

## **From Jazz Ambassadors to The Rhythm Road: American Music Abroad** ***A History***



*"There are certainly times when music conveys American values better than a speech. Hip-hop is America ...and so is jazz, and every other form of music with American roots that tell a story. For an American performer or group to come [to a country] gives people a chance to - in their own imagination, at least, think about what might be."*

*- Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton*

### **The Origin**

The U.S. Department of State's *"The Rhythm Road: American Music Abroad,"* is produced by Jazz at Lincoln Center. *The Rhythm Road* evolved from Jazz Ambassadors, a program established in 1955 by the U.S. Department of State. Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., a New-York City representative from Harlem, proposed sending some of America's thriving jazz musicians on world tours through the Jazz Ambassadors program during the Cold War. That year, a *New York Times* headline deemed jazz the country's "Secret Sonic Weapon."<sup>1</sup>

### **American Greats: First Jazz Ambassadors**

March 1956 marked Jazz Ambassadors' first international tour. Dizzy Gillespie travelled through southern Europe, the Middle East, and south Asia with his 18-piece band, greeting awestruck audiences along his path.

In 1956, 1960, and 1961, Louis Armstrong also participated, bringing his celebrated trumpet and distinctive voice to Ghana (then the British Gold Coast), Congo, Senegal, Mali, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Sudan, and the United Arab Republic. In 1963, 1970, and 1972, Duke Ellington toured the Soviet Union, Southeast Asia, and Africa and in 1958 Dave Brubeck visited 12 Polish cities.

### **Today**

The legacy of jazz diplomacy continues today in *The Rhythm Road: American Music Abroad*. Launched in 2005 and produced in partnership with Jazz at Lincoln Center and the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, *The Rhythm Road* has brought 150 musicians from 39 ensembles playing jazz, urban, hip hop, and American roots music to over 100 countries to date. In the traditions of Gillespie, Armstrong, and Brubeck, *The Rhythm Road* cultivates cultural exchange and brings America's musical art forms to audiences internationally.

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