Sounds of Freedom, Cosmopolitan Democracy, and Shifting Cultural Politics: From “The Jazz Ambassador Tours” to “The Rhythm Road”

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Music is a powerful global player, as it traverses national and continental boundaries faster than any other art form. It moves within transnational economic, cultural, and political circuits and forms an important asset of translocal and global community-building. Music has also remained linked to visions of change, liberation, and even revolution. We may think of the reputation of jazz as a liberating force in the Cold War period, of the Cuban Nueva Trova as a reflection of the ideals of the Cuban Revolution, or of soul and funk as an expression of change for African American and Afro-Latino cultures in the 1960s and 1970s (Moore 2014, 93–94). Certainly music’s utopian potential should not be overestimated but its political significance has been recognized by governmental institutions and grassroots movements alike. In U.S. government-sponsored programs such as The Jazz Ambassador tours and The Rhythm Road: American Music Abroad, music as a political messenger is mobilized from above; political power structures with national interests in global politics guide the funding and distribution of “American” musical expression cross-culturally. Both projects emerged in moments of national crisis: The Jazz Ambassador program was launched as a response to anti-Americanism(s) during the Cold War Period whereas The Rhythm Road project represents a follow-up response to the global image loss of the U.S. during the Bush Administration after September 11. Both programs build on black music’s multifaceted heritage as the sound of freedom.

I take a look at these programs through the dialectics of what I call “sonic cosmopolitics” from above and from below. By using sonic cosmopolitics as an umbrella term to describe the transnational music flows I am conceptually less concerned with what Daphne Brooks in reference to the legendary African American entertainers Nina Simone and Eartha Kitt calls “sonic cosmopolitanism” which she defines as the expression of their voices which create “the very sound of ‘the worldly’ and the limitless traveler” (Brooks 2011, 113). Rather, I explore the politicization of music as a translocal and global community-building force. As I argue, the above music projects partake in larger processes

of democratizing the world within and beyond Western liberalist meaning. Recent discourse on cosmopolitanism proposes a more open-minded view of cosmopolitan thought which steps into dialogue with other visions surrounding the term. With a nod to critics like Appiah I use “sonic cosmopolitics” to challenge both elitist and purely universalistic notions of the term cosmopolitanism and argue for ‘cosmopolitanism from *below*’ as an alternative to ‘cosmopolitanism from *above*.’ According to Amanda Anderson:

Cosmopolitanism ... typically manifests a complex tension between elitism and egalitarianism. It frequently advances itself as a specifically intellectual ideal, or depends on a mobility that is the luxury of social, economic, or cultural privilege.... At the same time, the cosmopolitan identification with the larger sphere of the world, or with humanity, or with standards assumed to transcend any locale, is ostensibly inspired by the deep-seated belief in the humanity of all, wherever positioned. (Anderson 1998, 268)

I would like to add that conceiving cosmopolitanism from a ‘*below*’ perspective makes room for contradictions, dynamics, conflicts as well as changes and encourages dialogue not only among different conceptions of cosmopolitanism as a philosophical world view and a political project but also about different ideas about the cosmopolitan individual and his or her cosmopolitan disposition(s) or political engagement beyond a local and national level. “Cosmopolitan democracy,” according to Danielle Archibugi, “helps to capture the idea that the international order is becoming increasingly democratic in the sense that there are many chains of negotiation, multilevel and multi-sited interconnections among population segments, and the expansion of many kinds of exchanges” (Blau 2001, 64). Such conviction clearly opposes ideas of imperialist forms of globalization present in various political, economic, military as well as cultural discourses. Perhaps torn between utopian belief and dystopian disenchantment it is illuminating to investigate what role “sonic cosmopolitics” occupy in this context.

Both The Jazz Ambassador tours and The Rhythm Road project builds on jazz as a core expression of U.S. American culture. They differ not only in historical context, though. Whereas the Jazz Ambassador program elected jazz musicians of international fame as its messengers to diffuse U.S. American music globally, The Rhythm Road project selects and promotes new and largely unknown artists. While the Jazz Ambassador program appears a clear top-down endeavor, the Rhythm Road project, despite its government affiliation, intensively borrows elements from contemporary grassroots politics of community-building through music. Hence, I want to address the Jazz Ambassador tours and the

Rhythm Road project within a larger framework of transnational music flows. Through the critical lens of sonic cosmopolitics from above and from below this also involves a reflection about how musicians, performers and artists as global actors position themselves in respect to the institutional body of a government sponsored program. The latter promotes but also selects and controls. Presented as national artists and the nation's cultural ambassadors, the musicians are at times conflicted in simultaneously having to deal with the diffusion of national cultural heritage on the one hand, and with imaginaries of belonging beyond nationscapes on the other.

At first glance, The Jazz Ambassador tours and The Rhythm Road project may look like unilateral and one-directional music flows. The U.S.-American musicians involved, however, have also entered into aesthetic, personal and political dialogues with local musicians, local communities and local representatives in their host countries. Musicians have been sent out but they have also returned with new cultural impressions and with an insight into new musical traditions. We may think of Dizzy Gillespie's insertion of Afro-Cuban and Afro-Latin elements in bebop as a striking example expressing an inter-American dialogue within the Jazz Ambassador tours' mission. By studying the transversal dimension of flows we encounter more complex patterns of circuits, circulations, and exchanges than broader conceptualizations such as globalization-as-Americanization and the Latinization of U.S. America have suggested. Both pursue a more unilateral and unidirectional approach to the mobility of goods, ideas, and people. For instance, Ruth Oldenziel explains:

There is now a broad consensus that Americanization refers to a cultural transformation that has only in part to do with the American nation-state and U.S. based multinationals, but often marks a semiotic sign floating outside its geographical bounds. America in this sense represents a kind of offshore America, constructed outside the U.S., called America. (Oldenziel 2007, 86)

She later sums up that "in short, both in the popular imagination as in conventional scholarship, American power is considered beyond geography: spaceless yet everywhere at the same time" (Oldenziel 2007, 90). The omnipresence of the signifier, however, suggests a center from which all flows emerge and does not take aspects of relations, reciprocity or exchange into consideration. With regard to the Latinization of U.S. American culture, studies like John Storm Roberts' *The Latin Tinge: The Impact of Latin American Music on the United States* (1999) provide intriguing insights

into the cultural flows from the South into the North and their impact on popular music forms in the United States. According to Roberts, “virtually all of the major popular forms—Tin Pan Alley, stage and film music, jazz, rhythm-and-blues, country music, rock have been affected throughout their development by idioms of Brazil, Cuba, or Mexico” (Roberts 1999, ix). Tracing back the musical flows to the late nineteenth century, Roberts maintains: “Aside from the successive specifically Latin styles that have swept the country ever since the late-19th-century habanera, both Latin-Caribbean and Mexican idioms have become indigenous to the United States through Puerto Rico and the Chicano Southwest” (Roberts 1999, ix). While drawing upon conceptualizations of agency and flows in their respective argumentations neither Oldenziel nor Roberts include the transversal nature of flows frequently present in global circuits and so essential for the emergence and development of jazz.

Jazz, which is the cultural and musical backbone of both The Jazz Ambassador tours and The Rhythm Road project, is a seemingly ever-transforming musical form that has emerged out of multiple flows and contact zones of musical traditions. Jazz’s complex translation of collective expression and individual voices provided a master trope to propagate U.S. American culture as democratic, egalitarian and individual. Especially during the Cold War period music in the form of jazz gained recognition as the sound of freedom. And jazz remains strongly connected to other black musical expressions that have continued to play a pivotal role at the intersection of democratic aesthetics and politics of liberation. Against the historical background of the tumultuous 1960s and early 1970s, when the Civil Rights and the Black Power movements not only shook the foundations of white supremacy in the United States but advanced anticolonial black struggles throughout the Americas and other parts of the globe, musical expression reached another height of spreading political messages. Referring to the diffusion of black cultures and politics during that epoch, Thomas Fawcett writes about new identitarian links between African American and Afro groups throughout Latin America and the Caribbean that travel via music—funk and soul—in particular:

[...] the globality of soul and funk music [...] shows that music can create linkages between distinct groups of the African diaspora. [...] Soul and funk music linked distinct communities of the diaspora despite the potential barriers of linguistic and cultural differences. Fans and musicians alike adopted elements of the soul aesthetic – such as the afro hair-style – in a show of solidarity and as an implicit protest against the status quo. (Fawcett 2007, 24)

Funk and soul started as sonic cosmopolitics from below, and were later adopted and diffused through global music markets. Commenting upon black musical expression in the Americas, Roger D. Abrahams reminds us that

Not that these black expressive forms are not associated with specific places: the Cuban Habanera, the Samba of Rio, Reggae and Kingston, the Mississippi blues. But these are also recognizably vernacular inventions that achieved a place in the transnational entertainment industry rather than providing the kind of cultural reflexivity that leads to the formation of a patria. (Abrahams 2001, 99)

What Abrahams suggests here is the diffusion of a larger black imaginary in market circles beyond the boundaries of nation-states. As he concludes, "These musics, and the peoples identifying themselves through them, knit together the entire region, even as they advertise local cultural invention to worldwide popular audiences (Abrahams 2001, 100). What emerges is a vision of black Americas far beyond the US South: "It is a region which not only includes the Caribbean and the U.S. South, but many coastal outposts in South America on both the north, east, and west coasts, and many areas of the latifundium of Central America, including Mexico, Belize, and Costa Rica" (Abrahams 2001, 100).

Describing the impact of funk and soul on black liberation throughout the Americas, William L. Van Deburg in *New Day in Babylon*, states that

Transcending the medium of entertainment, soul music provided a ritual in song with which blacks could identify and through which they could convey important in-group symbols. Music was power and considered to be supremely relevant to the protracted struggle of black people for liberation. To some it was the poetry of the black revolution. (Van Deburg 1992, 205)

Soul songs such as "To Be Young, Gifted, and Black" by Nina Simone, "We Got More Soul" by Dyke and the Blazers and in particular "Say It Loud (I'm Black and I'm Proud)" by James Brown turned into hymns for the struggle of black liberation throughout the Americas and other sections of the globe concerned with anti-colonial struggles.

With such a strong presence of black music in the realm of political struggle it comes as no surprise that jazz keeps on nourishing cultural politics, albeit now more from above than below, after having become America's classical music. The U.S.-sponsored Jazz Ambassador tours to the Middle East, Africa, and Asia launched in the 1950s during the Cold War period, and the contemporary The

Rhythm Road project launched in 2005 by the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs represent programs of musical mobility and cultural diplomacy organized and sponsored by governmental institutions. While the Rhythm Road project, the second State Department program in music diplomacy now run by Jazz at Lincoln Center was in full swing, the Meridian International Center in Washington, DC inaugurated the photographic exhibition *Jam Session: America's Jazz Ambassadors Embrace the World* in April 2008 to look back and honor jazz musicians such as Louis Armstrong, Dizzy Gillespie, Duke Ellington among others for their cultural work as jazz ambassadors during the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. As Curtis Sandberg reminds us,

Developed in collaboration with University of Michigan professor Penny M. von Eschen and drawn from collections around the United States, the presentation brought together for the first time in history more than 100 images capturing memorable scenes from jazz tours to 35 countries and four continents. (Sandberg 2008)

The traveling exhibition has functioned as a mobile archive to commemorate the jazz tours that started with Dizzy Gillespie's and his orchestra's engagement as jazz ambassadors playing in Latin America and being sent to Southern Europe and the Middle East in 1956 by the State Department and the Eisenhower Administration. The tour involved meetings with governmental representatives, local communities as well as artists and was designed to spread the gospel of American freedom and democracy as a counterforce to Soviet communism during the Cold War period. Other musicians were to follow such as Benny Goodman and his band who traveled to East Asia in 1958; the Dave Brubeck Quartet which toured Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and South Asia; Louis Armstrong and the All Stars who hit the front pages of newspapers around the world and played numerous concerts in Africa in 1960 and 1961, with Armstrong being celebrated as a black cultural and political voice by African communities and politicians alike; and the Duke Ellington Orchestra which crisscrossed the Middle East and South Asia in 1963—a tour that marked the beginning of a decade of journeys for one of the most influential jazz composers and bandleaders of the twentieth century. These mobile and musical forms of cultural diplomacy initiatives continued under the direction of the State Department until 1978, and numerous jazz musicians, including Miles Davis, Clark Terry, and Sarah Vaughan performed on a global scale as cultural ambassadors and musicians alike.

At their very base of the Jazz Ambassador and the Rhythm Road projects is an actor network based on a vertical top-down strategy. Put simply, government officials set the political agenda and government-sponsored cultural workers

become the mediators between government officials and the musicians sponsored for touring. The overall aim is to produce political influence through cultural contact. Both projects launched on State Department initiatives have aimed at celebrating U.S. American cultural production as a means of establishing a positive influence or better connections in regions and countries in the world that have had skeptical, critical or even antagonistic attitudes towards U.S. American foreign policies; the latter are often considered part of “empire building” to borrow a term from Amy Kaplan. But while race and colonialist politics marked the framework of the Jazz Ambassador programs especially in the 1950s and 60s, it seems that cultural conflicts fueled by Samuel Huntington’s notion of the clash of civilizations (Huntington 1996, 192 and 273) and the Bush Administration’s global war against terror provides the political context for the contemporary *The Rhythm Road: American Music Abroad* project to improve U.S. America’s public image abroad in the aftermath of the Iraq War. In the case of *The Rhythm Road* a stronger notion of participatory culture appears at the core of the endeavor. Intentionally or not it seems to foster a more egalitarian approach to cultural difference and diplomacy.

Both projects embody a variety of tensions and contradictions at work in the entanglement of music with politics. We may ask ourselves, for instance, how President Eisenhower in the 1950s could hold on to segregationist politics at home and put jazz and African American jazz musicians on a pedestal as cultural ambassadors at the same time. How did jazz musicians like Louis Armstrong and Dizzy Gillespie cope with the paradoxes of being part of a discriminated racial group on the one hand, and internationally acclaimed and celebrated musicians on the other? For Armstrong and Gillespie spreading the American gospel of democracy and freedom on a global scale was certainly closely linked to the struggle against black oppression within U.S. society. It seems that the global recognition of their musical talent provided them with the additional strength needed to face the paradoxes and controversies involved in being a black musical ambassador in the realm of international politics run by white U.S. hegemony. Even more significant it appears that they could resort to the rhetoric of black liberationist movements steadily gaining strength and visibility within and beyond the United States.

In the late 1950s and the turbulent 1960s the black freedom struggle had moved to the center of American domestic and international politics, and the global appeal of jazz music as an art form manifested in the successes of Dizzy Gillespie, Louis Armstrong and others, had put African American musicians in the spotlight of attention. The global appeal of jazz was due on the one hand to the individual talent and presence of Louis Armstrong and Dizzy Gillespie, but jazz had also already established itself as syncretic art form emerging out of

multicultural cross-overs and continued to do so (for instance, Dizzy Gillespie's fusion of Latin American rhythms with earlier jazz forms or Miles Davis' fusions of jazz and rock). Hence, jazz as musical expression sonically embodied the continuous process of crossing, bridging, and negotiating cultures.

While government officials, cultural workers, and the press may not have been aware of jazz's multicultural complexity, the success of jazz tours by Armstrong, Ellington, and Gillespie in Europe had provided sufficient evidence that the music had the ingredients to 'cross national boundaries.' As Daniel Stein reminds us:

In the mid-1950s, Armstrong became known as Ambassador Satchmo, a public figure that afforded him a new political platform. The primary function of jazz ambassadors was to present themselves and their music on international tours sponsored by the State Department with the objective of exporting a democratic image of America into regions of the world in which the Soviet Union sought political influence. (Stein 2012, 231)

Looking at Louis Armstrong's involvement in the Jazz Ambassador tour as a case study helps us shed more light on the complexity behind the politics of liberation. Historically, the struggle for civil rights in the U.S. coincides with African colonial independence movements in the 1950 and 1960s. Armstrong's involvement is equally multifaceted; he continuously repositioned himself as New-Orleans based black musician, African American spokesperson, critical commentator, and as a political entertainer—a shifting of roles that led to divergent views on Armstrong ranging from musical genius to African celebrity to Uncle Tom entertainer. It is important to remember that Armstrong's performances took place within the larger framework of the state-sponsored politics of liberation which were politically, economically, and culturally motivated. Democracy, free trade, and individual freedom and expression fused into a package of 'feel good' foreign diplomacy. However, the politics of liberation were complicated by a number of factors. The most important of these was that the racist internal politics within the U.S. contrasted sharply with the official support of black independence movements on the African continent. Jazz ambassadors like Armstrong and Brubeck themselves lyrically and musically mocked that "No commodity is quite so strange as this thing called cultural exchange" (Von Eschen 2004, 81), and repeatedly revealed the ambiguities, contradictions, and bigotry within the State Department's mission of spreading the U.S. American gospel of democracy through jazz, thus exposing the tensions within the actor network. The State Department adopted views

of jazz as the sound of individual freedom and social equality, an attitude that could easily be supported through references to the earlier rejection of jazz by totalitarian regimes in Germany, Russia, and Spain as a threat to state order and discipline. But for musicians such as Armstrong, the politics of liberation involved more complex issues having to do with racial exclusion at home, demeaning roles in film, dependency on the pressures of sponsoring (Pepsi Cola) and attacks by black radical intellectuals. Hence for Armstrong his music became politicized through contextualization and he wavered between the outspoken enraged African American citizen and the success-oriented popular music genius and entertainer. In projects like the Real Ambassadors he successfully synthesizes the political agent with the musical genius. As Penny Von Eschen reminds us:

The collaboration in the Real Ambassadors (a jazz musical revue and collaboration between the Brubecks and Armstrong performed to critical acclaim at the Monterey Jazz Festival in 1962) offered Armstrong material that was closer to his own sensibility and outlook. And while Armstrong had often managed to rise above racist material by the sheer force of his artistry, the production allowed him a chance to make a statement about a life-long struggle for control over his own representation.... For Armstrong, freedom remained an aspiration, not an achievement. (Von Eschen 2004, 89)

The Real Ambassador revue at the Monterey jazz festival took place during the most turbulent period of the Civil Rights movement in the early 1960s and managed to express the often very complex and contradictory politics of the State Department tours “at the intersection of the Cold War, African and Asian nation-building, and the U.S. civil rights struggle” (Von Eschen 2004, 79). The tours were further complicated by shifting alliances and tensions between the cultural workers of the foreign-service personnel and the musicians on tour such as Dizzy Gillespie, the Brubecks, and Louis Armstrong; while some cultural workers shared the musicians’ mission of music as a form of bridging cultures, nations, and races, others shared the racial views of President Eisenhower and his segregationist allies (cf. Von Eschen 2004, 80). For Armstrong, the situation demanded a constant repositioning of himself as a political agent from public to private. As Daniel Stein rightly points out:

Armstrong’s at times superficial disengagement from political action—‘his professed unwillingness to dive into politics’—is counteracted further by the stories he repeatedly told about his experience with racial

segregation, which usually ended with the affirmation of his music's power to reach across the racial divide. (Stein 2012, 245)

Hence, Armstrong's cosmopolitics emerge at the intersection of storyteller, public political figure (whose role was sometimes celebrated and then again denied) and musical genius. It is the autobiographical mode that became his primary political tool while the music remained the central cathartic and liberating expression for the private and the public self of Armstrong. His role as a musical ambassador also demonstrated that popular music, throughout its history, has negated clear dividing lines and, in addition, has repeatedly proven capable of transforming itself despite its entanglement in mass and commodity culture. Clearly, Armstrong, Ellington, and Gillespie had star cult status at the time they embarked on their tours as jazz ambassadors and this allowed them to raise their individual and at times dissident voices to foster their idiosyncratic understanding of community building.

Since Armstrong already added critical voices from below to a top-down cultural diplomacy program, we may ask ourselves in which ways sonic cosmopolitics from below are different from government sponsored programs. As the following section of this chapter intends to demonstrate, the Rhythm Road project embraces strategies of participatory culture fully. In its use of the music as a community-building force the Rhythm Road projects also resembles contemporary grassroots music movements. In recent years the conception of music as the sound of freedom has moved far beyond African American cultural contexts. The use of music in the context of contemporary translocal, transethnic, and transnational grassroots movements has adopted the notion of music as a liberating and a bonding force. Frequently this goes hand in hand with an explicit inclusion of the audience in the act of performance. Musical grassroots movements like the *Fandango Sin Fronteras* and *The Pleasant Revolution Tour* by the Ginger Ninjas are participatory networks and are part of what critics like David F. García and Arjun Appadurai classify as *flows* or *scapes* in times of heightened globalization (cf. García 2006, 95–107; Appadurai 1996, 25 ff.). They embody crossovers of music, musical heritage awareness as well as local and translocal community politics. These movements call in remembrance earlier African American models, arise out of the midst of grassroots contexts, and aim at creating and spreading new alternative forms of community building: from the people for the people.

The *Fandango Sin Fronteras* movement draws upon a restoration policy developed by *El Nuevo Movimiento Jaranero* in the mid-1970s to decolonize the state identity politics of the Mexican government by re-emphasizing the multicultural ingredients of the musical tradition and by reviving the participatory

and improvisational elements in the fandango praxis of rural communities (Gonzalez 2011, 63). Its decolonial outlook attempts to free fandango music from such stifling labels as state, regional, and national cultural heritage and to revive a participatory and horizontal spirit that takes away the boundaries between performer and audience, and between professional musicians and amateurs, making participatory culture a central strategy of musical performance and social network building. To link this newly regained praxis to Chicano/a communities in the United States music groups such as Quetzal from Los Angeles, Mono Blanco from the port of Veracruz, and Son de Madera from Xalapa initiated transnational collaborations at the beginning of the New Millennium. In the meantime fandango has travelled to various urban centers and Latina/o communities in the United States and Canada and has created new networks of *convivencia* (the Latina/o notion of community and coexistence) by means of a participatory music culture. The musicians and community activists involved in *Fandango Sin Fronteras* frequently travel back and forth between various locations, have roots and contacts at different sites and build networks on translocal as well as transnational scales. Communal and cultural centers in Xalapa, Santa Ana, and Seattle are representative sites of network-building and nodal points of transit for musicians and activists alike.

A similar inter-American outreach characterizes the ecopolitical projects of the rock fusion band Ginger Ninjas. As depicted in Sergio Morin's documentary film, *The Ginger Ninjas Rodando México*, in 2007 the band travelled from California to Palenque, Mexico in one of their tours as part of a larger ecopolitical project called The Pleasant Revolution Tour. The fact that they transported all instruments and amplifiers by bike set their form of traveling succinctly apart from exclusively elite or aesthetic notions of touring the world, often characterized by class privilege and the ability to travel and 'consume' the cultures of the world. Their major conceptual frame is the synthesis of alternative forms of mobility with music and audience interaction to promote new translocal communities and networks. They reclaim public spaces for community politics and use places like *plazas* and beaches for public performances. The Ginger Ninjas' *The Pleasant Revolution Tour* aims at bridging the gap between musicians and audience, between art and life, by getting the audience "on bike" as well and actually integrating them in the process of energy production for the amplification of the band's instruments. Their musical live performance style affirms that "for many critics, fans, and musicians," according to Roy Shuker, "there is a perceived hierarchy of live performances, with a marked tendency to equate the audiences' physical proximity to the actual 'performance' and intimacy with the performer(s) with a more authentic and satisfying musical experience" (Shuker 2012, 201). During their gigs in Chapala,

Guadalajara, Morelia, and other locations, the Ginger Ninjas set out to connect California-style ecological awareness with the rapidly growing Mexican movement of *ciclismo* in order to create a transnational ecological or if you want “ecocosmopolitan” awareness of finding new ways of encountering the other within and outside your community.

The Rhythm Road concept, then, while directed by the State Department, clearly aligns itself more consciously with these grassroots egalitarian approaches to mobilize music from the people for the people. Quite different from the elitist approach of The Jazz Ambassador tours to send world famous musicians abroad, The Rhythm Road does not select musicians and performers of a star-cult status but allows younger musicians to apply and go through a selection process. The program annually sends 10 bands (mainly jazz, some hip-hop, all of which audition for the gig) to more than 50 countries. Also, the politics of cultural exchange seem to have changed and become more dialogical. Whether this is a sign of revised diplomacy or a corrected politics of empire remains to be answered. The emphasis is now on dialogue; frequently musicians do not only export music made in America but attempt to adapt to the musical cultures of the regions and nations visited. As an official report declares:

Before the bass player Ari Roland went to Turkmenistan last year, he learned some Turkmen folk songs. His band played jazz improvisations of these songs with local musicians—the first time such mixing had been allowed—and a 15-minute news report about the concert ran on state television several times the next day. (Kaplan 2008)

While building on strategies of the Jazz Ambassador tours, the new program embraces a more horizontal approach to cultural dialogue. Rather than presenting huge concerts, musicians are expected to learn local traditions, to appear on local television and radio shows, to host workshops with local musicians and students, and to conduct concerts at schools and communities (“U.S. Embassy Presents” 2009). As the webpage of the Dictionary of Cultural Diplomacy has it, “Rhythm Road represents the new generation of musical ambassadors; reaching beyond concert halls to interact with other musicians and citizens around the globe” (“The Rhythm Road” 2014). It is designed to foster intercultural dialogue, overcome negative images and counteract stereotypes. Moreover, the promotion of the actual aesthetic experience of creating music together has helped the program to push the collaboration of artists from the United States with peoples and audiences from Africa, Asia and South America. As the Dictionary of Cultural Diplomacy has it: “Although an overt

act of Cultural Diplomacy sponsored at the state level, Rhythm Road promotes real grassroots interaction between US musicians and peoples of the world, promoting a spirit of cooperation, friendship, creativity and peace" ("The Rhythm Road" 2014).

In conclusion, I share with Josh Kun that:

Popular music is one of our most valuable tools for understanding the impact of nationalism and citizenship on the formation of our individual identities.... [I]t is also one of our most valuable sites for witnessing the performance of racial and ethnic difference against the grain of national citizenships that work to silence and erase those differences. (Kun 2005, 11)

What jazz—the phenomenon at the core of The Jazz Ambassador tours and The Rhythm Road—stands for is a complicated process of cultural recognition and resistance that accompanies the history of black music throughout the Americas. When the Jazz Ambassador tours started, jazz had just emancipated itself from connotations of 'jungle' music. Embodied today by the status of Wynton Marsalis and the Lincoln Performance Center, jazz has become America's classical music and has achieved elitist status.

The Jazz Ambassador tours could already build on jazz music's popularity on a global scale to turn it into a strategic tool for spreading the U.S. American gospel of freedom and democracy. Likewise, the musicians invited and sometimes also pushed by their music agents to participate in the Jazz Ambassador tours, had reached stardom long before they toured. While many of the jazz tunes presented had already hit the charts, the musicians' involvement in the tours certainly enhanced their record companies' sales. Music as cultural capital lent itself successfully to a promotion track of U.S. American cultural achievement. A fruitful synthesis of political impact and market success characterized the top-down program. Beneath the official success story, however, the internal conflicts between the at times outspoken and dissident jazz musicians, the government officials, and the civil right mediators reflected severe ruptures within the program; Louis Armstrong's critique of domestic racial policy, so sharply in contrast with the global gospel of freedom, is just one example. The official political mission then was to achieve geocultural primacy by spreading "American" music, conceived as a national or nationalistic expression. The jazz ambassadors had to walk the tightrope between transcultural musical expression and the role of national ambassador. Indeed, as Penny Von Eschen points out, "the goodwill ambassadors' understanding of jazz as an international music complicates

the characterization of jazz as ‘America’s music’—a label used by Willis Conover and others who have subscribed to the view that jazz won the Cold War” (Von Eschen 2004, 250). It would be reductive to talk about jazz as the ‘soundtrack of American Empire’ or the ‘music of freedom’ in a unilateral one-directional way. Rather, as Penny von Eschen emphasizes:

For these musicians, jazz was an international and hybrid music combining not just American and European forms, but forms that had developed out of an earlier mode of cultural exchange, through the circuitous routes of the Atlantic slave trade and the “overlapping diasporas” created by migrations throughout the Americas. And if the U.S. State Department had facilitated the music’s transnational routes of innovation and improvisation, for many musicians there was a certain poetic justice in that. (Von Eschen 2004, 250)

What psychological, cultural, and political forms of liberation The Jazz Ambassador tours may have culturally and sonically succeeded in achieving is hard to tell, but they certainly have helped free blackness from low culture and jazz from the label ‘American’ as monolithic and national confinement by constantly reshuffling its African, Latin American, North American, European multicultural backbones and giving voice and sound to a process of transcultural transformation within the Americas and beyond. Clearly, Fandango Sin Fronteras as well as The Pleasant Revolution Tour today aim at creating transnational diaspora communities and transnational ecological communities respectively and do so primarily from grassroots agendas, whereas musicians involved in The Jazz Ambassador tours and The Rhythm Road never have lost touch with U.S. cultural diplomacy interests completely (even if the individual artists and musicians may hold dissident views themselves). But as the new directions taken within the framework of The Rhythm Road show, grassroots politics and participatory cultures have gained more profound access to the realm of cultural diplomacy as well. Let us hope that this may lead to a more cosmopolitan understanding of democracy as well.

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