

"Why don't the artists rule the world?"

—Fan to Brubeck after a show in Poland, 1958

JAZZ DIPLOMACY DURING THE COLD WAR

Over two decades beginning in 1956, the U.S. State Department sent jazz artists to take new music to the Old World. It hoped to foster understanding and win friends in the Middle East, Asia, and behind the Iron Curtain. The first State Department tour by Brubeck's Quartet, in 1958, musically encircled the Soviet Union and included stops in Poland, Turkey, Pakistan, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Iran, and Iraq. Their travel difficulties—from obtaining visas to finding the right trains to freezing on overnight bus rides—faded in light of the fans' warm reception.

In 1987, Brubeck's musicians were the first American artists to perform in the Soviet Union after it signed a new cultural exchange treaty with the United States. Historically, the Soviet government considered jazz to be "revolting rubbish," but the people embraced the music. The "jambassadors" made a real contribution to diplomatic relations, too. When President Ronald Reagan visited Moscow in 1988, the Quartet "plus one" (bassist Eugene Wright) played for the Soviet and American officials. Secretary of State George Shultz later hugged Brubeck and said, "You broke the ice."

"Whenever [Secretary of State] John Foster Dulles visits a country, the State Department sends the Brubeck Quartet in a few weeks later to repair the damage."
—Comedian Mort Sahl

International Harmony

"Like jazz, [Brubeck is] no longer American. He's international, something we all understand."
—Audience member during the 1987 Soviet Union tour

Brubeck transposed some of his international tour experiences directly into music. A visit to the Chopin Museum in 1958 inspired him to play a newly composed and unrehearsed piece, "Dziękuję" ("Thank You") to his Polish audience. After a moment's stunned silence at its conclusion, they burst into appreciative applause.

Brubeck also found ways to use the rhythms and techniques he heard in other countries. He included musical traditions from Eastern Europe and the Middle East in *Jazz Impressions of Eurasia*. An ancient 9/8 rhythm from Istanbul reappeared in "Blue Rondo a la Turk." In India, Brubeck played alongside sitar and harmonium musicians. Despite the differences between Indian and Western scales, melodies, and harmonies, "we understood each other," he said. Clearly, for him, the cultural exchange went both ways.

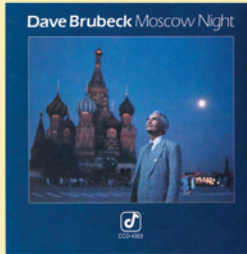


Jazz Impressions of Eurasia (1957)



Bob Lederman/Stack Use photograph

Traveling in Germany in 1961, Brubeck found the Berlin Wall in place and the Brandenburg Gate closed. Three years earlier, he almost had to hide in the trunk of a car to get to East Berlin where he could obtain the appropriate travel visas for his band and family.



Moscow Night (1987)



Quincy Tamm/Reagan Library

The Quartet played for the Moscow Summit between President Ronald Reagan (center) and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev (right) in 1988. During the concert at the U.S. ambassador's residence, conductor Russell Cloyd watched the tense atmosphere relax as Soviets and Americans tapped their feet in agreement: "You like Brubeck? I like Brubeck! We like Brubeck!"



ANTHONY BIGHARD/Stack Use photograph

U.S. Embassy and Iraqi officials greeted Brubeck when he arrived in Baghdad, Iraq, just weeks after the Quartet left the Middle East, nationalists revolted against the Iraqi monarchy.



The Quartet's 1958 tour was supposed to end in April, but Secretary of State John Foster Dulles canceled its spring U.S. dates in order to send the group to Iran and Iraq.

"Dictatorships are so afraid of jazz."
—Dave Brubeck



The Quartet kept up a relentless schedule of performances, speaking engagements, and other commitments while on tour, but Brubeck found time in India to meet with locals, and Joe Morello found time to pose with "Buddie" the elephant.



U.S. Information Service photograph
Brubeck brought his wife, Lola, and sons Darius and Michael for portions of the 1958 tour.