

Thesis reader review

Title: *Music as a Cultural Diplomacy Instrument: The Jazz Diplomacy during the Cold War*

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Opposing reader: Alberto Lioy, Ph.D.

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The work is well written and overall coherent, exploring a pertinent topic – soft power and the use of music for diplomacy – that is not at the center of the discipline but is certainly deserving of more sustained attention within the scholarship. It has ramifications that go well into the present that make it more than just an interesting “piece of history”. The candidate is certainly well-read in the subject and has spent the time necessary to develop expertise in line with the requirements of a Bachelor’s Degree. Even if the work is not based on empirical research, but it simply depends upon a reformulation of secondary sources, their abundance and appropriateness makes them sufficient for the task.

I think that the dissertation is at its most successful in showing the reader the peculiar characteristics of jazz music that made it fit for representing the United States in a way that was different from what government officials could have done. The ambiguities and tensions inherent in a music scene born out of the legacy of slavery and the continuation of racial inequality made it a powerful tool for presenting a more nuanced, more human, more compassionate version of the superpower across the world. Perhaps the only thing that was missing in this sense was a clear idea of the “chain of command” behind jazz diplomacy, in terms of who made the choice to use it for propaganda and when. Nevertheless, it constitutes a fine example of how interdisciplinary work can be performed at any level of scholarship.

Where I believe that this thesis falls short is in connecting its various parts. It reads a little bit too much as a general summary of its different topics, without a clear vision of how they come together, something that could have been done through a properly developed conclusive section, absent from the final draft. I believe that this will be a key element of discussion during the dissertation defense, since I would like to see the candidate personally make those lacking connections. In addition, the general part about international relations and its different theories could have been shorter, or repurposed to reflect a more contemporary understanding of the debates in the discipline. Did we really need a long description of realism and liberalism here, considering that the rest of the thesis does not engage with them?

The same goes for the part on the history of jazz, which spends quite a lot of time on its origins and misses the opportunity to connect it to the American foreign policy of the time. No discussion of manifest destiny in the XIX century, for example. While interesting to read, the dissertation also made some interesting choices as it excluded Latin America, where collaborations between local musicians and jazz musicians from the United States became commonplace in the 1960s, to focus on other parts of the world. We also lack a real evaluation of the policy. Was it overall successful? Did it have a long term impact? Finally, I think I would have appreciated the addition of a focus on more recent events, with perhaps an account of how the main phase of jazz diplomacy came to an end and at least a mention of similar efforts to revive this strategy made during the Obama presidency (“hip hop diplomacy”).

Questions for discussion:

- 1) What is, in the opinion of the candidate, a fair evaluation of the policy in its own time and of its legacy in our contemporary geopolitical landscape?
- 2) The candidate should be able to connect the constructivist, critical approach chosen to more traditional approaches in international relations. How does this type of diplomatic effort fit within an international order that is often ruled by the idea of the survival of the fittest?
- 3) Do you believe that this is also an example of liberalism, based upon the idea international collaboration? Why or why not?

To sum it up, I believe that the thesis surpasses the usual standards set by the Department of Political Science of the Faculty of Arts of the Czech Republic for bachelor theses. I recommend the thesis for defense and suggest a grade of B, provided that the candidate is able to answer the questions above in a satisfactory manner.

Date: 8th January, 2024

Signature: 