatre performed in Budapest in June 1969. The American embassy reported that the audience was "apparently stunned by the initial piece with its electronic music, abstract rear-projection and emphasis on the linear" but "warmed up" and "showed its amusement at the light-hearted antics of *Tower*, in which the dancers suddenly address the audience with parts of meaningless conversations, spoken simultaneously." An enthusiastic Hungarian newspaper review proclaimed: "Nikolais's human, artistic and ethical viewpoint is attractive. . . . This is not art for art's sake, nor is it for the sake of sensation, but reflects a true sense of responsibility and strength in art."⁴⁸ The Hungarian critic was perceptive about the performance: although Nikolais's choreography was billed as "abstract," it frequently included easily accessible metaphors of freedom and constraint that were highly appealing in Eastern Europe. Some of the dancers, dressed in striped robes, moved like automata, while others moved freely. Another piece performed on the tour, *Tensile Involvement*, featured a soloist who began free, then became entangled in long cloth bands (figure 3).⁴⁹ It seems likely that the reviewer was helping the cause for his own reasons, redeeming the avant-garde by placing it within an acceptable framework of socialist critical concepts. Whatever the critic's motives, American officials regarded such praise as an indicator of progress in the cultural cold war.

In some cases it appears that U.S. officials considered the provocative quality of avant-garde music a positive feature, much as other advocates did. The Dorian Quintet included Morton Subotnick's *Misfortunes of the Immortals*, along with works of Mozart and Darius Milhaud, on its Asian tour. This work challenged the very nature of the classical music concert: glaring klieg lights, strangely disconnected film excerpts, and harsh electronic sounds constantly interrupted the music played by the live performers. The reception of Subotnick's music was mixed, with the post in Ceylon calling it "counterproductive" and New Delhi reporting that even lovers of Western music were "bothered and bewildered." The quintet's bassoonist, Jane Taylor, recalled that audiences responded to the piece just as they had in the United States—some loved it, many hated it, and everyone thought it was "weird."⁵⁰ In the State Department's estimation the Subotnick could



Figure 3. Alwin Nikolais Dance Theatre performing “Tensile Involvement.” RG 306-PS-E-76–290, National Archives. All reasonable efforts were made to locate the photographer.

not be called “an artistic success,” but it was important “because it stimulated debate about the future of the arts.”⁵¹ One might question whether such debate was significant, given the dramatic economic and social problems faced by many of the recipient nations. Still, U.S. officials’ comments imply that they considered the kind of dialogue fostered by avant-garde music a useful step toward democratization.⁵²

The inclusion of the most difficult art music on State Department-funded programs was a high-risk enterprise, not only for the department and the musicians but also for the local impresarios who cosponsored events. After the Contemporary Chamber Ensemble appeared in Taiwan, “the impresario remarked that although he lost money, he was glad to have been the one to introduce this type of music to Taiwan.”⁵³ Prestige was his reward. The belief that avant-garde music was “advanced”—almost in the sense of scientific progress—could be deployed for a variety of purposes.

Not only did it console impresarios for money-losing performances, but it also highlighted the contrast between America's embrace of modernism and the Soviet emphasis on conservative styles. An enthusiastic officer at the post in Mexico reported jubilantly that the Cunningham Dance Company had shamed the Soviets with a standing-room-only workshop on modern dance: "In comparison, the 'Stars of the Bolshoi Ballet,' who, tutu-clad, 'pretty,' and swaying to the remembered melodies of Tchaikovsky, were drawing hordes of middle-brows to the cavernous Auditorio Nacional, seemed to be the expression of a dull, conformist and very 'square' 19th century society."⁵⁴ This distinction could also help elite audiences in the host countries feel separate from (and more skilled than) other, untrained listeners.

When foreign listeners rejected these performances, of course, there was a significant cost both to American prestige and to the local organizers. After a poorly received performance of John Eaton's electronic music in Arequipa, Peru, the American ambassador reported to the State Department that he heard negative comments from a Lima impresario: "it will take some time for the Eaton performance to be lived down."⁵⁵

THE QUANDARY OF "TWO AUDIENCES"

In Southeast Asia, Latin America, and much of Africa the legacy of colonialism meant that vastly different cultural and educational experiences separated the elite social strata from everyone else. CAOs representing the United States at diplomatic posts indicated to the State Department that there were "two types of audiences" and that it was "imperative to cater to both." The post in Manila described an "upper class society set—sophisticated, well-educated people thoroughly familiar with the American scene, appreciative of the best" and "in the provinces . . . more naive, uncritical audiences who are pleased by almost any attraction." An officer in Argentina described an almost identical situation.⁵⁶ The problem, then, was finding music that might address multiple intended audiences, for it was difficult to pinpoint the social implications of any musical style or its attractiveness to audiences according to the simple opposition of mass and elite. The appeal of a Copland ballet or a modern jazz combo, to name just two examples, was neither definitively "elite" nor "mass," and the unpredictable tastes of audiences, varying in each locale, would determine how the music was received. As decolonization accelerated, U.S. officials never reached consensus about whether their target for cultural propaganda was a mass or an elite audience.⁵⁷ Even if they could imagine their audiences,

they had little control over who showed up at the concert halls to hear the music they sent.

Embassy staff in the field and State Department staff in Washington routinely used the regrettable shorthand of “sophisticated”/“unsophisticated” to refer to groups of people as more or less conversant with the norms of Western arts. However unfortunate the term, it described a real problem for U.S. musical presentations. From the 1950s onward State Department officials had to acknowledge cultural diversity as a matter of course. They did not have enough funding to send many different attractions around the world—yet the high-art presentations that were welcomed by elite audiences were usually avoided by other listeners, and elite listeners would have nothing to do with variety shows or other mass entertainments.⁵⁸ In an effort to appeal to diverse populations, the Cultural Presentations staff simultaneously explored three solutions. First, they changed the music, sending more popular entertainment, such as marionette shows and folk-singers. Second, they chose musicians who would educate audiences, as well as entertain them. Third, they used other media to convince audiences of the music’s value.

Solution 1: Change the Music

In their review of the Cultural Presentations program, conducted from 1961 to 1962, Roy Larsen and Glenn Wolfe noted that cultural diplomacy would be an important means of wooing the newly decolonized nations. At this time the State Department was receiving many requests from its diplomatic posts for “attractions with primarily entertainment, rather than cultural, values.”⁵⁹ The posts wanted to compete with Soviet efforts in this direction: while the numerous Soviet variety shows sent to Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia typically included no stellar artists, they had “enough spice and variety to carry the show along at a rapid pace” and offered great mass appeal.⁶⁰

The department did send a few variety shows abroad in hopes of directly competing with the Soviet entertainments. In 1962–63 the comedian Joey Adams took a vaudeville-style revue to Asia, and the popular jazzman Cozy Cole took a mixture of comedy and light jazz to Africa. These shows enjoyed mixed successes. Cole’s revue was “disconcerting” to those who were expecting a jazz performance, for it featured commercial music: “One O’clock Jump,” “Night Train,” and “Misty.”⁶¹ The reception of Cole’s concerts suggests that the Americans who staffed the posts made unwarranted assumptions about the low cultural expectations of local audiences. The post in Casablanca believed that Cole’s variety show was “well conceived

for a *Moroccan* or *African* audience (which may well like the balloons better than the music)"—yet contrary to the PAO's expectations, it was French expatriates, not ethnic Moroccans, "who lost all dignity in their mad scramble for balloons."⁶² The post wrongly expected that a simple variety show would appeal to the common denominator of local tastes: Cole's show was a hit in Marrakech, but it flopped in Casablanca. In making these predictions, post officials may have erred out of prejudice. Many U.S. diplomatic posts in Africa were staffed by white Americans raised in the South; it seems likely that some Americans arrived with unwarranted biases about race and artistic preferences.⁶³

Larsen and Wolfe, who reviewed the program, knew that "some in the newer nations may be offended by the nature of attractions sent them, since a growing number of intellectual leaders, as well as expatriates, are sophisticated people who would appreciate top quality presentations, and 'who are being led to believe in some cases that the U.S. has no such presentations.'"⁶⁴ Popular entertainment such as Cole's was as risky as avant-garde music, for it could alienate intellectuals and insult anyone who knew that the United States was sending more prestigious music elsewhere. It also contradicted the prevailing conception of American culture as striving for higher achievements. James Magdanz, a member of the Cultural Presentations staff, told the Music Advisory Panel in 1958 that "there were further problems if the Program ventured into pure entertainment channels, since then the purposes of the Program, to demonstrate Culture 'with a capital C,' are not served."⁶⁵ Entertainment music was difficult to justify to Congress or to the American public. Joey Adams's tour drew scathing criticism in U.S. newspapers. One critic complained, "I don't think we are going to win the cold war—or a hot war—by proving that we are superior in blowing up balloons or eating cigars or tap dancing."⁶⁶ This article generated outraged letters from the American public to their representatives in Congress; if jazz was difficult for the public to accept as cultural diplomacy, vaudeville seemed entirely without merit.

If entertainment was not acceptable, then, the best strategy appeared to be a mixed program featuring prestigious classical music alongside other genres. According to a State Department report to Congress, the North Texas State University Choir was selected to tour Europe in part because of its mixed programs, which included sacred and classical music, American folk songs and Negro spirituals, and excerpts from American musical comedies. The report specified that "the earlier [classical] numbers in the program served to demonstrate to professional music critics and knowledgeable musicians the technical and artistic competence of the choir, the high

quality of the voices, and the precision and discipline of the choir's singing"—thus conveying the necessary prestige—whereas the other numbers entertained. Likewise, the University of Maryland Singers specialized in Renaissance madrigals, but when they were sent to the Near East, North Africa, and Europe, they presented a broad program including Renaissance music, accessible American selections of Billings, Barber, Schuman, and Copland, and a set of "Negro and white spirituals."⁶⁷ The State Department reported that the ancient music gained the respect of critics but that audiences enjoyed the spirituals the most. Mixed programs appeared to be a more workable strategy than the variety show, and this solution was widely adopted.⁶⁸

Even avant-garde music remained an important part of the mixed-program strategy. On a trip to Latin America the La Salle Quartet's programs included music for children and works selected to please "completely sophisticated concert-goers able to appreciate the most advanced compositions." The State Department's report to Congress noted that "the most modern works did, admittedly, leave some listeners puzzled and others even unhappy" but that "audience consensus and critical opinion reflected great admiration and respect."⁶⁹ The Claremont Quartet's programs in Africa and Latin America typically included some Beethoven, Haydn, or Brahms but also some contemporary European music and some new American music. The quartet sometimes lightened the programs still further by playing single movements rather than whole multimovement works.⁷⁰ This kind of programming showcased many ideas at once: America had a thriving performance scene, with well-trained instrumentalists on a par with Europe's; America had a deep respect for tradition and "the classics"; America's composers also participated in the most "advanced" musical trends.

As we saw in the case of Merce Cunningham in Venezuela, the presence of art music on U.S.-sponsored concert programs could be an impetus for audience members to assess their own competence, demonstrating a feeling of musical insecurity. When the Claremont Quartet gave a concert and a seminar in Asyut (now in Egypt), a student asked them, "How do you appraise our audiences in the United Arab Republic?"—the implied question being, "Are we good enough listeners?"⁷¹ Failure to fill concert halls for concerts including classical music reflected poorly on the Americans who chose the music, but it could also be taken as a sign that the audience showed insufficient understanding or appreciation of high art. For instance, a critic in Melbourne, Australia, chided the public in his review of the New York Chamber Soloists' mixed program. He cited the presence of only 250 people at the concert as a "display of apathy" and stood in judgment over

his city: “we disgraced ourselves.”⁷² The prestige conferred by classical music was not a straightforward gift. Even a mixed program, designed to please everyone, offered the opportunity for listeners to judge their own musical preferences harshly according to what they imagined a refined listener elsewhere might think.

Solution 2: Education

Many officers at U.S. diplomatic posts throughout much of the world demonstrated a persistent belief that classical music was inappropriate for the populations where they served. Members of the Claremont Quartet tried to persuade a Foreign Service officer in Peru that “totally unsophisticated audiences can enjoy, appreciate and benefit from excellently performed concerts of chamber music”—but the officer told the State Department, “We are doubtful.”⁷³ Arthur Schlesinger Jr., who was special assistant to President Kennedy, remarked disparagingly: “Naturally, you don’t send a chamber music quartet to Uganda.”⁷⁴ Nevertheless, the people who planned cultural presentations did not always assume that art music could reach only a tiny fraction of the audience in the developing world. From time to time during Music Advisory Panel deliberations, the question was raised whether art music could be made accessible to more people. At a 1963 panel meeting, Mark Schubart, former dean of the Juilliard School, challenged the idea that only popular music should be sent to Africa. The minutes record this exchange between Schubart and Glenn Wolfe, director of the Cultural Presentations program:

Mr. Schubart commented that when we talk about sending attractions to Russia or the Orient, we are not instructed to appeal to the lowest tastes; why are we in a different position when sending attractions to Africa?

Mr. Wolfe replied because in Africa you have an extremely limited number of educated people; there is an 8% literacy rate. . . .

Mr. Schubart said that when you want to do something about the literacy rate, you don’t send comic books. Are we to give the Africans attractions commensurate with their literacy, or win them over to the enjoyment of something better?⁷⁵

Africa’s elite had by the 1960s produced indigenous composers of classical music, yet a significant portion of the classical music audience in postcolonial societies would still consist of European expatriates, who were not one of the State Department’s targeted groups.⁷⁶ Although the Music Advisory Panel, committed to classical music, could urge the State Department to send “something better,” the experts in intelligence and diplomacy would

ultimately determine what music would travel. On a tight budget, and wishing to reach as many people as possible with each investment, officials remained reluctant to believe that classical music could be effective diplomacy in the Global South.

Still, equally mindful of the need to please and the risk of giving offense, the Cultural Presentations staff did plan programs that made classical music available to people who had previously had little experience with it. During 1963 and 1964 both the Dorian Woodwind Quintet and the Claremont String Quartet made long tours in Africa. They brought mixed programs and offered educational lecture-demonstrations alongside their traditional concerts. In developing their programs, the Dorian Quintet took advice from experts on African affairs in the United States and studied recordings of music from various African countries. The quintet's lecture-demonstration programs in the Congo, Cameroon, Sierra Leone, Morocco, Mauritania, and Liberia included introduction of the musicians, performance of single movements highlighting the sounds of all five instruments, and a demonstration illustrating basic ideas about chamber music (melody and accompaniment, rhythm, and mood). The quintet then played a variety of works, making reference to the ideas from their demonstration. At the end of the concert the musicians took questions from the audience and allowed them to examine the instruments.

For their formal concerts the Dorian Quintet commissioned a work from the Nigerian composer Solomon Ilori, then a student at Columbia University. Although the newspaper *Etoile du Congo* reported that the work's "Negro origin" helped the audience to understand it better, most listeners were not impressed with Ilori's music, and it was soon dropped from the program. Instead, audiences were captivated by music of Joseph Haydn and Jacques Ibert.⁷⁷ After the assassination of President John F. Kennedy the quintet's tour became still more interactive. The group cancelled most of its public events to show respect, and members spent their time at informal events with students. Perhaps because its estimations of African audiences remained uncertain, the State Department was unusually hesitant to announce the Dorian Quintet's success: "It was not anticipated that the response would be the same as from areas with a tradition in Western music. The response was less demonstrative and was not expressed in [printed] critical reviews and comments . . . but in other respects the response was gratifying."⁷⁸ Still, it is likely that the group was judged effective overall, for the State Department sent them to the Near East and Asia in 1970.

Beginning in January 1964, the Claremont Quartet offered concerts, lecture-demonstrations, and workshops throughout northern and eastern

Africa, including the United Arab Republic, Sudan, Somalia, Kenya, and Uganda. (South Africa and Tanganyika were cancelled. Tanganyika suffered a violent revolt at the time of the tour, and the South African government refused to allow the quartet to perform because they would not play for segregated audiences.) With more than a little condescension, the State Department reported that the quartet was “especially fitted” for an instructional tour in Africa because its concerts in the United States had emphasized university audiences and children’s programs.⁷⁹ That the performances were of high artistic quality was equally important to the group’s success. In Cairo and Alexandria, audiences who were knowledgeable about Western music praised the quartet, whose members believed that their concerts pleased their audiences.⁸⁰ One Cairo newspaper lauded the modern American works by Paul Creston, Alan Hovhaness, Quincy Porter, and Meyer Kupferman, calling the Creston work “a real revelation.”⁸¹

Some African musical authorities were as surprised as the State Department by the Claremont Quartet’s ability to connect with audiences new to classical music. A State Department report quoted the director of the East Africa Conservatoire of Music in Kenya: “The Quartet has revolutionized musical education in Africa by showing us it is possible to interest Africans with no musical education at all in the most sophisticated kind of western music, chamber music. It seems it only takes a willingness to go out and meet them half-way.”⁸² The musicians reported that white colonists had expected only white people to attend the chamber music concerts, but black Africans turned out for their concerts in large numbers.⁸³ According to Marc Gottlieb, the quartet’s first violinist, the quartet presented all its music, both classical and contemporary, with the expectation that it would be both novel and enjoyable to audiences: “if they haven’t heard it before, they would have no reason not to like it. To them, Mel Powell would be the same as Mozart.”⁸⁴ As a result of the experiment that the Dorian and Claremont ensembles represented, the cultural attaché of the American embassy in Nairobi concluded that sending only popular artists to Africa would be a mistake: “The low cost, highly mobile, demonstration arts workshop, be it in chamber music, painting, dance, drama, however difficult or sophisticated the genre, can interest and inspire people all over the world who are eager to learn, if only the artists can be found who are just as eager to communicate their art.”⁸⁵

Nevertheless, efforts at direct education of audiences through workshops of this kind remained a sideline in the Cultural Presentations program. Rarely was a tour marked as primarily educational in this way. Charles Frankel, who served as assistant secretary of state for educational

and cultural affairs in the mid-1960s, observed that the politics of a rapidly decolonizing world made such programs increasingly unpalatable. He found that under postcolonial conditions, cultural relations “cannot rest on the presumption that our nation or any nation has a mission to educate the world.”⁸⁶ State Department officials had chosen to send chamber music to Africa because “it would prove to them that we consider them our cultural equals,” but Frankel feared that the framing of tours as an educational venture might undercut that message.⁸⁷ In practice the Dorian and Claremont groups’ educational method was very like the work they did in the United States, less speaking down to audiences than sharing unfamiliar music with them in a friendly fashion—but even this low-key approach required extreme tact. The project of educating audiences would continue in less overt ways.

Solution 3: The Mediation of Prestige

In addition to the strategies of mixed programming and education, the State Department cooperated with the USIA in using other media to cultivate audience interest in the concerts they were sending out. The U.S. consulate in Chiang Mai, Thailand, reported that even though the public was very receptive to visiting musicians, Thai listeners needed “careful education.” In this case the education was provided not through live appearances and workshops but through radio programs and “sound trucks saturating the towns with background information and samples of music” to ensure adequate familiarity with the music and thus a successful concert.⁸⁸

Where Western music was not well liked, the arrival of a great American musical personality was often met with mild curiosity or indifference. Yet in cosmopolitan areas and places that had American cultural centers, music fans or critics could easily access foreign publications, sometimes using information found there to evaluate musicians by Western standards. A U.S. embassy official in Rio de Janeiro explained that in prestige-conscious Rio, critics based their opinions in part on information gleaned from the American musical press. If a musical group was well-regarded by U.S. critics, the Brazilian press would also accord the group favorable attention.⁸⁹ In cases where the music was unfamiliar to local concert reviewers, newspaper coverage for a given concert often relied heavily on the texts of official press releases from the USIA, a relatively direct means of disseminating information about American music to publics abroad. This relationship between music and other media meant that it was possible to create a reputation to precede an artist’s appearance. Indeed, this procedure was the norm. George Hellyer, counselor of the U.S. embassy in Tokyo, explained

that “often name artists in Japan do not coincide with U.S. opinion. Names are usually built through motion pictures, records, and books. It is very difficult to build a name in Japan unless adequate materials and time are available.”⁹⁰ By cultivating artists’ fame far in advance, and carefully judging which artists to send, the State Department could best assure the visiting musicians’ success.

It is a curious irony that even though embassy staff perceived an acute demand for American music on the part of foreign publics, they had to work very hard to get people to attend performances. This was true even of the most famous attractions. Howard Elting Jr., counselor of the American embassy in Vietnam, explained that the embassy was catering to the tastes of “educated Vietnamese” in planning cultural presentations, yet the educational preparation undertaken by the embassy was dazzling in its scope. To publicize the concerts of the Jack Teagarden Sextet, the Golden Gate Quartet, and the Little Orchestra Society, the three cultural presentations that would visit Vietnam in 1959, USIS published one hundred thousand copies of a booklet in Vietnamese about these three concerts. Embassy personnel held record-listening sessions and gave twelve public lectures about American music and these performers, some of which were reprinted in newspapers. The Voice of America aired advertisements, recordings of the three groups were given prominent placement on Radio Vietnam, and footage of the groups was included in weekly newsreels in movie theaters. After the performers actually arrived, two of the three concerts were broadcast nationally. To avoid selling many tickets to foreigners resident in Vietnam, all publicity was conducted in Vietnamese until the final week. Elting reported that the tremendous publicity effort was itself noteworthy in the public’s eyes: “A number of Vietnamese commented after the concerts that the wonderful thing about the visit of the Little Orchestra is that it enabled the Vietnamese to learn something about American organization and planning. ‘That,’ exclaimed a Vietnamese newsman, ‘is a lesson we Vietnamese have to learn.’ A curious commentary, this, in that no such thought ever crossed our minds in planning the concerts.”⁹¹ U.S. cultural presentations thus provided not only high-quality performances but also an important glimpse into American strategies of mediation.

The process of educating Vietnamese audiences appears to have been effective. Likely as a result of the pervasive publicity, ticket sales for the American presentations in Vietnam were better in 1959 than ever before, even though the acts that preceded these—Richard Tucker, Marian Anderson, William Warfield, and Eleanor Steber—were also first-rate. Of the three groups that came to Vietnam that year, the Little Orchestra

Society—the same group that failed to impress the Japanese—made the biggest impression. In Elting's assessment the quality of the performance, the sense of a gift bestowed, and the financial prowess required to move an orchestra all played a role in shaping the audience's response. He believed that most audience members were ill equipped to appreciate the music but that "the great majority were very much impressed by the spectacular scope of the entire effort."⁹²

Whether listening to classical music necessarily requires "understanding" (that is, mediation through formal education) remains a contested question among music scholars. In the 1950s and 1960s, State Department personnel generally believed that people had to have some familiarity with art music in order to like it.⁹³ The Cultural Presentations staff fully recognized that such education was unavailable in most of the world. Perhaps this is why they were unwilling to rely on the music's appeal alone. Instead, they let the impressive expense of moving a large orchestra stand as "a dramatic compliment to the country which is visited and demonstrate our genuine interest in their people."⁹⁴ Where the music might not have mattered to every listener, the gesture—the sense of a gift received—filled in a variety of meanings, leaving some listeners satisfied by the compliment. The musicians, by contrast, relied not on "understanding" but on enjoyment: whether the music was familiar or not, they invited listeners to share it in hopes that they might like it.

CLASSICAL MUSIC AND SOCIAL POWER

Concerts of classical music were not expected to transmit ideas in the manner of information propaganda, yet they did inspire meaningful thinking in participants. These performances and the negotiations about them built complex social relationships. A key part of this practice was the art of judging the social relationship between giver and recipient, both on a personal level and as a metonym for international relations. Requests for music communicated to the State Department by its embassies reveal how people assessed their own power in relation to the Cold War conflict: were they bypassed, or were they in the same league with their neighbors? Did the United States consider them cultured, or not? The presence and nature of musical presentations was taken as a barometer of what Peter van Ham has called "social power": citizens of nation-states could and did judge the importance of their states relative to the United States and their neighbors by what music was sent.⁹⁵

Joseph Nye has identified the sheer attractiveness of America's cultural products—its music, its movies—as a major source of soft power without

exploring fully how the attraction works.⁹⁶ Although van Ham describes nonmusical forms of social power as generated through multilateral communication, he seems, like Nye, to perceive music's appeal as a form of consumerism that colonizes the global imagination—a unilateral imposition of cultural products.⁹⁷ In some respects we can see the desire of many audiences for the “highest” forms of music played by the “top” groups as a kind of avarice, wanting to acquire a high-status possession and to feel oneself marked by that status. Many listeners, though, seem to have genuinely wanted to hear this music, whether out of curiosity or deeply felt interest. Diplomatic posts received positive comments and letters of gratitude after the concerts. Furthermore, the pleasure and the intrinsic musical value were not separable from the prestige of the music and the implied compliment of attention from a superpower. Much as the State Department puzzled over its audiences, we cannot easily disentangle the particular motives that led people to enjoy concerts.

In the play of attention and prestige that swirled around the music, power did not rest with the United States alone. Foreign publics made a variety of demands on the State Department through communication with its embassies and consular posts. The desire for this music was carefully cultivated through information propaganda, yet listeners abroad also requested and used music to suit their own purposes. We see in posts' anxious missives to Washington that the program was highly responsive to—even subject to—the tastes and aspirations of the publics it sought to reach. For cultural diplomacy to work, officials needed to know their audiences and try hard to please them. This collaborative element is not negated by the fact that the United States was simultaneously cultivating demand for this music. Rather, the top-down and bottom-up aspects of this process remained in productive tension with each other.

In a critique of Nye's analysis Edward Lock explains that “the possibility of attraction rests upon the existence of social norms defining what it means to be attractive”—and these norms are not fixed but are negotiated among the parties.⁹⁸ In its bid for prestige the Cultural Presentations staff invoked a European hierarchy of musical value to assert American competence in cultural matters and tried to transmit that hierarchy abroad so that American music could be judged worthy. Audiences the world over who received American cultural presentations accepted the European norm to widely varying extents. Many regarded the acceptance of the norm as the price of participation in a prestigious worldwide elite, yet the freedom with which music critics abroad censured Western performers suggests that citizens of host countries were not merely passive recipients. The norms that

the Cultural Presentations staff sought to introduce were not adopted uncritically. They were contested and adjusted at each concert, at each pre-concert talk, in each newspaper review or educational event. Any consideration of cultural diplomacy must take this “pushback” into account and acknowledge the extent to which norms were partially adopted, refused outright, or applied in ways the senders had not foreseen—as in Japan, where the norms were turned against the very American performers who sought to introduce them. Van Ham defines social power as “the capacity to establish the norms and rules around which other actors’ actions converge.” Yet in choosing classical music as a vehicle for diplomacy, the State Department was applying norms first established elsewhere—and thereby risking censure according to those very norms.⁹⁹

In the Cultural Presentations program, classical music proved a valuable tool, allowing U.S. officials to deploy preexisting norms and cultivate new ones, presenting an image of America as both musically innovative and devoted to the most exalted traditions. The State Department’s extensive use of classical music encouraged people elsewhere in the world to see this music as a cultural universal, even as its value had to be negotiated anew in each place. When State Department officials sent classical music abroad, they counted on the transferability of classical music’s prestige, and it appears they were largely correct. Listeners abroad did not evaluate the offering of American music exactly as U.S. listeners would. Still, many were willing to accept the premise that music could be judged on a scale of value according to which some is “higher” or “better,” and givers and receivers alike felt it necessary to come to agreement about which was the “higher.” If they agreed, the gift of music could be enjoyed as a genuine compliment to the receiver, even as it also enhanced the prestige of the giver as possessing worthwhile culture.

The belief that people the world over were hearing and liking the same music focused attention on values that were held in common, and this practice strengthened the imagined connections among individuals in different places. As we will see in the next chapter, American diplomatic practice went still further. By training orchestras abroad and providing conductors for them, the gesture of inclusion grew into one of active participation.