



## **Promotion of Global Dialogue through the Performing Arts: The Artist as Citizen Diplomat**

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### ***Introduction***

Cultural diplomacy, the exchange among nations of ideas and cultural products, is regarded as a cornerstone of public diplomacy. Since 2005, the U.S. State Department has enhanced its public diplomacy efforts by drawing upon the United States' rich and varied arts communities to facilitate the exchange of ideas and the promotion of dialogue. While the popularity of these cross-cultural exchanges waned in the Cold War years, they have generated institutional and public support as a part of 21<sup>st</sup> Century diplomacy. This proposal examines the impact of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra's cultural diplomacy by measuring attitudinal changes and beliefs, in order to provide the PSO with reliable data for use in event promotion, fundraising, and foundation relations.

This year, 2014, marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra's (PSO) visit to Tehran, which will be commemorated with a return visit and Tehran concert. This latest cultural diplomacy will be facilitated with the American Middle East Institute as a partner organization. As a former member of the Pittsburgh Symphony marketing staff member and current a political science professor whose research interests involve public diplomacy, the prospects of this exchange provide the optimal scenario to study the impact of a performing arts organization on public and cultural diplomacy efforts. Furthermore, as Figure 1<sup>1</sup> indicates, a majority of Americans and Iranians support greater cultural, educational, and sporting exchanges between the two countries:

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<sup>1</sup> Public Opinion in Iran with Comparisons to American Public Opinion, April 7, 2008.



**Figure 1: Steps for Improving U.S.-Iran Relations**

Steps for Improving US-Iran Relations		
Measure	% of America	% of Iranian
Direct talks on issues of mutual concern	82	57
Greater cultural, educational, and sporting exchanges	63	63
Greater trade	55	64
Provide more access for each other's journalists	70	70
Have more Americans and Iranians visit as tourists	43	71

*Source: Public Opinion in Iran with Comparisons to American Public Opinion, April 7, 2008.*

This paper is the first installment of a multi-part research project to examine the impact of citizen-diplomacy on the stakeholders and participants in the PSO's prospective concert tour in Tehran. It is intended that this paper will add to the knowledge base of various constituencies. For example, in the competitive arena of arts funding and visibility, robust research on the impact of the artist as cultural diplomat is not only of value as the PSO educates youth and ticketholders on the Orchestra's value to the community, but also as a vehicle for securing additional public and foundation support. In addition, this study would be of use to the State Department and the American Middle East Institute in furthering their efforts in the use of cultural/citizen diplomacy.

***Background: Citizen Diplomacy***



According to the United States Department of State, public diplomacy “is to support the achievement of U.S. foreign policy goals and objectives, advance national interests, and enhance national security by informing and influencing foreign publics and by expanding and strengthening the relationship between the people and Government of the United States and citizens of the rest of the world” (Department of state/Undersecretary). The State Department’s public diplomacy “includes communications with international audiences, cultural programming, academic grants, educational exchanges, international visitor programs, and U.S. Government efforts to confront ideological support for terrorism. The Under Secretary oversees the bureaus of Educational and Cultural Affairs, Public Affairs, and International Information Programs, as well as the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications, and participates in foreign policy development” (ibid). Public Diplomacy by this definition definitely has a political undertone.

Within the domain of public diplomacy is cultural diplomacy; cultural diplomacy is considered ‘soft power’ and includes the “exchanges of ideas, information, art and other aspects of culture among nations and their people in order to foster mutual understanding” (Waller, 2009, p.74). Cultural diplomacy is meant to be a two-way exchange; “cultural diplomacy derives its credibility not from being close to government institutions, but from its proximity to cultural authorities” (Cull, 2008, p. 36). Citizen diplomacy is people-to-people contact not the direct intervention of governments, such as: scientific exchange, cultural exchanges, and international sporting events. “Citizen Diplomacy is the concept that the individual has the right, even the responsibility, to help shape U.S. foreign relations, “one handshake at a time.” Citizen diplomats can be students, teachers, athletes, artists, business people, humanitarians, adventurers or tourists. They are motivated by a responsibility to engage with the rest of the world in a meaningful, mutually beneficial dialogue” (Center for Citizen Diplomacy).

### ***Citizen Diplomacy Efforts of the PSO***



May 27, 1964 the President of the United States, Lyndon B. Johnson congratulated the Iran-America Society<sup>2</sup> for fostering a “growing interest in the cultural and artistic heritage of Iran in this country, which will be seen by many Americans in the exhibit *7,000 years of Iranian Art*” (Johnson, 1964). The exhibit was inaugurated on June 5, 1964 by His Imperial Majesty the Shahanshah<sup>3</sup> and opened to the public on June 7, 1964 at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. and ran through July 19, 1964. The official attendance for the D.C. exhibition was 68,406 people. The exhibition then travelled to other cities in the United States: Denver, Kansas City, Houston, Cleveland, Boston, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. The exhibition included 737 catalogued items which dated from prehistoric periods to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, such as: “pottery, metalwork of bronze, gold, and silver, weapons and jewelry, paintings, carpets, and textiles” (Iranian Art). Approximately 500 of the 737 items were part of the Foroughi Collection; Mohssen Foroughi was the “brother to the Iranian ambassador to the United States” and his collection was “shown in six European museums in 1961-1963” (Iranian Art).

President Johnson stated:

The United States prizes the fullest possible exchange of culture and ideas between nations in the belief that the understanding so engendered between peoples is an important asset to peace. I remember with pleasure my visit to Iran and I am especially pleased to see this new kind of exchange with a country sharing so many common interests with the United States in the international field (Johnson, 1964)

Later that summer, the PSO performed two concerts August 26-27, 1964, in Tehran at the Iran-America Society Cultural Center<sup>4</sup>-Abbassabad outdoor theater. Tickets were 200 rials which sold out, standing room only tickets then went on sale for

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<sup>2</sup> The Iran-America Society, a non-profit organization, was organized in May 1964” to foster among Americans and Iranians a greater knowledge of the arts, literature, science, folkways, social customs, economic and political patterns of the United States and Iran, and to develop a deeper understanding of the similarities and diversities of the Iranian and American ways of life”  
The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26275>

<sup>3</sup> The Shah and Empress Farah were in the United States to discuss increased foreign aid to Iran with President Johnson (Iranian Art).

<sup>4</sup> The Iran-America Society hosted “tens of thousands of Iranians for English language instruction and classes on topics such as American cooking and art. In the 1960’s, Iranian society was characterized by an unquestioned acceptance of Westernization” (Garthwaite in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, January 19, 2014).



100 rials. The repertoire included music by “Berlioz, Brahms, Copland, Hindemith, Mahler, Piston, Ravel, Schubert, and Weber” (Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, January 17, 2104). The 1964 Middle East and European trip was sponsored by the United States Department of State; beside Iran, the PSO also performed in Poland, Germany, and Lebanon. “That was unquestionably, the most significant commitment any orchestra ever made to performing cultural diplomacy, just by virtue of the fact that they were on the road for 11 weeks, much of it behind the Iron curtain” stated Bob Moir, the current Senior Vice President of Artistic Planning and Audience Engagement (ibid). The 1964 tour was the PSO’s first tour outside of North America and was under the leadership of music director William Steinberg; “21,000 miles through 14 countries” with a note from President Johnson “wishing the orchestra ‘bon voyage’ for the long trip [and stated]...I am confident that you will be outstanding representatives of our nation’s creative vitality and high standards of performance” (ibid). The PSO’s 1964 tour “was one instance of the government’s efforts to spread American cultural during the Cold War...and was an example of the government emphasizing America’s soft power” (Garthwaite, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, January 19, 2014).

In addition to the many summer festivals and tours through Europe, the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra also has a history of diplomacy, such as their tours in 1987 to China, in 1989 to the Soviet Union and the PSO in 2004 was the “first American orchestra to play for Pope John Paul II at the Vatican” (Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, January 17, 2014). Mr. Moir believes that “a symphony orchestra can accomplish historic symbolic breakthroughs in the form of these kinds of missions of cultural diplomacy” (Ibid).

To mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1964 performance in Tehran, the PSO and the American Middle East Institute (AMEI) under the direction of Simin Yazdgerdi Curtis started to discuss as early as 2009 the possibility of a return visit to Iran. However, planning ceased because of the protests in Iran after the 2009 Iranian presidential election; the plans resumed when Mr. Moir of the PSO and Mrs. Curtis of the AMEI met with Mohammad Ali Najafi, director of Iran’s Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization (ICHTO) in September 2013. According to Gregg Sullivan, senior advisor for Iran at the



United States Department of State, the PSO and AMEI “still have a lot of details to work out, but we’re going to stay in close touch with them as this goes forward” (ibid).



The Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra performs in Tehran in August 1964.

Unlike the 1964 PSO tour to Iran which was subsidized by significant monetary support from the U. S. Government and sponsored by the State Department (Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, January 19, 2014), the American Middle East Institute will be completely responsible to raise the funds necessary for the 2014 tour. The president and CEO of the AMEI, Simin Yazdgerdi Curtis, believes that “the State Department will definitely come through for us or connect us to entities that will help us, because they definitely want to see this happen” (ibid). Gregg Sullivan from the U.S. State Department reiterates the encouragement for the “people-to-people ties” (ibid), noting that in the cultural diplomacy area, the State Department funds the Music Abroad program; “a symphony orchestra can accomplish historic symbolic breakthroughs in the form of these kinds of missions of cultural diplomacy”(Moir, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, January 17, 2014).

Complicating the 2014 visit to Tehran by the PSO are the negotiations concerning the Iranian nuclear program. The target date of July 20, 2014, is set for a



negotiated deal between Iran and the P5+1 (France, Britain, Germany, the United States, Russia, and China). The Los Angeles Times reported on May 16, 2014 that “significant gaps remain” on the “fundamental issues” and that a “crucial round” of negotiations ended “abruptly”. Another, more personal, complication for the PSO is the mixed reaction from within the symphony organization. Louise Sciannameo, vice president of public affairs, believes that “it’s kind of a 50-50 situation: those that think it’s a great idea, and those that have their reservations”; reactions ranged from “wow”, “very exciting”, “they’re really the ambassador for this city”, “amazing news, absolutely amazing”, “art rises above the politics”, to “I’ll reserve judgment” and “authoritarian regimes often create cultural exchanges to serve their own purposes” (Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, January 18, 2014). Moir, from the PSO and Yazdgerdi Curtis from AMEI travelled to Iran February 15-22, 2014 as guests of the Fajr International Music Festival in Tehran. Moir and Yazdgerdi Curtis returned with a proposal for a cultural exchange between an Iranian nongovernmental organization (possibly the Tehran Symphony Orchestra) and the AMEI; Yazdgerdi Curtis thought highly of the experience and the people, “it was magical, and the Iranian people were so welcoming, so hospitable, so generous” (Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, March 4, 2014).

On Wednesday March 26, 2014 The Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra announced that the trip to Iran originally proposed for late August 2014 was postponed. Simin Yazdgerdi Curtis of AMEI believes that the trip will take place within two to six months of the original date, “we have a lot of momentum going, so we don’t want to delay it by much” (Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, March 27, 2014). The senior vice president of artistic planning and audience engagement, Bob Moir, attributed the delay to the complicated preparations required of international tours, which can take up to two years to plan, “by contract, we must present a tour in detail to the musicians six months in advance for a vote. We have passed that deadline and still do not have sufficient information to make a comprehensive presentation to them that will answer all of their possible questions”, [however], “things are moving ahead. We’re just not going to do it this summer.

### ***Methodology***

This study involves the following research questions:



- What are the implications and significance various stakeholders attach to the PSO cultural exchange with Tehran?
- In what ways are the implications and significance applied by the various stakeholders to furthering citizen/cultural diplomacy, and to upholding the mission of the PSO? What are the results for programming and development?

The research has two components: one conducted stateside and the second conducted at the concert sites. The stateside research involves conducting interviews of major decision makers and stakeholders of the PSO and AMEI to establish the goals and expectations of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary tour. This comparative research examines the evolution in cultural diplomacy in the PSO's 50-year engagement with Iran, the changing political-cultural landscape, and establishes the baselines for a questionnaire of musicians and broader stakeholders. The interviews will be analyzed to understand the implications and significance attached to the cultural exchange by the various stakeholders and measuring the change between pre and post visit. This segment of the research would include a brief anonymous survey pre and post visit of the Orchestra members (musicians) including the Music Director, senior PSO staff, and Board members. This brief survey would assess change in beliefs on the role of cultural exchange itself and for the PSO in particular. Also, any stakeholder will be given the opportunity to be interviewed if they choose to give an in-depth viewpoint.

Cultural exchange is the direct exchange of ideas by citizens. Data suggests that while direct talks between countries may be citizens most preferred means of communication, cultural diplomacy runs a close second and is widely used by countries of diverse governance and development levels. To complete this assessment, the final phase of research will be participant interviews conducted with stakeholders immersed in cultural diplomacy. These interviews will take place at the concert site to assess the impact of direct and immediate cultural immersion and exchange, rather than reflective, post-hoc reflection that is captured in stateside surveys in the weeks and months following the trip. Additionally, a snowballing interviewing process will allow for the inclusion of the stakeholders from our exchange partners in Tehran at event sites and





following events. A standardized set of prompts will be used in dialogues to create structured focused comparisons of respondents' views.

### ***Impact of the Study***

In the competitive world of arts funding and visibility, robust research on the impact of the artist as cultural diplomat is not only of value as the PSO educates youth and ticketholders on the Orchestra's value to the community, but also as a vehicle for securing additional public and foundation support. Using the pre and post surveys would be able to show the impact of the visit on the various stakeholders. Also, this study would be of use to the State Department and the American Middle East Institute in furthering their efforts in the use of cultural/citizen diplomacy; the PSO would be able to use the momentum gained from the visit to translate into higher awareness in Pittsburgh of the Orchestra's international work and hopefully higher ticket sales; and the musicians will be able to recount their experience as cultural diplomats to the Pittsburgh community and school children, and the wider national and international communities thus serving the PSO mission.



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