
BOOK REVIEW

Danielle Fosler-Lussier. *Music in America's Cold War Diplomacy*
Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015
ISBN 9780520284135. 352 pp., incl. bibl., index

Cadra Peterson McDaniel. *American–Soviet Cultural Diplomacy:
The Bolshoi Ballet's American Premiere*
Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014
ISBN 9780739199305. 294 pp., incl. bibl., index

Reviewed by Jessica Black

The growing popularity of examinations of cultural diplomacy indicates a new trend in musicology, with the number of studies focused on the use of music as diplomacy and cultural exchange steadily rising. Notable recent publications include the edited volume by Felix Myer et al., *Crosscurrents: American and European Music in Interaction, 1900–2000* (2014), *Dancers as Diplomats: American Choreography in Cultural Exchange* (2015) by Claire Croft, and the edited anthology *Music and International History in the Twentieth Century* (2015).¹ Adding to this growing number of volumes are the recent publications *Music in America's Cold War Diplomacy* by Danielle Fosler-Lussier and *American–Soviet Cultural Diplomacy: The Bolshoi Ballet's American Premiere* by Cadra Peterson McDaniel. While Fosler-Lussier's volume covers a variety of exchanges undertaken by the United States in the Cold War period, McDaniel has chosen to focus on the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union, examining the Bolshoi Ballet's 1959 tour to the United States as a key incident of cultural diplomacy.

¹ Felix Meyer, Carol J. Oja, Wolfgang Rathert and Anne C. Shreffler eds, *Crosscurrents: American and European Music in Interaction, 1900–2000* (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2014); Clare Croft, *Dancers as Diplomats: American Choreography in Cultural Exchange* (Oxford: OUP, 2015); Jessica Glenow-Hecht, ed., *Music and International History in the Twentieth Century* (New York; Oxford: Berghahn, 2015). A chapter by Danielle Fosler-Lussier, 'Instruments of Diplomacy: Writing Music into the History of Cold War International Relations,' is featured in *Crosscurrents*.

Fosler-Lussier's book is by far the more absorbing of the two works: it is highly recommended as an introduction to cultural diplomacy and the significant musical and political events it encompassed. Unlike other studies, the chapters are dedicated to different issues, rather than arranged chronologically or by tour—for example, jazz in the Cultural Presentations Program, African American ambassadors, and the presentation of the United States' religious heritage abroad—but each chapter contains at least one in-depth case study to guide the reader through the intricacies of exchanges. Interestingly, many tours by major orchestras or performers that are the focus of other studies of cultural diplomacy are only briefly discussed. For example, discussion of the New York Philharmonic's ground-breaking 1959 tour is limited to examining the media involvement, but this is an astute choice by Fosler-Lussier, considering Leonard Bernstein's engagement with the press and the high level of publicity this tour received.²

Another point of difference in this study is that Fosler-Lussier not only looks at the United States' exchanges with the Soviet Union (the most significant relationship of this period) but also its exchanges with a range of European, African and Asian countries. This approach gives agency to the 'other' partners involved in exchanges with the United States, and provides a 'bottom-up' perspective to cultural diplomacy, as opposed to the predominant 'top-down' perspectives on diplomacy that may be familiar to readers. In this engaging interpretation, rather than only exploring the push of United States diplomacy, Fosler-Lussier examines its pull, and the power wielded by countries that received American performers. Public demand and opinion abroad was important to the United States: while a concert by American musicians was usually presented as a gift, 'assertions of quality, explanations of historical value, compliments to the hosts as listeners, and countless other verbal qualifications surround the music and shaped perceptions of its value' (p. 27). Fosler-Lussier highlights the intricacies of this issue when looking at the United States' diplomatic efforts with Ethiopia. While Ethiopia was not a nation of high strategic importance in the Cold War, competition from Soviet and Chinese cultural presentations compelled the United States to send 'first-rate artists' to this country, despite it being a place where Western classical music was not preferred (p. 28). Even audiences who were not familiar with Western music carefully noted the quality and prestige of the artists they were offered.

A chapter is devoted to looking at classical music as development aid, which provides an interesting contrast to the regular cultural diplomacy trope of exploring groups that were sent abroad to gain a competitive edge during the Cold War. Focusing on the work of conductor William Strickland, Fosler-Lussier looks at the development of Western musical education in Asian countries, as Strickland used US State Department funding and private grants to encourage musical activities and develop two-way musical partnerships. Equality and reciprocity were crucial elements in the relationship the United States had with the Soviet Union, but were not as prevalent when it dealt with other countries, so it is fascinating to read of Strickland's determined efforts to create mutually advantageous relationships with developing nations. As Fosler-Lussier observes, 'Strickland went about his business, leading

² For example, in addition to the general press coverage of the tour, Bernstein was photographed for a *Life* magazine spread, filmed a television special for CBS in Moscow and upon his return to the United States mounted a nation-wide publicity tour, beginning with a speech at the National Press Club in Washington.

concerts, teaching conductors, making recordings, [and] his work hardly looked like diplomacy at all' (p. 76). Yet the author prudently points out that Strickland's work was a significant tool 'for enhancing America's image abroad' (p. 76).

In the conclusion of *Music in America's Cold War Diplomacy*, Fosler-Lussier offers an appraisal of the success of the examples of cultural exchange discussed. But more interesting is her discussion of the impact of the media and the emergence of exchanges as 'pseudo-events' (p. 205). Exchanges were highly visible events that were watched with interest by many people, not just in the participating countries. This resulted in performers becoming involved in 'elaborate stage plays' in which they addressed the world and were carefully scrutinised in return (p. 206). Fosler-Lussier's interpretation of cultural exchanges is reminiscent of the notion of spectacle in contemporary Hollywood blockbusters, with a pleasurable audio-visual experience often prioritised over the narrative.³ Following this reading, the visibility of performances was heightened through the media interpretation and subsequent reinterpretations of the event, often at the expense of the political intent and core messages at the heart of diplomacy. This interpretation provides a fascinating commentary on the impact of the press and media on these highly politicised undertakings, and how they were construed by those on both the inside and the outside of the cultural exchange process.

Music in America's Cold War Diplomacy is extensively researched and documented, and draws on Fosler-Lussier's PhD and numerous published articles. The companion website provides a comprehensive searchable database of musical and theatrical performances sponsored by the US State Department, which is a valuable additional resource for readers and researchers in this field.

The year 1959 was particularly significant in the history of cultural diplomacy between the United States and the Soviet Union. Nikita Khrushchev visited the United States, and Vice-President Richard Nixon visited the Soviet Union, where he and Khrushchev engaged in the 'Kitchen Debate' at the American National Exhibition in Moscow. The New York Philharmonic undertook a tour to the Soviet Union under Leonard Bernstein, while the Moscow State Symphony toured the United States later in the year. Amongst these events, the Bolshoi Ballet completed its first tour of the United States. This tour of arguably the most significant and dazzling Russian cultural institution is the subject of Cadra Peterson McDaniel's *American–Soviet Cultural Diplomacy: The Bolshoi Ballet's American Premiere*. Such a significant cultural exchange undertaken by a high-profile organisation should provide a captivating volume, especially coupled with the premise of examining cultural exchange from a Russian perspective rather than the prevalent American narrative. Unfortunately, this volume does not grasp these opportunities and instead the text is often repetitive and unfocused. The author has utilised a number of Russian sources and undertaken the translations herself. Regrettably, McDaniel's book is riddled with typographic errors, both in the text and footnotes. At first disappointing, the consistent errors become frustrating and distract the reader from engaging with the text.

American–Soviet Cultural Diplomacy examines each of the ballets that the Bolshoi chose to present across its American tour—*Swan Lake*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Giselle* and *The Stone Flower*, as well as a Highlights Program—but the overall structure is repetitive. After introductory

³ Geoff King, *New Hollywood Cinema: An Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 179.

chapters on the origins of cultural exchange, each of the four ballets is examined individually, with an explanation of the ballet narrative, its links to Soviet ideals and an examination of its reception by American audiences and critics. However, the ballets exhibited similar ideas, and this leads to repeated observations and conclusions. The sentiment that it was hoped that 'Americans would become like the *new Soviet man* dedicated to creating a Communist society' after watching the ballets is oft-repeated (p. 84). McDaniel also observes that 'whereas the Americans appreciated the artistic talent of the performers, the Soviets used the ballet as a Cold War weapon ... This discrepancy would later appear in evaluations regarding the Bolshoi's success' (p. 50). While a valid observation, it is repeated after the summary of each ballet, and not elucidated as effectively as it could be. The reader may ask whether the overall structure of the book could be reconsidered to link arguments and observations more powerfully and avoid extensive repetition.

Readers who do not have an in-depth knowledge of dance should not be deterred from reading *American–Soviet Cultural Diplomacy*, as the use of ballet terminology is limited. The analysis of each of the ballets and how they represented a Marxist style is generally based on the author's study of recorded footage of performances (not from the 1959 tour but from the 1950s) and her own interpretations. While many valid points are made as to why the ballets were selected for performance in the United States, further references to official accounts, or evidence from either Soviet government officials or Bolshoi directors and dancers, would have added interest. The links established between the ballets and Marxist and Soviet ideals at times appear dubious: for example, McDaniel highlights the observations made by Galina Ulanova, the ballerina who performed Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet*, of comparisons between Juliet's actions and the actions of Soviet citizens following Nazi attacks in World War Two (p. 74).

In her examination of the success of the tour, McDaniel concludes that, 'for Soviet leaders, the Bolshoi's tour proved a remarkable success in their ultimate strategy for a Soviet Cold War victory and the worldwide triumph of Communism' (p. 201). She points out, however, that the Soviet excitement was considered somewhat premature. The Americans viewed the tour as an immediate artistic success, 'but it did not lay the foundation for a long-term ideological victory' (p. 202). To support this claim, McDaniel provides a detailed exploration of why President Eisenhower sought to downplay the Bolshoi's tour, looking specifically at the impact of the 1959 Berlin Crisis with an in-depth explanation of this incident. While it was a significant international event and provides a justification as to why Eisenhower appeared cool to the Bolshoi's visit (he did not attend any events, although Nixon attended one performance), the number of pages dedicated to the Berlin Crisis seems to de-rail the chapter, veering it off-course from the original focal point of evaluating the Bolshoi's success.

The conclusion of *American–Soviet Cultural Diplomacy* discusses more recent examples of the arts and foreign policy, making the discussion of cultural diplomacy more relevant to today's reader. McDaniel examines the repertoire that was performed at the re-opening of the Bolshoi Theatre in 2011 after it had been closed for a six-year renovation. Officials selected Glinka's *Ruslan and Liudmila* and Tchaikovsky's *The Sleeping Beauty* for the opening performances. McDaniel argues that *Ruslan and Liudmila* was a particularly interesting choice as it was, in one sense, 'a cultural reassertion of Russia's claim to Kiev,' which is particularly pertinent following recent Russian actions in Ukraine. As cultural diplomacy

does continue to this day in a number of countries, McDaniel's examination of the Bolshoi's tour as an example of the arts as an expression of foreign policy is valuable in today's political climate.

Fosler-Lussier's and McDaniel's books are examples of the breadth and depth that scholarly works on cultural diplomacy now encompass. While other new works discuss more recent exchange efforts, these books emphasise the growing fascination with cultural exchanges between the two Cold War superpowers in the 1950s and 1960s. The connections that are made to foreign policy today make it clear that the use of the arts in foreign affairs should not be relegated to the Cold War era.

About the Reviewer

Jessica Black graduated from the University of Melbourne with a Master of Music (Musicology) degree. Her research interests include American music, music of the twentieth century, and music and politics.