

Sophia Janevic

AMCULT 498

“Invading” the Kremlin: The 1961 University of Michigan Symphony Band Tour and American  
Cultural Imperialism

“Kremlin ‘Invaded’” read a Michigan Daily article in March of 1961.<sup>1</sup> It was the middle of the Cold War, and Soviet-American tensions were at a high as both powers competed for global influence. However, it was not an American military unit carrying out this “invasion,” but rather a music ensemble: the University of Michigan’s Symphony Band. Though perhaps more innocuous than armed forces, musical groups such as the Symphony Band were no less significant in Cold War strategy and diplomacy. The Cold War was primarily a nuclear arms and technological race, but it is often referred to as in part a cultural race, with both the U.S. and Soviet Union competing to win global favor through the spread of their art, music, and ideologies. An integral strategy in this cultural feud were music tours, with the U.S. State Department and the United States Information Agency sponsoring countless professional musicians and orchestras to embark on world tours, showcasing both American talent as well as American values. Sponsorship of collegiate ensembles rose in popularity shortly thereafter, as they demonstrated not just America’s elite musical talent but also the quality of its education—professional musicians were impressive; students playing at a professional level even more so.

It was within this context that the UM Symphony Band embarked on their tour on February 19th, 1961. The tour lasted fifteen weeks and covered ten countries, including six republics of the Soviet Union, Romania, Poland, Lebanon, Greece, Cyprus, Egypt, Jordan,

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<sup>1</sup> ‘U’ Band Goes Sightseeing in Kremlin, Box 1, Symphony Band 1961 Tour collection, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

Turkey, and the United States. This remains the longest State Department sponsored tour in American history, with the ninety-four member band performing for over 140,000 audience members. This paper will focus on the Soviet Union portion of the tour, which lasted eight weeks and included forty-four performances in ten cities, both for public audiences as well as exchange concerts with students at Soviet music conservatories. Of this tour, the university proudly stated, “The Symphony Band musicians were America's cultural emissaries, using music to forge common ground.”<sup>2</sup> This language implies a reciprocal musical relationship between the Soviet Union and United States, but closer examination of the tour’s repertoire, performance practices, and one-on-one interactions reveals that UM’s 1961 Symphony Band tour was a culturally imperial project that promoted American values of freedom and education rather than seeking to “forge common ground.” Though performances and one-on-one interactions between Americans and Soviets were sensitive to Soviet tastes and at times even reciprocal, these actions were still motivated by underlying notions of American cultural superiority.

In order to understand the 1961 Symphony Band tour as a culturally imperial project, it is important to first define what cultural imperialism is. Cultural imperialism can most generally be understood as an “informal” form of imperialism (as compared to “formal,” concrete forms of imperialism such as settler colonialism) with the aim of expanding empire, influence, and power through the spread of cultural practices, products, and values. Though “informal,” scholars such as George Yudice remind us that cultural imperialism can be equally if not more damaging than “formal” forms of imperialism, and therefore should be considered just as seriously.<sup>3</sup>

Just as early Americans justified territorial expansion through Manifest Destiny, American cultural imperialism is often justified through the notion that American cultural values

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<sup>2</sup> UM Symphony Band 1961 Russian Tour Site, <http://sitemaker.umich.edu/russiantourband/home>.

<sup>3</sup> George Yudice, “Culture” in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies, Second Edition*, ed. Bruce Burgett, and Glenn Hendler (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 69, ProQuest Ebook Central.

are modern, innovative, universal, and an inherent good that must be spread globally. Manifest Destiny—in its original form—argued that New England Puritans were “God’s chosen people in the Promised Land,” who were given “divine sanction” to expand democracy and freedom through westward territorial expansion.<sup>4</sup> Scholar David Kazanjian explains how this “deeply nationalist mythology” continues to this day, with Americans espousing that their country was founded on “principles of freedom, equality, and democracy,” and that it must continue to spread these principles globally.<sup>5</sup> This highlights a critical aspect of American cultural imperialism: these notions of freedom and democracy are embedded in American culture and are considered inherently good values, and therefore the spread of this culture is viewed as a moral obligation to grant outsiders access to democracy. This attitude was especially prevalent during the Cold War, when Americans believed that Soviet communism was a threat to democracy and sought to overpower it. Music tours such as the 1961 Symphony Band tour were conceptualized as a showcase of the cultural “fruits” of U.S. democracy and capitalism, often asserting that the arts flourished best under these conditions.

Another significant aspect of cultural imperialism in relation to Cold War musical diplomacy is the concept of “soft power.” A term coined by former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Joseph S. Nye, soft power refers to a co-optive form of power that attracts outside groups to a country based on its “culture, political values and institutions, and policies that are seen as legitimate or having moral authority.”<sup>6</sup> This differs from hard power, which relies on coercion—usually through military force or economic payoffs—to achieve specific outcomes. In the realm of soft power, culture spreads through commerce, music,

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<sup>4</sup> Shelly Streeby, “Empire” in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies, Second Edition*, ed. Bruce Burgett, and Glenn Hendler (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 96, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>5</sup> David Kazanjian. “Colonial” in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies, Third Edition*, ed. Bruce Burgett, and Glenn Hendler (New York: New York University Press, 2020), 56-57, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004), 43.

personal contacts, exchanges, social media, film, etc.—essentially any form of interaction between people or products. More importantly, these products and exchanges carry cultural meanings and values believed to be inherently good that increase the probability of the United States “obtaining its desired outcomes because of the relationships of attraction and duty that it creates.”<sup>7</sup> Music tours were one of the primary Cold War efforts to increase American soft power—if other countries were impressed by American musical performances and the values conveyed within them, America itself became more attractive and therefore gained political influence.

Cold War music tours have previously been examined through an imperial lens by various scholars, critiqued both as propaganda ventures and as diplomatic achievements of American soft power. Much of this existing scholarship centers on professional musicians and ensembles. Early tours focused primarily upon performance of Western Classical Music by elite ensembles such as the New York Philharmonic, which were often in direct competition with impressive ballets and symphonic performances by touring Soviet groups. Chapter one of Danielle Fosler-Lussier’s book *Music in America’s Cold War Diplomacy* examines this relationship between classical music and the mediation of prestige in earlier Cold War tours. She posits that the prominence of classical music in tour programs was a “strategic” choice: even if global listeners weren’t intimately familiar with classical music, they knew it existed and associated it with a high social class.<sup>8</sup> She ultimately argues that classical music was a tool used by U.S. officials to “deploy preexisting norms and cultivate new ones, presenting an image of America as both musically innovative and devoted to the most exalted traditions.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Stephen Howe, *Empire: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press Inc. 2002), 4, Kindle.

<sup>8</sup> Penny Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up The World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 23, 24.

<sup>9</sup> Danielle Fosler-Lussier, *Music in America’s Cold War Diplomacy*, (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2015), 46.

Fosler-Lussier also outlines a shift from exporting classical music to exporting jazz music—U.S. embassies reported that classical music couldn't connect with the “socially and economically heterogeneous audiences” that the department sought, but jazz—a genre whose improvisational structure encouraged freedom and collaboration—might.<sup>10</sup>

In the vein of jazz music, chapter one of Penny Von Eschen's book *Satchmo Blows Up The World* explores the export of prominent jazz musicians during the Cold War, arguing that musical tours were imperialist impositions with no interest in reaching “the man on the street.” Fosler-Lussier's article “Cultural Diplomacy as Cultural Globalization,” which focuses on the UM Jazz Band's 1965 tour of Latin America, directly opposes this sentiment. Fosler-Lussier argues instead that Cold War music tours were not just unidirectional cultural impositions (or strictly imperial ventures), but that the touring musicians had much more complex experiences that changed audiences, the musicians themselves, and the communities which they returned to.<sup>11</sup> She states, “Whatever the intentions in Washington, the touring musicians entered contexts in which those intentions could not play a determining role in events.”<sup>12</sup> In the case of the UM Symphony Band's Tour of the Soviet Union, my argument falls between these two beliefs—to call the tour a one-way imperialist imposition is an oversimplification, but American governmental intentions and values of cultural superiority are not so easily divorced from the contexts of the tour. University musical groups have a greater propensity to engage with “the man on the street” than professional musicians, naturally lending themselves to a less “top-down” dynamic. However, university ensembles were still engaging in culturally imperial projects and operating under American imperial ideologies.

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<sup>10</sup> Fosler-Lussier, *Music in America's Cold War Diplomacy*, 18.

<sup>11</sup> Danielle Fosler-Lussier, “Cultural Diplomacy as Cultural Globalization: The University of Michigan Jazz Band in Latin America” in *Journal of the Society for American Music* 4, no. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 60.

<sup>12</sup> Fosler-Lussier, “Cultural Diplomacy as Cultural Globalization: The University of Michigan Jazz Band in Latin America” in *Journal of the Society for American Music* 4, no. 1, 63.

Both of Fosler-Lussier's works emphasize a "bottom-up" approach in addition to a "top-down" approach to determining the imperial outcomes of the tours, drawing heavily upon sources from both touring musicians and locals that paint a compelling picture of the disconnect between U.S. State Department goals and lived experiences. In Fosler-Lussier's article, she emphasizes the necessity of describing tours from perspectives "other than that of official reports," as musicians adapted on the spot to various communities and political situations that differed vastly from the intentions in Washington.<sup>13</sup> In the context of this work, "bottom-up" refers primarily to the experiences of the touring musicians, as recorded through interviews. These sources offer essential insight into how the experiences of musicians differed from the expectations of the State Department—for example, though the government intended for the band to "teach" American music, the relationship between band and local was sometimes unexpectedly reciprocal: a conversation with a Curaçao local entirely changed band chaperone Richard Crawford's understanding of Duke Ellington, influencing all of his later scholarship.

Due to the nature of the available materials in the Bentley Historical Library's Symphony Band 1961 Tour collection, this paper will primarily take a "top-down" approach in the sense that the majority of sources I draw upon—newspapers, programs, personal diaries, etc.—are from the American perspective. As Fosler-Lussier would argue, many of these personal accounts may also be considered a "bottom-up" perspective, as they record the actual experiences of people on the ground rather than the American government's conceptualizations. Additionally, despite the lack of Soviet sources, moments of Soviet resistance to American ideology are evident even within American first-hand accounts. Scholar George Yudice reminds us that hegemony is never total, with dominated groups actively using culture as a critical tool to resist

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<sup>13</sup> Fosler-Lussier, "Cultural Diplomacy as Cultural Globalization" in *Journal of the Society for American Music* 4, no. 1, 62.

power imbalances like those maintained by the U.S. empire. Shared culture is an opportunity to organize, pushback, and gain power—though the U.S. wields culture as a weapon, so do those in the peripheries who challenge America’s soft power hierarchies. These boundaries of dominator vs. dominated are murkier in the context of the Cold War, in which both the American empire and Soviet Union were global superpowers. However, I still try to incorporate Soviet perspectives in this paper whenever possible as a reminder that American cultural imperialism was not a unilateral endeavor, but rather a complex relationship between two parties.

With this paper, I aim to fill two important gaps in existing literature. The first is to increase scholarship that examines the role of collegiate ensembles in Cold War musical diplomacy. Fosler-Lussier explores this extensively in both of her works, but most other existing scholarship focuses primarily on professional musicians and ensembles. The second is to analyze the UM 1961 Symphony Band Tour critically from an imperial perspective. This tour has been lauded as a great achievement of the university and has been the center of many nostalgic articles and reunions, but the comprehensive collection of tour materials housed at the Bentley Historical Library has otherwise been relatively untouched as an archival resource. This project would be among the first to critically examine this tour through a lens of cultural imperialism.

In this paper I will analyze the archival materials held in the Symphony Band 1961 Tour collection at the Bentley Historical Library. I will begin by examining the cultural values imparted by the band’s repertoire selections, with repertoire broadly referring to both the compositions themselves as well as Soviet reception to selected pieces, alterations in programming, and performance practices. I will then discuss one-on-one interactions between Americans and Soviets as well as general attitudes toward Soviets as depicted in a band members’ diary and a satirical band newspaper. Overall, I argue that UM’s 1961 Symphony

Band tour was a culturally imperial project that intended to “forge common ground” through music but instead promoted American values of freedom and education. Though performances and one-on-one interactions between Americans and Soviets were sensitive to Soviet tastes and at times even positive or reciprocal, these actions were still motivated by underlying notions of American cultural superiority.

### **Conquering Heroes: Repertoire, Reception, and Performance Practice**

Though music is often boasted as a “universal language,” in reality it is anything but. The contexts in which pieces are composed and performed imbue them with specific cultural meanings. For this reason, one may look towards the UM Symphony Band’s repertoire as an indication of the American values the tour intended to impart. In this section, I will analyze the overall program of the band, examining it as an indicator of American educational quality. I will then narrow my focus to two specific repertoire areas—Gershwin tunes and “The Victors”—looking at both the band’s sensitivity to and “conquest” of Soviet tastes. Finally, I will discuss the band’s adaptation to Soviet performance practices as moments of temporary change, rather than long-term cultural exchange. Overall, I will suggest that the UM Symphony Band’s flexible program and performance practices boasted both American values of freedom and education, with adaptations to Soviet tastes exhibiting a true interest in Soviet culture, but ultimately not a reciprocal cultural relationship.

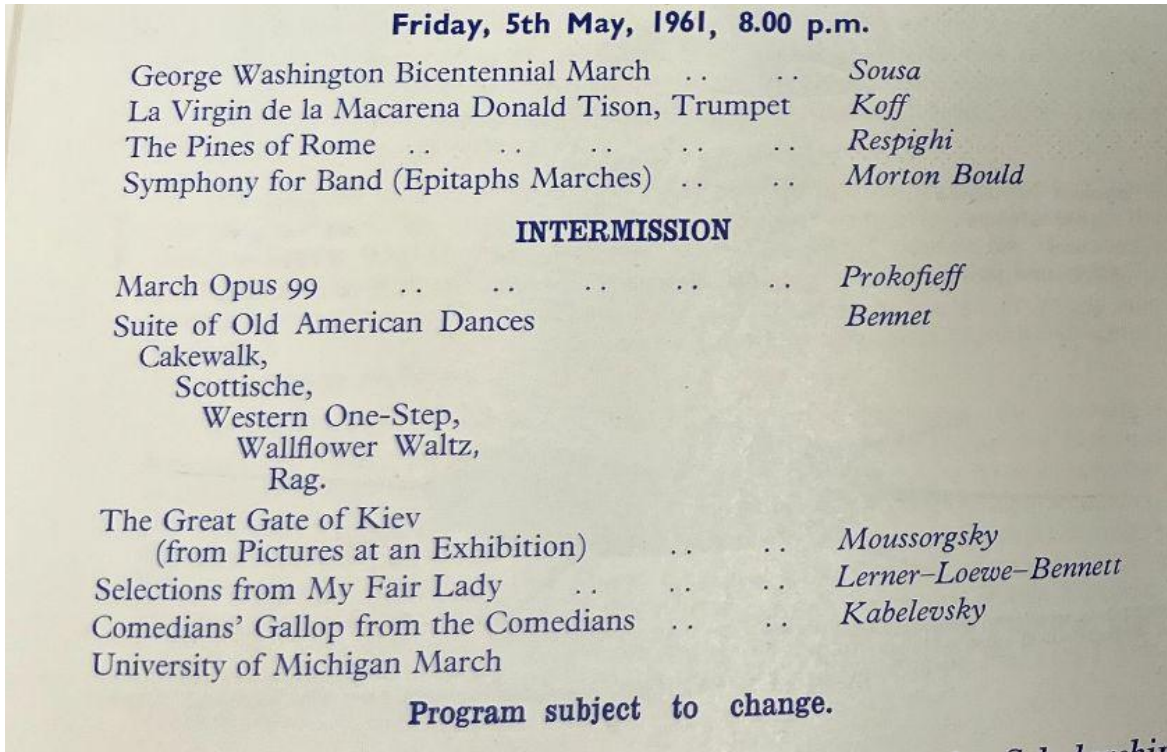
The UM Symphony Band’s original repertoire sought to convey an image of American musical education as prestigious and diverse through a mix of Western Classical music, contemporary American band composers, jazz, and Russian works. Rather than performing a set program for all forty-four performances, the band prepared a vast “bank” of repertoire from



which they would mix and match pieces to create a new program at each concert. Since the program was so fluid, an analysis of the individual pieces is less important than the overall impression that the works provided as a whole. Pieces such as Richard Wagner's *Lohengrin* and Johann Sebastian Bach's *Toccatina and Fugue in D Minor* exhibited a mastery of Western classical music, which emphasized the band's connections to an elite European cultural tradition. Works by American composers such as William Schuman, Vincent Persichetti, and UM alumnus Glen Osser conveyed that America had its own composers that both fit into this elite tradition as well as defined an American compositional soundscape. Jazz music selections boasted a uniquely American style of music derived from African musical idioms, and served to satiate a Soviet appetite for jazz prompted by popular global radio shows such as "Voice of America." Finally, the UM band made an effort to connect to the Soviet soundscape through the inclusion of Russian works such as Moussorgsky's classical-leaning *The Great Gate of Kiev*, as well as more folk-based tunes such as *Rhapsody of Russian Folk Songs*.<sup>14</sup> A typical tour concert program would feature at least one piece from each of these four categories. When performed together, these pieces conveyed the band's ability to master a large variety of styles from a wide range of composers, which in turn indicated an advanced American musical culture and high-quality education. To play *Lohengrin* was impressive for any group, but for a student group to play a flawless *Lohengrin* after a rousing jazz tune and immediately preceding an American march exhibited an outstanding feat of musical training.

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<sup>14</sup> Sovetskaya Kultura: Our Guests—A High Class Band, Box 1, Symphony Band 1961 Tour collection, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.



**Figure 1:** A typical UM band tour concert program, Box 1, Symphony Band 1961 Tour collection, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

The band’s flexible programming was also conducive to adding new pieces to the larger repertoire “bank” based on Soviet reception. One notable aspect of the tour was the UM band’s sensitivity to Soviet tastes and willingness to update their programs accordingly. The most prominent example of this was the music of George Gershwin. Soviet audiences were reportedly “Ga-Ga Over Gershwin,” an American composer who wrote in jazz and popular styles.<sup>15</sup> After the band’s opening night concert in Moscow, newspapers reported that the crowd shouted for encores and for more “Gershwin,” only finally leaving when the Russian master of ceremonies shouted, “It’s over.”<sup>16</sup> In response to this overwhelming demand for Gershwin tunes, the tour business manager Frederick E. Moncrieff contacted James D. Shortt—the band’s on-campus

<sup>15</sup> U-M Band Finds Reds Ga-Ga Over Gershwin, Box 1, Symphony Band 1961 Tour collection, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>16</sup> 6000 Applaud First Concert by U-M Band, Box 1, Symphony Band 1961 Tour collection, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

business manager—to request additional Gershwin orchestrations. Shortt shipped extra Gershwin pieces by air express, and the band received them just over a week later and began incorporating them into their programs.<sup>17</sup> Soviet audiences responded enthusiastically, with Moncrieff reporting that the band received a “wild reception” from an audience of 6000 who “demanded 45 minutes of encores after the regular program.”<sup>18</sup> Of this change in repertoire, one newspaper reported, “The band’s repertoire had been heavily weighted with classics, but was being changed to satisfy the Russian demand for lighter selections.”<sup>19</sup> Though the UM band had entered the Soviet Union with the expectation that the Western Classical “classics” would be the most well received for their associations with elite culture, they adapted when this wasn’t the case. In the UM band’s mission to best portray an elite American music culture, they showed a true investment in appealing to what Soviet audiences wanted to hear, not just a blind imposition of what they *thought* Soviet audiences might want to hear.

In addition to Gershwin tunes, American newspapers reported that the Soviets were particularly fond of the UM school fight song “The Victors,” which they played at the close of each concert program. Though performed primarily to celebrate the band’s home school, “The Victors” is a piece that conveys American ideologies of dominance and western freedom. Composed in 1898 by Louis Elbel, “The Victors” was inspired by (or as some scholars would argue, stolen from) a patriotic march composed seven months prior by Tin Pan Alley composer George Rosenberg. The march, titled “The Spirit of Liberty March,” celebrated American notions of freedom and featured a rousing trio section (in a standard American march, the trio is the section that contains the main melodic material of the piece, usually in a different key than

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<sup>17</sup> ‘U’ Band Changes Program To Include More Gershwin, Box 1, Symphony Band 1961 Tour collection, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>18</sup> U-M Band Finds Reds Ga-Ga Over Gershwin, Box 1, Symphony Band 1961 Tour collection, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>19</sup> ‘U’ Band Changes Program To Include More Gershwin, Box 1, Symphony Band 1961 Tour collection, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

the first and second strains). Elbel used almost the exact same melody of Rosenberg's trio in the trio section of "The Victors," altering just two notes in the entire sixteen bar phrase.<sup>20</sup> He originally composed "The Victors" in celebration of the Michigan football team's victory over the University of Chicago in the Western Conference football championship, drawing upon Rosenberg's ode to American notions of liberty and the militaristic roots of the march genre to convey the team's superiority.<sup>21</sup> "The Victors" is thus not just about the Michigan football team and its victories, but also about broader ideologies of American dominance and freedom.

In addition to the compositional roots of the song, the lyrics to "The Victors" become increasingly significant in identifying American ideologies during the Cold War. Lyrics such as "conquering heroes," "leaders and best," and "champions of the west" originally referred to football wins, but took on new meanings when performed in the Soviet Union. On tour, the band represented not just their university but their entire country, so suddenly these "conquering heroes," "leaders and best," and "champions" referred generally to Americans. One newspaper article, headlined "Russian Tour Sees 'Victors' Favorite Song," wrote that the band sang the lyrics as they played, "inviting the audience to join in clapping in tempo during the final chorus."<sup>22</sup> Though the band sang the lyrics, it is unclear whether or not they translated the meaning of the lyrics to Soviet audiences, thus Soviets were willingly (but likely unknowingly) participating in a celebration of American values. The Soviets participated enthusiastically nonetheless, so much so that band director William Revelli said, "I think that if we had stayed in Russia long enough, The Victors might have become their national anthem."<sup>23</sup> For a song so

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<sup>20</sup> James Dickson. "Talk of the Town: Hail to the Victors - A Borrowed Song?" AnnArbor.com, November 4, 2009.

<sup>21</sup> University of Michigan Athletics. "Michigan Fight Song." University of Michigan Athletics. University of Michigan Athletics, May 2, 2019.

<sup>22</sup> Russian Tour Sees 'Victors' Favorite Song, Box 1, Symphony Band 1961 Tour collection, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>23</sup> U-M Band Flies Home, Ends Tour With Note of Triumph, Box 1, Symphony Band 1961 Tour collection, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

entrenched in American values to become the so-called national song of America's Cold War enemy signifies a cultural "conquering" of the Soviet Union.

Though "The Victors" sought to assert American values, the band's performance practices were frequently altered to suit Soviet tastes. This flexibility, however, was temporary and not a signifier of long term cultural exchange. The Western Classical concert hall has many unspoken rituals, which when practiced signify belonging to a cultural elite. For example, clapping between movements of a piece is often considered a faux pas, so those who do unknowingly clap are aurally and visually singled out as "lesser" than those from elite social backgrounds. In this way, concert hall traditions also frequently serve as invisible barriers to participation from the general public, preserving classical music's status as "high" culture.

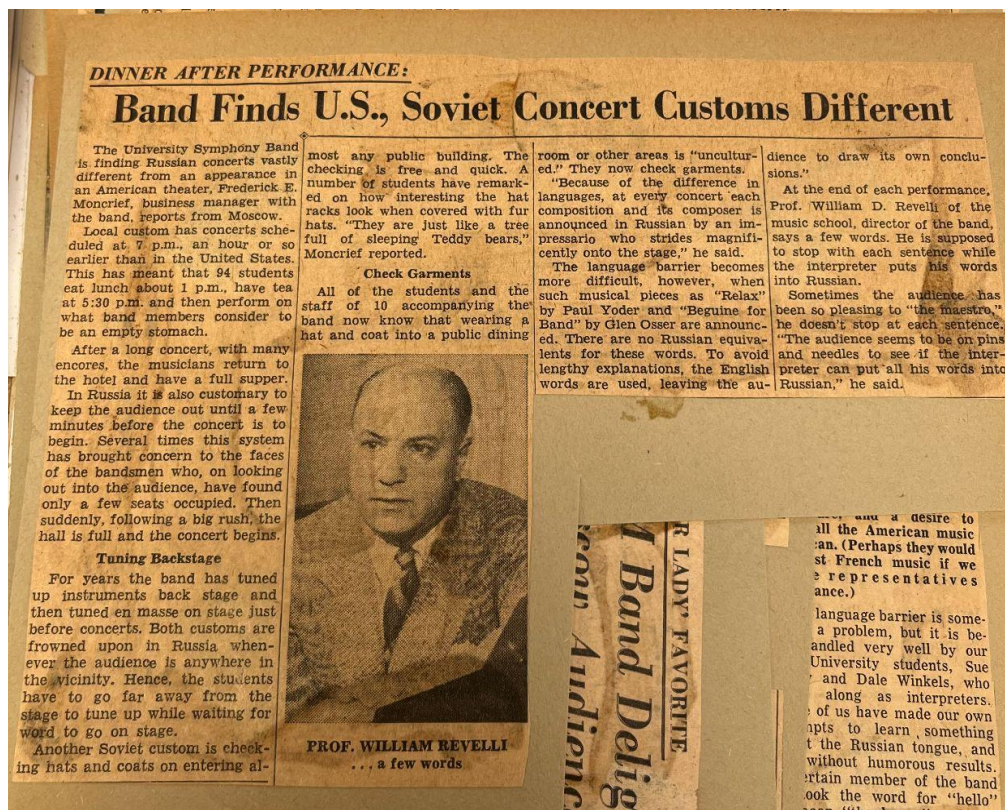


Figure 2: Newspaper clipping about Soviet concert customs, Box 1, Symphony Band 1961 Tour collection, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.



An American newspaper article and a tour reflection highlighted how two such elite Western Classical traditions were challenged by common Soviet practices when the UM Symphony Band performed in the Soviet Union—tuning and applause. Under the Western Classical tradition in America, it is common for the entire ensemble to tune backstage, and then again en masse on stage—before the conductor walks out, the oboe will play a concert A and the rest of the group will adjust their instruments to match. However, an article published during the tour stated, “Both customs are frowned upon in Russia whenever the audience is anywhere in the vicinity. Hence, the students have to go far away from the stage to tune up while waiting for word to go on stage.”<sup>24</sup> A tour reflection by Frederic E. Moncrieff also emphasized a difference in applause practices. While in America it is customary for the audience to applaud at the end of the performance with each audience member applauding at their own speed, Moncrieff highlighted how in the Soviet Union “the band and the audience applauded one another,” with the audience clapping together at a synchronized tempo.<sup>25</sup> The specific practices themselves are less important than the UM band’s willingness to adapt and change their practices to suit the tastes of the Soviet audiences. Since the UM band’s traditions were not just markers of American values, but also markers of belonging to an elite Western cultural tradition, their willingness to alter these practices shows a conscious effort to engage with Soviet musical culture. However, the band’s alteration in performance practice wasn’t a moment of reciprocal, long term cultural exchange, but rather just a temporary, respectful change to appease Soviets on home soil. In none of the countless articles and reflections about performance practices did anyone note any inherent cultural value in the Soviet traditions or any considerations of implementing these

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<sup>24</sup> Band Finds U.S., Soviet Concert Customs Different, Box 1, Symphony Band 1961 Tour collection, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>25</sup> *The Victors Around the World* by Frederick E. Moncrieff, Box 1, Symphony Band 1961 Tour collection, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

traditions at home. Instead, these moments were reduced to humorous anecdotes about how different the Soviets were, and the band reverted back to performing their own traditions upon their return home.

Overall, the University of Michigan Symphony Band's initial repertoire, including a rotating list of diverse selections and "The Victors," boasted the quality of American education as well as values of freedom and dominance. The band showed a true interest in Soviet tastes—they "lightened" their program with more Gershwin tunes and changed their standard performance practices to please Soviet audiences. However, this interest was temporary, and not an indicator of a reciprocal cultural relationship.

### **Moscow, Last Stop For Everyone: Personal Interactions and Ideologies**

Inside the music halls, decisions such as programming and performance practice were prescribed by authoritative figures such as the band's director William Revelli, or even through consultations with government officials. Outside the music halls, Americans had less control and their interactions with Soviets were much more fluid, resulting in both engagement and pushback. Though the tour was envisioned as forging common ground through music, a more significant portion of one-on-one interaction occurred adjacent to and outside of musical settings, with Americans and people of the Soviet Union forming relationships.

News reports by papers such as the *Michigan Daily*, *Detroit Free Press*, and even the *New York Times* give a sense of the bigger picture of the tour's progress and musical achievements, but the broadness of their scope tends to gloss over the personal interactions between American students and the Soviet public. These personal interactions are instead captured best through personal writings by members of the band. This section will first analyze

the tour diary of band member Loren Mayhew, arguing that American-Soviet relationships, though often amicable, were not always perceived as equal. Americans' conversations were motivated by imperial sensibilities of superiority, even if not always explicitly expressed. It will then examine broader American perspectives of Soviet people as captured through the band's satirical newspaper *The Leaky Bugle*, exploring the imperial ideology that would shape the subsequent moments of cultural exchange. Ultimately, it will suggest that American-Soviet interactions weren't unilaterally negative or fake—many American band members and Soviets formed genuine connections and shared positive cultural experiences—but this fact cannot be divorced from the ideological context in which the Americans were engaging with the Soviets.

The tour diary of horn player Loren Mayhew offers a window into the personal lives of band students on the tour, revealing that his conversations and even friendships with Soviet people—rather than musical interactions—were the biggest sites of cultural exchange. Mayhew's diary was updated daily throughout the tour, with significant moments from each day recounted in a few succinct but detailed paragraphs. Though his experiences are personal and may not reflect the experiences of the rest of the band, they offer important insight into the usual types of relationships and conversations that occurred on the tour.

One overarching theme that emerges from Mayhew's diary is his dismissal of Soviet musicians. Though the tour was intended to focus on musical interactions and to forge common cultural grounds, Mayhew expresses little interest in the musical lives of the Soviet people. He frequently mentions Soviet reactions to the American band's musicality, expressing pleasure at how Soviet audiences were “gassed” by their performances (a positive reaction), or belittling people who didn't receive it positively. On April 2nd, he wrote “Our concerts did not receive tremendous reception, but this is just a small resort city and there is not much opportunity for



culture here.”<sup>26</sup> Rather than recognizing these small tourist towns as having their own distinctive and rich culture that perhaps just doesn’t enjoy an American band program, Mayhew immediately assumes that this town must be “devoid” of any culture—Americanness (and an appreciation of it) is associated with culture, while a lack of appreciation is not even recognized as a lesser culture, but simply no culture at all. Even in larger, perhaps more “cultured” towns, Mayhews showed little interest in the musical lives of Soviet students. On March 6th he wrote that the band spent the morning visiting classes at Moscow State Conservatory, with both the Russian conservatory students and the UM band performing concerts for each other. He says that “our playing completely gassed them much to our satisfaction,” but what’s most striking is that he left out any mention of the American students’ reactions to the Russians’ performance.<sup>27</sup> His only explicit impression of Soviet music was his reaction to his own band mate attempting to play a Russian horn. In the hands of Americans, Soviet music was noteworthy, but otherwise he seemed to view the Soviet Union as just an audience rather than as musicians in their own right.

**Sunday, April 2, 1961, 46<sup>th</sup> Day**

**Sukhumi, Abkhazian, Georgia, USSR**

Today was sunny! The sun made the city look like paradise. I sure do wish Judy were here to see it. I walked all over the city and took several pictures.

Our concerts did not receive tremendous reception, but this is just a small resort city and there is not much opportunity for culture here.

The local citizens have told us that we are the first Americans to visit this city.

**Figure 3:** Excerpt from Loren Mayhew’s diary, Symphony Band 1961 Tour collection, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, 18.

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<sup>26</sup> Loren Mayhew’s Russian Tour Diary, <https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/handle/2027.42/110897>, Symphony Band 1961 Tour collection, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, 18.

<sup>27</sup> Loren Mayhew’s Russian Tour Diary, Symphony Band 1961 Tour collection, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, 8.

Mayhew's dismissal of Soviet musicians could be just the nature of his diary—he was writing for himself, not an audience (as is further evidenced by his frequent descriptions of personal ailments such as infections, sinus troubles, and diarrhea), and perhaps simply wanted to remember the positive reception his hard work was receiving rather than detail any sort of cultural exchange. However, this is likely not the case since although any element of “exchange” was mostly absent from discussions of music, Mayhew's personal conversations and even friendships with Soviet people show a greater sense of reciprocity. Though Mayhew glossed over exchange concerts with Soviet student musicians, he reflected positively on numerous social dances that were held in the evening after these exchange concerts. Mayhew also wrote in great detail about his friendship with Alla, a Ukrainian girl he met in a music store on his first day in Kiev. The following day she attended their concert, and walked him back to his hotel while they chatted about their shared interest in electrical engineering. They met again the next day too, when they attended a “panorama movie” together and Alla took him to a department store to help him buy a Ukrainian shirt (“they are very beautiful”).<sup>28</sup> Mayhew also referenced several conversations with Soviet students, such as on March 18th when he and a student at Kiev Conservatory “talked for a long time, mostly about the different courses which we each had to study.”<sup>29</sup> This high level of detail of his experiences with everyday Ukrainian culture is a stark contrast to his discussions of Soviet musicianship, and portrays the Soviets as inferior in “high” culture settings like classical music (at least at the student musician level), but perhaps more equal when it came to “lower” culture entertainment, clothing, and conversation.

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<sup>28</sup> Loren Mayhew's Russian Tour Diary, Symphony Band 1961 Tour collection, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, 13.

<sup>29</sup> Loren Mayhew's Russian Tour Diary, Symphony Band 1961 Tour collection, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, 12.

Though Mayhew appears to have formed deep bonds with some of his Soviet friends, his descriptions of Soviet people sometimes cast them in a light of pity, depicting them as helpless victims of communism rather than free agents of democracy. His descriptions at the time of the tour are generally a bit vague, pointing primarily to Soviet issues with funding and education. On March 28th, he wrote, “I have learned some things about the condition of this country that is very interesting. First, so much money is being spent on rocket research that everything else is seriously lacking in funds, especially education.”<sup>30</sup> However, one notable aspect of this diary is that when it was transcribed into type, Mayhew added a few asides in parentheses. Some are clarifying comments, some are jokes poking fun at his teenage self, and some are further details to stories that lacked context. These comments were written specifically with an audience in mind, and are often more direct in their observations and critiques of communism than his teenage self was. Of his time with Alla, for example, he writes that when a prison truck drove by one day she burst into tears: “I am pretty sure that Alla was desperately grasping for a way out of the overbearing communist torture. Her memory has haunted me ever since then even until now. I often wonder what happened to her and even still cry a little at my inability to help.”<sup>31</sup> In this description, Alla is a helpless victim of communism, and Mayhew was an (unsuccessful) American savior with the potential to offer her freedom. It is interesting that he only expresses these feelings as an adult regret, rather than in the original text. The fact that Mayhew was compelled to write about this experience years later rather than in the moment indicates that the girl leading him around Kiev was not so helpless, but rather that Mayhew was just nostalgically dramatizing the band’s role in promoting American cultural values of “freedom.”

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<sup>30</sup> Loren Mayhew’s Russian Tour Diary, Symphony Band 1961 Tour collection, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, 17.

<sup>31</sup> Loren Mayhew’s Russian Tour Diary, Symphony Band 1961 Tour collection, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, 14.

Mayhew's descriptions may emphasize a sort of American cultural savior complex, but his anecdotes perhaps unknowingly reveal moments where the Soviet people were anything but passive. During Mayhew's conversation with the student at Kiev conservatory, for example, Mayhew writes that "He did make it quite clear though that he was proud to be a citizen of Kiev."<sup>32</sup> Later that same day, when Mayhew was discussing electrical engineering with Alla, he wrote of an argument about atomic reactors. When Mayhew mentioned that America had atomic reactors, Alla "became very alarmed...because she strongly believes that we were endangering the world with atomic radiation from the reactors. When I tried to explain to her how we shield the radiation from the air, she retorted, 'There is no way of shielding atomic radiation from the air. I am an engineer — I know!'"<sup>33</sup> Regardless of whether or not Alla's opinion was scientifically correct, she stood her ground when Mayhew's information conflicted with her own knowledge. Both Alla and the student from Kiev show a deep pride in their Soviet education, and refused to be helped or corrected by an American student.

While Mayhew's diary offers insight into the nature of American-Soviet interactions, the band's satirical newspaper *The Leaky Bugle* illustrates the imperial ideologies and negative perceptions of Soviets that the American students held. *The Leaky Bugle* was a regularly published newspaper produced by and circulated among UM band students. Since it was circulated among a small circle of band members rather than intended for mass public publishing, this paper offers critical insight into how this group of Americans—unfiltered by their diplomatic responsibilities—viewed Soviets. On February 18th, 1961 (the day before the band embarked on their tour) the band published a special "tour edition" of the paper. Since it

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<sup>32</sup> Loren Mayhew's Russian Tour Diary, Symphony Band 1961 Tour collection, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, 12.

<sup>33</sup> Loren Mayhew's Russian Tour Diary, Symphony Band 1961 Tour collection, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, 12.

was published before the band had even left America, it conveys the ideologies held by the band that they would bring with them on tour and that would shape their subsequent interactions. The tour edition contained satirical articles about their upcoming travels, fake translation guides, comical itineraries, and cartoons. The unique combination of illustration and dialogue in the cartoons offer one of the clearest windows into American imperial ideology.

One of the cartoons, consisting of just a singular panel, portrays American imperial ideology by contrasting the benevolent American against the naive, war-mongering Soviet. This cartoon depicts two Russian men on the street. One man points and asks the other (in an exaggerated, phonetically spelled Soviet accent), “Boris, vot do you theenk dut is?” The other man stares where he is pointing and responds “I teenk it is a new secret missile! Ve better tell comrade comissar at vunce!” The object they are pointing at is not an actual missile, but rather an American walking down the sidewalk carrying a trombone. He smiles, oblivious to their pointing, as he walks in the direction of a sign labeled “band rehearsal.”<sup>34</sup> In this scene, the Soviet men are depicted as naive and uncultured due to their inability to recognize a musical instrument. Beyond their basic inability to recognize something so “obvious,” the cartoon takes it a step further and has them assume the unrecognizable object is a weapon. Their eagerness to report this “weapon” sighting back to their communist comrades paints the Soviets as war-mongering—they view Americans only as a threat, and as a nuclear arms competitor. This is contrasted against the American band student, who is oblivious to their comments and appears simply eager to spread American culture through music. It is evident that the Americans view themselves as entering the Soviet Union on a peaceful, cultural mission, whereas they see the Soviets as uncultured, suspicious, and always on the defensive.

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<sup>34</sup> *The Leaky Bugle*, Box 2, Symphony Band 1961 Tour collection, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.



**Figure 4:** Cartoon 3 from *The Leaky Bugle*, Box 2, Symphony Band 1961 Tour collection, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

Another cartoon, also just a singular panel, pokes fun at Americans' poor Russian language skills, but ultimately portrays America as the dominant global power. In the foreground, a Soviet man in an ushanka (traditional Russian hat) greets an American man holding a suitcase. The American butchers an attempt at saying hello in Russian, instead mispronouncing the word for goodbye, "er, ah, 'POST VIDANYAH!'" The Soviet man replies, "Like, yeah man, and how are things swingin' over in Capitalistville?"<sup>35</sup> The use of language is particularly interesting in this cartoon. The Soviet man speaks fluent, unaccented, colloquial English, whereas the American struggles over basic Russian. On the surface this appears to make fun of the Americans for their monolingualism, but on a deeper level it speaks to global power

<sup>35</sup> *The Leaky Bugle*, Box 2, Symphony Band 1961 Tour collection, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

dynamics. The Soviet man's fluent English skills perhaps indicate that English is the more globally dominant and culturally influential language—the Soviets are essentially forced to learn it to participate in global exchange (even when that exchange is happening on their home soil), whereas the Americans can get by without learning Russian. This portrays America (“Capitalistville”) as the more dominant global power than the Soviet Union during a time when both empires were fighting for that position. It is also significant that this cartoon depicts Soviets as having flawless English skills whereas the first cartoon portrayed the Soviets as having thickly accented English. Americans alternate fluidly between these two portrayals of Soviets, but both ultimately work to the benefit of the Americans. The thickly accented English feeds into stereotypes of Soviets as uncultured, and the flawless English points to the global dominance of English. Both of these scenarios rely upon ideologies of Americans as the global cultural standard.



**Figure 5:** Cartoon 2 from *The Leaky Bugle*, Box 2, Symphony Band 1961 Tour collection, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

Beyond the implications of language in the cartoon's foreground, the signage in the cartoon's background portrays the Soviet Union as a place of inescapability and certain death that Americans transcend. Behind the men greeting each other, Americans are seen disembarking

a plane, waving and holding suitcases. They walk towards a building labeled with signs that read “WELCOME MICHIGAN” and “MOSCOW,” with a sign directly underneath that says “LAST STOP FOR EVERYONE!”<sup>36</sup> The sign “LAST STOP FOR EVERYONE!” does not indicate the end of a route or even the last stop of the band’s tour (it was in fact their very first stop), but rather a sense of doom—those who enter Moscow will never return. These connotations of death paint Moscow, and the Soviet Union generally, as a dangerous place. The sign also connotes an inescapability to the communist Soviet Union—an intense leadership that doesn’t allow one to leave—that the Americans disrupt with their presence. Though the sign indicates Moscow as the last stop for “everyone,” it is unclear whether “everyone” actually applies to the Americans, or whether their ideologies of freedom allow them to transcend this fate. The presence of their plane indicates that perhaps they aren’t stuck in the Soviet Union as USSR members are, but that they are free agents of global travel. Though the Soviets can’t leave, Americans are able to come and go as they please and escape “certain doom” in Moscow.

Interactions among Americans and Soviets weren’t unilaterally negative or fake. As seen in Mayhew’s diary, American band members and Soviets formed genuine connections and shared cultural experiences. They learned about and practiced each others’ languages, exchanged experiences at their respective universities, and discussed common interests. The Soviets even asked them to extend their stay, and the band flew back to Moscow to perform an additional, previously unscheduled concert before heading to Cairo.<sup>37</sup> However, these positive moments of exchange, friendship, and appreciation cannot be divorced from the ideological context in which the Americans were engaging with the Soviets. As seen in *The Leaky Bugle*, as well as

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<sup>36</sup> *The Leaky Bugle*, Box 2, Symphony Band 1961 Tour collection, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>37</sup> Russians Ask ‘U’ Band To Extend Soviet Tour, Box 1, Symphony Band 1961 Tour collection, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.



Mayhew's commentary about Alla, the Americans generally viewed themselves as benevolent, free, saviors, and the cultural standard, whereas the Soviets were viewed as victims of communism, uncultured, defensive, war-mongering, and residents of an overall dangerous and weak empire. At the level of action (conversations, social dances, trips to the movies, etc.) Americans appeared to be generally amicable. However, at the ideological level, these interactions were still motivated by—or at the very least colored by—imperial sensibilities.

## **Conclusion**

Though the Kremlin may not have been physically invaded by the University of Michigan Symphony Band, the UM band's repertoire, performance practices, interactions, and ideologies are all indicators of some degree of cultural invasion. The band's flexible repertoire was both sensitive to and a conquest of Soviet tastes, ultimately boasting the elite quality of American education as well as American notions of freedom and dominance. Its performance practices were similarly flexible, with adaptations to Soviet tastes exhibiting a true interest in Soviet culture, but ultimately not a reciprocal cultural relationship. However, personal interactions, not concert halls, were ultimately the biggest sites of cultural exchange. Americans and Soviets formed genuine connections, but these positive moments of exchange and friendship cannot be divorced from the imperial ideological context in which the Americans were engaging with the Soviets. Not every repertoire decision or personal interaction was explicitly "imperial" at the level of action, but at the level of ideology, Americans viewed themselves—not the Soviets—as the global cultural standard. Thus, no true reciprocal cultural exchange or "forging of common ground" could occur on the fundamental basis that the Americans didn't view the Soviets as cultural equals.

Due to the limited scope and time frame of this project, there are many potential avenues for future research on the University of Michigan Symphony Band's 1961 Tour. One is ensemble and instrumentation. Only military bands, not symphony bands, existed in the Soviet Union at the time of the tour, and the quality of instruments in each empire differed greatly. A future project could examine how this altered American and Soviet perceptions of each other's music in musical exchange concerts. Another potential avenue for research is comparing Soviet conservatory culture with American music school culture. The two varied greatly in terms of what genres of music they developed, as well as the ages and types of musicians they focused upon, which sparked interesting observations in the tour's exchange settings. Other projects could explore the role of gender in American cultural imperialism. A small percentage of the UM band were women, which prompted mixed reception from Soviet audiences.

Whatever the direction of future research, it is important to continue to analyze the University of Michigan 1961 Symphony Band through a critical lens rather than as a blind celebration of university—or American—achievement. Though an impressive musical feat, we must not let that cloud our perspective of the active participation of universities in U.S. cultural imperialism.