

The Ethics and Politics of Empathy in US Hip-Hop Diplomacy

The Case of the Next Level Program

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In the mid-2000s, the US State Department revised its historic musical diplomacy strategies, sending more genres abroad, linking to existing exchange programs, and increasing opportunities for musical interaction. The newest initiative, named Next Level, conducts workshops in the hip-hop arts for beginners and professionals alike while refining its domestic and foreign audiences. Unlike the mid-twentieth century “Jazz Ambassadors,” Next Level (NL) seeks American musicians who identify as activists and teachers as much as emcees, deejays, dancers or beatmakers. NL’s format and desired performers can be read as the latest iteration of best practices in person-to-person diplomacy. I argue it also expresses an ideological shift towards privileging musicians’ affective labor—that is, their work on themselves and others to perceive an embodied interpersonal connection that transcends language—in and beyond musical performance.

Historians of the US Cultural Presentations Program (CPP), which sent jazz and art music ensembles abroad from 1954 through the 1970s for multi-country tours aimed at elite audiences, frequently focus on the ways that American musicians achieved their personal goals for meeting and playing with and for non-elites (see Eschen). Danielle Fosler-Lussier has recently argued that we should read these tour anecdotes not as moments of “subversion,” but as accommodated, even appreciated, by State Department and Foreign Service personnel (*Cold War Diplomacy* 98-99). Regardless of how we interpret them, scholars agree that such moments and the CPP as a whole expressed all participants’ understandings of themselves as active in one Cold War front. By contrast, the artists I have spoken with about their involvement in NL and other programs see themselves as transcending US diplomatic and policy goals,

whether they agree with them or not, precisely through their own sincerity of intention (Salois “US Department”).

This chapter argues that the Next Level program demonstrates what the State Department has learned from previous generations of musical diplomacy. With its small-scale workshops and hand-picked collaborations, NL has taken the unplanned encounters and unexpected consequences of earlier tours and made them the center of its programming strategy. Under this ideal, person-to-person musical diplomacy is mobilized not for the wholesale winning of hearts and minds—regardless of the cultural or class status of those hearts and minds—but for a micropolitics of empathy, where the goal is an affective sense of being mutually recognized and appreciated, if not understood.

This chapter discusses how NL’s structure requires affective labor from its musicians. I focus on the kinds of intersubjective connections desired between American musicians, foreign musicians, and their target audiences. Ultimately, this chapter focuses on participants’ intertwined musical and affective labor in order to move beyond framing “hip-hop diplomacy” solely as a contradiction, viewing it instead as an extractive application of the State Department’s understandings of human and musical intersubjectivity.

US ARTS DIPLOMACY: PHILOSOPHY AND PRACTICE

US cultural diplomacy policy has been characterized by public-private partnerships, “policy incoherence...and political vulnerability” (Sablosky 31), and differing opinions within the foreign policy establishment since its inception in the 1920s and 1930s. As such, musical diplomacy has seen a succession of experiments, especially since its revival in the post-9/11 era. The forerunner of today’s arts-diplomacy programs, the Cultural Presentation Program (CPP), was established in 1954. Debates dating to CPP’s origins, including its founding board’s preference for art musics, and its quick addition of internationally-known jazz ensembles to its roster of orchestras and chamber groups, constitute an important backdrop for present-day programming choices (Campbell; Eschen). Historians also emphasize the CPP’s intention to demonstrate that US culture achieves its greatest potential through, not despite, its private markets (Monson 111).

Diplomacy practitioners and historians describe the decade after 1989 as a nadir in financial and political support for US cultural diplomacy (Bayles 235-36; see Bayles in this volume; Cull 180-83). The United States Information Agency (USIA), which was responsible for most arts diplomacy programming

during the Cold War, shrank from 1978, when the Carter administration combined it with the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs to create the United States International Communication Agency (USICA), through the 1980s and 1990s. In 1999, it was fully dissolved and its non-broadcasting programming integrated into the Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (Sablosky 32; Hayden 179).

After the attacks of 11 September 2001, a small boom in publications by scholars, practitioners, and advocates argued for a "new public diplomacy," described by Nicholas Cull as a response to changed factors including new political contexts, technologies, state and non-state actors, and theoretical approaches (Bayles 235; Cull xi-xii). Cultural programming was central to calls for renewed public diplomacy, as commentators pointed out its relatively low costs and the target youth audiences' desire for creative products. In 2005, the Rhythm Road program, now known as American Music Abroad (AMA), revived and expanded the mid-century "Jazz Ambassadors" model (Aidi; AMS Planning and Associates 21). AMA was the first of several new concert and exchange programs in music and dance. While the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of new and old programs are similar, current arts diplomacy programming has also diversified its methods, its musical styles, and its targets, recognizing that no single musical export can meet the preferences of diverse youth audiences. Instead, realizing these audiences lack not American musical products but experience with actual Americans, programs like Next Level, OneBeat, and to some extent AMA focus on bringing individuals together for intensive short-term encounters.

Since their inception, US arts-diplomacy programs have relied on an apparent contradiction. On one hand, artists and audiences are perfectly capable of separating American people from American policy, and often willing to do so (Fosler-Lussier, "Music Pushed" 63).¹ On the other hand, that separation allows those who might disagree with US foreign policies to develop good will toward individual Americans. This in turn better prepares those audiences to accept American interests. In the words of the 1993 US Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy (US ACPD), "US foreign and economic policies will be understood best . . . by those whose views are based on personal observation of American society and contact with a broad cross-section of Americans" (US ACPD 2, qtd. in Sablosky 38). To accept the notion of separate cultural and

1 Referring to both target audiences and American musicians, former NL site manager Paul Rockower remarked, "for the most part, people, I find, can differentiate between political representatives and people who are cultural representatives."

political spheres is in itself to accept a fundamental argument made by US diplomacy.

For Craig Hayden, this apparent contradiction confuses the legitimization of public diplomacy with the practice itself. He argues that US advocates often “conflate the compelling aspects of US values with the deployment of technologies that are perceived to be demonstrative of these values” (175). Hayden neatly encapsulates what Marshall Stearns and Dave Brubeck argued in the 1950s and 1960s, and what contemporary diplomatic and musical practitioners often argue today. According to this narrative, jazz and hip-hop do not merely sound American; the personal interaction their musical organization requires directly expresses central American values of individuality, mutual respect, dialogue, and debate in a democratic public sphere (Crist; Fosler-Lussier, *Cold War Diplomacy* 86).

Similarly, Hayden argues that “US public diplomacy [assumed] that . . . exposing foreign audiences to US values will illuminate a shared identification with US motives and policies. In this view, public diplomacy provides a kind of revelatory function—pointing foreign audiences toward the belief that American values and institutions are in fact their values” (180). By contrast, the Obama-era focus on diplomacy’s methods of communication, rather than on a single strategic message, reveals a belief that “influence accrues not in the elaboration of arguments about the United States, but in the symbolic significance of diplomatic practices that aid . . . and connect” target populations (182).

Both of Hayden’s comments fit two features of Next Level. First, the program emphasizes connecting different hip-hop communities, both in placing geographically distant American artists on teams together and in the Global Next Level All-Stars, the team of foreign artists formed from professionals in host countries and brought to the US for a two-week residency at the end of each edition. Second, narratives about hip-hop music frequently focus on its rapid rise to preeminence as a “global” popular form, combining an assumption of music’s universality with a strongly held belief in hip-hop’s particularity as a means of resistance and a demonstration of agency.² Deployed uncritically, such narratives

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- 2 Hip-hop connection narratives, in which practitioners in widely disparate places understand systemic racism against African Americans as either practically resembling their own marginality or as a metaphor for their own struggles for recognition, strongly resemble Lauren Berlant’s depiction of “intimate publics”: “What makes a public sphere intimate is an expectation that the consumers of its particular stuff already share a worldview and emotional knowledge that they have derived from a broadly common historical experience. A certain circulation structures an intimate public, therefore: its consumer participants are perceived to be marked by a commonly

imply all hip-hop practitioners will immediately understand each other if only given the opportunity to connect. In this vision, NL is less a demonstration of an American way of life and more a service provider to small groups of influential artists in each country. Yet simultaneously, NL communicates the “global” relevance of American aesthetics and values precisely through the “revelatory function” of its networking platform.

STRUCTURING EMPATHY: THE NEXT LEVEL PROGRAM

Like other State Department arts-diplomacy programs, the Next Level program began with a call for applications from the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs to non-profit groups to audition, arrange, and run the proposed trips. Mark Katz, Professor of Music at UNC-Chapel Hill in North Carolina, won the pilot grant in 2013; the grant has been renewed five times, including for the upcoming 2019 edition (Katz, Dec. 2016 and Feb. 2018). According to the ACPD’s 2016 report, the program’s 2013 budget was \$960,000, with subsequent years funded at \$800,000. This budget includes, but is not limited to, the costs of travel, accommodations, salary, and per diem for an average of 26 participants for two to three weeks each (US ACPD, 2016 *Comprehensive Annual Report* 103).

During its first year, NL sent teams of American “artist-educators” to six countries—India, Bangladesh, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro, Serbia, Senegal, and Zimbabwe—to hold workshops in hip-hop emceeing, deejaying, composition or beatmaking, and dance. Like other programs, youth in countries or cities with significant Muslim populations are an important target audience. As Martha Bayles notes (255), unlike contemporary arts diplomacy programs that seek to reach mass audiences, such as American Music Abroad, DanceMotionUSA, or the regional Voice of America and Radio Sawa broadcasts, NL targets only pre-selected groups of youth and hip-hop devotees. Typically, the State Department confirms the cities each NL edition will visit before auditions occur for that grant year; NL organizers have input, but not a final say over

lived history; its narratives and things are deemed expressive of that history while also shaping its conventions of belonging; and, expressing the sensational, embodied experience of living as a certain kind of being in the world, it promises also to provide a better experience of social belonging—partly through participation in the relevant commodity culture, and partly because of its revelations about how people can live” (vii).

where to go (Katz “Hip-Hop Diplomacy”; Rockower). Site managers visit each host city prior to the teams’ arrival to meet with embassy personnel and the heads of non-profit groups with whom the teams will work, to scout accommodations and locations, and to confirm their presence will not inflame any local rivalries. In each location, NL team members spend most of their time working with school-age youth, often with some practical exposure to the hip-hop arts.³ Itineraries also leave time for team members to meet advanced students, take cultural excursions, and collaborate with local musicians and each other. Each trip culminates in at least one public performance by the team’s students and one by the team itself.

NL’s programming relies on teams of artists with strong teaching credentials as well as expert musicianship. The application for the 2015-16 year required “teaching ability and experience,” “potential to use music or dance to promote peace and cultural exchange,” and the “potential to thrive as cultural diplomats” (“Apply”). These application criteria also tend to encourage “conscious” artists, who explicitly use their music and lyrics for socio-cultural commentary. Likewise, foreign service personnel indicate that they are usually offered and prefer artists with a track record of social engagement, such as teachers, mentors, or non-profit entrepreneurs (Werberg).

The examples in the next section show that from audition to final performance to post-return media management, musicians’ personal qualities of generosity, sincerity, and empathy are at the heart of a successful NL trip. I am most concerned with empathy, provisionally understood here as an affective recognition of the other as deserving of interest, investment, and care—and thus as equal, despite being dissimilar. As a concept, “empathy” is often deployed in a manner similar to “affect.” It has enough of an implied conceptual core to be useful, but fuzzy boundaries and multiple theoretical genealogies permit wide variations in application. Lauren Berlant identifies a “metacultural ideal of liberal empathy” that expresses itself through “the ideal of a ‘one people’ that can absorb all differences” (55). This universalist discourse underpins much public diplomacy and is echoed by several interviewees.

As Martha Nussbaum (*Upheavals of Thought*) and Carolyn Pedwell (“Affective (self-) transformations”; *Affective Relations*) point out, different theories about empathy presuppose different emotional mechanics. Pedwell summarizes feminist and anti-racist definitions of empathy as concerned with “imaginative reconstruction,” “perspective-taking,” and “mutuality” (*Affective Relations* 51).

3 Katz notes that today, “the typical age range is 18-25,” but teams occasionally partner with high schools (Feb. 2018).

These intertwine the rational, creative imagination and the affective, embodied dimension of understanding that imagination. By contrast, Sara Ahmed suggests a different process in her discussion of representations of queer lives. In her filmic and novelistic examples from the late twentieth century, queer subjects' happiness is derailed by the unhappiness of their loved ones, who themselves insist they are being empathetic when they fail to imagine happiness outside of conventional straight romantic lives (*Promise* 92-96). Ahmed uses these representations to insist on the inescapable otherness of the target of empathy, arguing that "empathy sustains the very difference that it may seek to overcome: . . . subjects 'feel' something other than what another feels in the very moment of imagining they could feel what another feels" (*Cultural Politics* 30).⁴

If commonplace discourses about empathy hold that it encourages people to see themselves as fundamentally similar, while critical theorists note that this can shade into appropriation or pity, how do diplomacy professionals deploy the idea? Pedwell distinguishes between theorists who see empathy as a "capacity, skill or tool," which can be instrumentalized by institutions and cultivated by the neoliberal subject invested in developing herself as a set of human resources, and those who see it as closer to affect, as an intersubjective "social relation or product of circulation" (*Affective Relations* 49). The latter, perhaps paradoxically, are more likely to understand the production of empathy as an economy of circulation with, like other economies, winners and losers.

EMPATHY AS AFFECTIVE LABOR

In what follows, I offer examples of the affective labor NL participants, including program organizers, must do throughout their trips. This work is not directed solely at workshop participants at the teams' field sites, but also at their team members, State Department personnel, and themselves. As effective teachers and "cultural diplomats," the musicians selected must demonstrate heightened interpersonal skills. They must be able to engage equally effectively, and on short notice, with a wide variety of strangers, including their musical colleagues from across the US, American and foreign embassy personnel at their site, local

4 In her summary of feminist thinking around this issue, Clare Hemmings reminds us that "transnational feminist perspectives . . . have highlighted a further likely slip between empathy and pity in white Western consideration of 'global others' . . . and emphasised the struggles and loss of authority that real empathy requires" (152).

leaders at the institutions where they are placed, and youth workshop participants ranging from rank amateurs to devoted hip-hop heads.

While NL applicants are not asked to complete in-person interviews, expectations of applicants' personal engagement are shaped by and similar to those of other State Department-sponsored programs. As described by site manager and public diplomacy specialist Paul Rockower, the audition for American Music Abroad requires musicians to perform an emotional connection with their interviewers. Rockower noted "[t]here were some groups that were Grammy-nominated . . . they didn't get accepted because they were dour" during their auditions and interviews. That emotional connection was in part based on demonstrating a shared mission and reflecting organizers' own sense of the project's meaning and prestige. As he put it, "[y]ou don't want divas. You want people who will appreciate the opportunity." Further, musicians were asked to cultivate an empathetic response to the challenges of travel. Rockower recalled asking applicants to anticipate disastrous scenarios: "Pretend you're doing a program in Lebanon and you're on your way to a Palestinian refugee camp. . . . [When you arrive,] they've been sitting there for two hours and there's no power. What do you do?" Although this hypothetical two hours probably includes stressful situations for the musicians, team members are expected to desire to put the needs of the audience first, rather than being "divas."

Once musicians have completed their tour with NL or its sister programs, they are ineligible for subsequent editions for a minimum of three years ("Apply"). Should we consider NL and similar programs exploitative if these excellent artists cannot find a similarly remunerative opportunity, without the obligation to advance the US's diplomatic and political goals, in the private sphere? NL organizers themselves are sensitive to this possibility. Katz and his staff work to provide more secure employment and to sustain musicians' commitment to the program. During the second edition in 2015-16, teams went to El Salvador, Honduras, Tanzania, Thailand, and Uganda ("About"). According to Rockower, the Thailand trip was managed by an artist from the pilot year. By the summer of 2016, three artists had become site managers, with others expected to do so in future editions (Katz, July 2016). In addition, NL hires former participants for other roles in which they have expertise, such as videography. A former participant who also manages his own arts non-profit, dancer Junious Brickhouse, now serves as Associate Director (Katz, Feb. 2018).

Katz sees a responsibility to compensate hip-hop's artistic community in a sustainable way. As he explained in a public lecture during the pilot year, "I'm sure this is not the State Department's agenda, to employ hip-hop artists . . . but it is a part of my agenda. . . . I'm sending taxpayer dollars into the hands of hip-

hop artists, and I think that's a good thing" ("Hip-Hop Diplomacy"). Additionally, Katz has

long thought that it was important to bring hip-hop practitioners into the administration of the program. . . . One way to do that is to hire them as site managers. It's also a way of continuing that relationship and cultivating a strong and mutually beneficial relationship with the community that I interact with. . . . I can tell . . . that some artists will be excellent at site management—they have that skill set and that temperament. (July 2016)

By conflating “skills” and “temperament,” Katz implies that managing personalities, reactions, and emotions is a major part of leading a team as a site manager.

In addition, NL organizers are careful to assemble inclusive teams for each trip. These not only show target audiences the diversity of musical styles, ages, religions, racial and/or ethnic backgrounds, sexual orientations, and gender identities in US hip-hop today, but demonstrate a commitment to the entire hip-hop community rather than a normative masculinist vision. During interviews, Katz, Rockower, and project manager Michael Cohen all emphasized the program's commitment to forming teams that included at least one woman. However, the ACPD data on NL show 30 percent female participation across the first three years, hinting at how difficult it is to achieve this goal at present (US ACPD, *2016 Comprehensive Annual Report*).⁵ Keeping a diverse roster of musicians in the pool of potential labor in this way, while working around the rule against musicians going on multiple tours, is paradigmatic of what Carolyn Pedwell describes as the results of empathetic responses to differential life chances idealized by both critical scholars and international development professionals.

[T]he radically ‘unsettling’ affective experience of empathy . . . is conceived as potentially generative of both personal and social change . . . [I]n these and other feminist and anti-racist texts, the suggestion is that, while ‘we’ might theorise social inequalities and commit ourselves to social responsibilities and obligations in the abstract, a transformation at the affective level is required to make ‘us’ actually feel, realise and act on them. (“Affective (Self-)transformations” 166)

5 Katz notes that “in the next [cycle] it will be 39 percent [female participation]” (Feb. 2018).

In this reading, Katz's goal of "continuing that . . . mutually beneficial relationship" is ultimately informed by affective connections to his interlocutors.⁶

In what follows, I will use the case of DJ 2-Tone Jones, a Washington DC-based artist who went on the first NL trip to India, to illustrate how NL's "artist-educators" are expected to manage their affective and musical labor abroad. Jones's background makes him an excellent choice for a team of "artist-educators" designed to introduce youth to hip-hop beyond internationally popular artists. His personal style is historicist in outlook, as evidenced by his published mixes and his Shaolin Jazz Project, which highlights the continuing influence of jazz on hip-hop by pairing jazz remixes with famous Wu-Tang a cappella raps. He is also active with a hip-hop non-profit called Words Beats & Life in Washington DC, coaching teenagers in deejaying and chess. In our interview, he described finding that the NL application reflected what he already does. He was also interested in "the approach of bringing together different artists who hadn't really worked with one another" to go abroad.

The team met for the first time in orientation in Washington DC in early summer 2015. The following month, they spent two weeks in Patna, the capital city of the Indian state of Bihar, working with children at a local high school. This was followed by one week at the US Consulate in Kolkata, working with more advanced students in their late teens to early twenties. As Jones explained to me, and as participants in other tours confirmed (Gann; Rockower), the very first trip of the pilot year was busier and more experimental than subsequent trips. The group worked with novice students three to four hours a day in order to prepare for their culminating performance. After hours, artists also rehearsed amongst themselves, preparing for their own performance at the end of the residency. They replicated that structure in Kolkata.

However, the team also had an additional mandate. The Consulate "wanted us to create six [public service announcements, PSAs] . . . three for radio, three for TV—that involved the youth in social issues they dealt with on a daily basis. We had to create those while teaching them while getting the performance together . . . and have the PSAs actually completed to actually display during the performance," recalled Jones (Wallace). As a dedicated teacher who frequently works with school-age children, Jones already had a strong idea of how long it would take absolute beginners to achieve a performance that was both rewarding

6 Note that this reading does not require a single kind of relationship between affective "transformation" and moral or ethical norms. I am not suggesting, for example, that Katz's desire to redistribute is not also based in a belief that it is the right thing to do.

for them and appropriately conversant in hip-hop conventions. According to him, the program did not allow for the latter goal:

We really had about 8 days with the kids . . . it's a hundred-plus degrees every day . . . and the artists who are leading this, we've never worked together. And we have to do our own performance. And we have to meet with local artists and put something together with them that will also be a part of this culminating [performance]. . . . So yeah, my average day might be waking up at 7 and then I might be going to bed at like 2 or 3 in the morning. (Wallace)

At the same time, Jones emphasized that he enjoyed working with the students in Patna. "If anything, [the kids] were better than my expectations," he commented. "They were just excited . . . about every day we were there." The equanimity with which Jones recalled the stresses and highlights of the three weeks, and his sense of being "kind of like the guinea pigs" (Wallace) on the program's first trip, demonstrated the precise blend of resilience, optimism, technical ability, and gratitude that the application process appears to seek.

EMPATHY ON STAGE

When they gathered to perform in the Kolkata Consulate at the end of the third week, team members still did not have strong expectations for how they would interact beyond basic hip-hop conventions. As Jones put it, "as a deejay, one of the people I should be able to feed off the most is the emcee, but I didn't hear her rap until the second week" (Wallace). Layering additional non-hip-hop musicians onto that lack of familiarity required complex musical negotiations at the moment of performance. Empathetic listening practices and affirming responses, understood here as affective "social relations" in Pedwell's sense, are vital to turning individual musicians' choices into an ensemble's coherent performance. To illustrate this, I will analyze specific moments from a video of the team's final performance. In this video, DJ 2-Tone Jones, producer Ko, and emcee Purple Haze collaborate with two Baul musicians, OneBeat alumna Malabika Brahma and her musical partner, percussionist Sanjay Bhattacharjee (Next Level USA 0:00-2:40).

The video begins with Jones scratching into the percussion pattern that opens Main Source's 1991 hit "Looking at the Front Door," which is based in F minor. He launches the sample four measures before the song's famous vocables-based chorus. Ko is situated to the left of Jones; off screen, on the stage to the left,

Purple Haze and Malabika Brahma wait for their cue. Standing behind Ko and Jones, Bhattacharjee listens carefully for the right moment to enter. He makes tentative noises with his khamak, a tension drum, to find a pitch that will match the guitar in Jones' sample.⁷ After two measures on the dominant pitch, Bhattacharjee lands on the tonic sounded by the bass guitar in the sample, while maintaining an off-beat pattern that echoes the guitar and hit-hat rhythms. Ko, who has been watching Jones and nodding along to this introduction, turns to his equipment to prepare to enter at the start of the eighth measure, or halfway through the chorus. At nearly the same time, emcee Purple Haze says "give us something Ko" as sixteenth notes beginning on the second half of the third beat of the eighth measure, so that her spoken "Ko" lands on the "and" of the fourth beat. At this cue, Bhattacharjee increases the volume of his strumming pattern in the ninth measure, his tonic pitch sliding slightly sharp. Ko's initial drum sounds land late; after two measures, he settles on a clap on the "and" of beats two and four.

Once a new eight-measure unit begins, Jones turns the volume down on his sample to highlight the other musicians. Ko glances back at Bhattacharjee, and they exchange a smile just as Malabika Brahma drifts into the frame as she moves to the beat. Throughout this and the next eight-measure units, Ko adds a syncopated bass-drum pattern of two dotted-eighths plus an eighth note, while Bhattacharjee occasionally throws in four eighth notes played on the beat to contrast this syncopation (0:00-1:09).⁸

Off camera, Purple Haze prepares to enter with the word "yeah" on the "and" of beat two of the sixth measure of a unit (approximately 1:04). Ko immediately drops the claps in his percussion pattern and Bhattacharjee fills the rest of the measure with on-beat strumming. Purple Haze then enters with the phrase "I used to be in love but no not anymore," so that the first syllable of "used" lands on the first beat of seventh measure, and "not" and "more" line up with Ko's bass-drum pattern. Combined, these give the effect of a late entrance, so that it sounds as if she rushes her first phrase to catch up. In her second line, "so I left my heart open where I once had it stored," with "left," "once," and "stored" lining up with dotted eighths in the bass-drum pattern throughout the eighth

7 Alternately known as a khamak (or khamaka) or ananda-lahari, this drum is usually hung from a shoulder strap and held under the arm. One or two strings threaded through the drum head are attached to a much smaller drum, held in the hand, with which the performer can change the strings' tension and pitch (Capwell 95).

8 As Mario Dunkel points out, Ko's bass-drum pattern gives the effect of 2/4 measures over the 4/4 of "Looking at the Front Door."

measure of the unit. During the next full eight-measure unit, Purple Haze settles into a straight eighth-note rhythm, contrasting the syncopated bass-drum pattern. Bhattacharjee transitions to a stable supporting pattern, letting the interplay between Purple Haze's phrases and Ko's changing drum samples be the focus of the unit. The camera focuses on Purple Haze as she directs her rap to Brahma, turning her body towards Brahma, smiling and looking at her even as Brahma gazes at the ground in an attitude of attentive listening. Both women keep time with their bodies, shifting their weight on subdivisions of the beat.

In the following eight-measure unit, Malabika Brahma's entrance precipitates new responses from each musician. Brahma enters on E, a major seventh above the tonic F sounded by the bass in "Looking at the Front Door." She ends her first phrase on the sixth degree above the tonic, or D-flat. Jones drops the Main Source chorus sample, in which the melodic phrase resolves to the dominant, avoiding potential dissonance. Bhattacharjee immediately fills in on the tonic for four measures. In her second phrase, Brahma climbs towards a higher register. In her third phrase, Brahma ascends to and holds a D-flat, which Bhattacharjee reinforces by playing it one octave below. Without the Main Source sample, this has the effect of establishing the sixth degree as a new tonic pitch. Purple Haze then initiates an exchange of lines in what I hear as the new key, singing "You know my heart, though you know I didn't tell you/How do you know me?" so that the ends of both lines fall on the new tonic pitch. Brahma and Purple Haze then cue each other to trade off phrases with eye contact, physical gestures, facial expressions, and verbal cues. After Brahma's phrase, Purple Haze repeats her line in her second entrance. However, beyond the camera's frame, Bhattacharjee shifts his accompaniment pattern back to the original tonic F immediately after Haze's line. As a result, Brahma takes the exchange in a different direction, rejoining with "I know" on a low F. As Purple Haze freestyles over the next measures, Brahma smiles and shakes her head while giving eye contact and focus to her, as Jones quietly brings back the chorus of "Looking at the Front Door." When Brahma enters again, she sings over the sample, using Purple Haze's melody from "you know my heart" as a cadence on the D-flat (1:32-2:40).

These moments demonstrate how difficult it is for seasoned musicians to anticipate unfamiliar collaborators' actions, read each other's cues, and decide what to do next, often within a subdivision of the beat. When I showed Jones this clip, he said, "This was one of the ones that was a little more thrown together in the moment. . . . All the others were things we might have tried in a jam session, whereas this was kinda like, 'uhh, hey I remember we did something the other day, do you remember?'" He offered that since he was not sure what would

happen next, he thought “I can just do a basic beat, [Bhattacharjee] can just do whatever he’s doing behind me.” He noted that he did not feel the Baul musicians and the group had enough time to rehearse beforehand, but they “still made it work some kinda way” (Wallace).

Each decision discussed here has the potential to derail the performance. When Ko first enters, his slightly out-of-time sounds in his first two measures could confuse less able collaborators. When Bhattacharjee starts to vary his patterns, Ko looks back in a way that could be interpreted as either reinforcing or discouraging. When Purple Haze starts using shorter patterns that pull against the rhythms set up by Ko and Jones’ sample, or when Brahma structures her melodic line around the sixth scale degree, both lead the backing musicians to reduce the texture to essential percussion.

In each case, the musicians respond to what they are hearing, even if it is not what they are listening for. For example, when I interpret Brahma’s melody as a change of key, I am listening with the ingrained assumption that the bass line of “Looking at the Front Door” implies an unchanging tonal center, even when the sample itself is no longer audible. In a sense, I am unable to avoid hearing my own expectations, set up by the sample. The ensemble, however, fluidly moves between the F minor established in Main Source’s chorus and Brahma’s tonal center of D-flat, and between following the deejay or the khamak as the leading instrument. In a sign of the flexibility and intercultural adaptability that NL prizes in its musicians, both the hip-hop and Baul musicians in this example listen beyond genre conventions and affirm unexpected results.

Video analysis also demonstrates how the musicians use their roles in the group to promote effective turn-taking and expectations of reciprocity. In the moment of performance, the musicians manage their own reactions, their inter-group responses, and what they are showing to the audience all at once. Both vocalists, as the center of attention for the live audience, appear focused on making the audience feel comfortable with what is happening on stage. They maintain their composure and their smiles, literally reaching out to the audience with their gestures, and sharing space equally on stage even as they move from one side to the other. On the interaction between Purple Haze and Brahma, Jones commented, “there was a section of time where . . . I was like ‘you know, where you guys going with this?’ But. . . . They had a bond, they had a moment.” Holding only microphones, the female vocalists use their relative freedom of movement to visualize their sonic dialogue, confirming their attention to and interest in each other’s performances for both the instrumentalists and the audience. Likewise, the instrumentalists also constantly affirm each other’s initiatives with non-verbal cues, even as their faces are turned to their instru-

ments and their musical gestures may lead in a different direction. While the artists give a visual and sonic impression of confident spontaneity, on close listening one can hear the traces of a stressful, though rewarding, three weeks in their performance.

CONCLUSIONS

Next Level has turned a traditional weakness of arts diplomacy, the inability to judge performances' effectiveness with large audiences, into a strength. Although today's descendants of the mid-twentieth-century Cultural Presentations Program include more workshops and collaborations than the CPP was designed to do, they also still conduct multi-stop tours with audiences in the hundreds. To date, reviews of these programs' effectiveness rely on press clippings and anecdotes from embassy personnel. While these are often high-quality, well-contextualized data, they skew towards elite audiences and towards demonstrating the efficacy of the host embassies. In contrast, by targeting small groups pre-selected by the host embassy or consulate, or by the local school, NGO, or youth group, NL avoids having to adjudicate its impact on large audiences in the first place. Instead, as DJ 2-Tone Jones' example demonstrated, a successful Next Level trip negotiates a path through the occasionally conflicting goals of the embassy, the target institutions and students, and the artists themselves.

Despite differences these examples bring out within and between groups, everyone interviewed remains committed to the idea of forging a lasting connection and to the belief that they did so. NL completed its pilot year in April 2015 by bringing five foreign musicians to Washington DC and Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Dubbed the "Next Level Global All-Stars," they were among those who had collaborated with the NL teams on each tour. Each was chosen based on recommendations from NL organizers, the participating Embassy, and the NL musicians (Rockower). Like the US artists, the musicians chosen for the global residency were already active as professional musicians, teachers, advocates, media personalities, and/or activists. According to Mark Katz, the goals of the residency were to reunite selected foreign musicians with American participants and to offer an opportunity for one person from each country to create with the others (2014). In a blog post for the NL website, a staff member wrote, "Hip-hop represents a worldview where diversity is the norm, not the exception, and we strive to uphold that. . . . The same performance can even be meaningful to different people for different reasons, and this understanding has always been at the heart of our diplomatic mission" ("Amazing Journey").

Paul Rockower likewise described the Global All-Stars residency as “creating space in which diverse voices can be heard.” But he also emphasized the difference between the goals of the NL organizers and those of the State Department, noting that for the latter, it was less about advancing hip-hop as an art form and more about training future leaders. As he put it, “That’s why we do lots of workshops in entrepreneurship, in social activism, in conflict resolution . . . trying to give them more skills so they can . . . be involved in their communities.” The organizers ran such workshops with the help of DC-based NL participants, including Jones, who joined a panel to discuss hip-hop pedagogy.

Based on their public comments, the members of the 2015 global residency were enthusiastic about the State Department’s vision of hip-hop as social advocacy and entrepreneurship. In a roundtable in Washington DC on 10 April 2015, the All-Stars were asked what lessons they would bring home from the residency. Zimbabwean beat maker Nyari “FTR” Mazango said:

The possibility that what I do, music, hip-hop, can connect me to so many people just as a medium in itself, I think is the biggest thing I can ever take from all this. . . . Because I can go back with it, and when I’m building community programs, . . . I can show them the possibility of connecting with so many people through the music itself.

Similarly, emcee Black Zang answered the same question with, “[In Bangladesh] we really can connect through hip-hop, we really can help each other . . . on any kind of issues.”

In this way, Next Level may do its most profound work—or at least its most trackable work—on its American participants and their professional foreign counterparts who continue to reflect on their intercultural experiences, rather than on the youth who attend in-country workshops. Dr. Elliot Gann, a beatmaker and educational psychiatrist who joined the NL Senegal team in summer 2014, described telling his audience on a Senegalese radio show, “I wish every American could have the experience that I’m having.” Toni Blackman, the first “hip-hop envoy” in the American Specialists Program and also part of the NL Senegal team, recently published her appreciation for the Dakaroise emcee Toussa, her collaborator and member of the global Next Level All-Stars in 2015, in a series of *Instagram* posts: “Toni & Toussa. Sounds like a great name for a café or the title of an EP. . . . It’s so dope to see artists you helped mentor and/or coach soar. I’m so excited and proud.” For his part, Jones described returning to DC with a cache of mid-century Bollywood recordings and a new interest in exploring the genre for beatmaking and collaboration.

What does a focus on affective labor, and empathy in particular, do for our understanding of artists' agency during Next Level or similar programs? My concern here is not whether artists' political speech is censored; every participant I have interviewed affirmatively stated they felt no pressure to be silent or avoid specific topics. Since the reorganization of USIA into USICA in 1978, safeguards have existed against cultural programs being co-opted by other parts of the State Department, and against compelling participants to act or speak on behalf of US foreign policy (Sablosky 32; Hayden 177).⁹ Instead, I am interested in how artists are positioned and what makes them useful to the state.

Jones summed this up when I asked what he thought the State Department gets from Next Level.

Of course it is a way to better the US image abroad, that's the nature of the program. . . . These kids never thought in a million years that someone would pick them to work with hip-hop artists from the US. . . . Even if I found out there was some ulterior motive, I still would feel justified that these kids got something out of it. (Wallace)

Here, Jones takes for granted that the State Department is acting in its own interest, though he also said that he felt there were Department personnel with sincere interest in hip-hop music and culture. At the same time, the mutual attachment of teachers and students allows him to avoid asking or worrying about "ulterior motives."¹⁰ In a similar vein, Jones appreciated that the program was "sending authentic artists," not necessarily "iconic" hip-hop artists, and placing a premium on teaching ability rather than fame. This individualized sincerity of intention allows hip-hop artists, who might not agree with US policy in the places they are going or in general, to join the program and make it work.

Additionally, the way that arts-diplomacy rhetoric positions artists who are working for these programs tends to erase their expertise and their labor as contributions. Precisely because artists are encouraged to say what they think, they are not encouraged to see themselves as representatives of the state or of the

9 I am not aware of an explicit policy regarding advertising NL's accomplishments to US citizens, but since the program routinely posts professionally edited videos to its own social media accounts, anyone in the personal and professional networks of NL and its current and former musicians can see program news through Facebook, Twitter, and elsewhere.

10 In our discussion, Jones recalled with a laugh that the team's Patna students "still reach out to us on Facebook. . . . I still get some of these random profile pictures on my page" (Wallace).

American people as a whole (though some do). Because they can run their workshops, demonstrations, and collaborations how they see fit, they are not encouraged to see themselves as employees of the state. Because they are selected as much for their personal qualities as for their musical abilities, they are not encouraged to see themselves as working, but rather as “doing what they love.” Paradoxically, this devalues people’s musical expertise and years spent honing their craft in favor of appreciating their generosity, flexibility, sincerity, empathy, or independence.¹¹ When this mode is embraced by musicians as well as State Department organizers, it serves to depoliticize the state’s choice of hip-hop regardless of the performers’ lyrical statements. Next Level and other programs stress the universalism of artists’ affective labor instead of the systemic, race-based difference-making hip-hop arts so often identify and critique.

Next Level builds upon the now-commonplace “public diplomacy” paradigm by orchestrating moments of person-to-person diplomacy. Hip-hop’s origin narrative, when told through institutions committed to color-blind policy, contributes to a belief in its power to overcome linguistic, religious, political, or cultural barriers shared by program organizers, workshop participants, and musicians themselves. As Rockower insisted in our discussion, “Hip-hop is universal. It’s this empowering force in all of these different countries. . . . The value of this stuff—there’s no metrics that will ever support it.” I do not doubt the sincerity of this comment, but as in any genre, “empowerment” through hip-hop is dependent on local contexts and definitions of power.

In claiming that hip-hop transcends linguistic and political borders, the State Department deploys seductive assumptions about the universality of art. However, it does this through the paradoxical position hip-hop music occupies worldwide. While at home, US artists must continually reassert hip-hop’s aesthetic value in order to combat systemic discrimination against the genre and African Americans. Abroad, Next Level relies on the affective labor of its teacher-artists to leverage hip-hop lovers’ own narratives about the genre’s role in supporting freedom and resistance. To return to Hayden’s observations, NL thus serves a “relevatory function,” confirming to both American and foreign participants a fundamental sameness of values understood as central to US public diplomacy

11 In reviewing this chapter, Katz suggested, instead, that NL participants are allowed to focus on their craft as musicians and teachers, “Instead of pressuring them to perform in areas in which they are not expert (speaking about US foreign policy, etc.)” (Feb. 2018). My point is not that NL participants should be expected to cultivate expertise in such traditional diplomatic skills, but that in practice, their affective labor is considered as or more important as their musical and teaching labor.

(180). This, in turn, serves to naturalize US cultural dominance and diminish questions about US domestic and foreign policy abroad.¹²

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