

## The Rhythm Road: American Music Abroad Quotations

### Press and Blog Quotes:

“There are certainly times when music conveys American values better than a speech. Hip-hop is America ...and so is jazz, and every other form of music with American roots that tell a story. For an American performer or group to come [to a country] gives people a chance to – in their own imagination, at least, think about what might be.”

-- Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton discussing *The Rhythm Road*

*CBS Sunday Morning, U.S. Diplomacy: Hitting the Right Notes, July 4, 2010  
New York, New York, U.S.*

What is so prominent and inspiring following these diverse conversations is that even today, cultural diplomacy clearly continues to affect the hearts and minds of our foreign neighbors -- unconstrained by social, religious or geopolitical boundaries. Perhaps it sounds simple enough, but this is no easy feat considering the complex international relations in our globalized society and the vast but often biased media outlets in every region of the world. The Rhythm Road program is particularly important considering our current multifaceted communication networks...what is clear is how The Rhythm Road facilitates not only cross-cultural discourse but also provides an extraordinary platform for artists to emerge from their own localism and share what they do, face-to-face, with the unknown.

-- Linda Constant, Blogger, Huffington Post & Balance of Culture

*Huffington Post, A Different Kind of P2P, By Linda Constant, October 11, 2010  
Los Angeles, California, U.S.*

The Rhythm Road program is collaborative and dialogic: the musicians involved routinely play with local groups creating new cultural forms and fusions. They learn as much from their hosts as they transmit about America (which also says a lot). This program is capacity building: the musicians work to inspire young musicians with master classes and out-reach sessions in schools.

In fiscally tough times the traditional cultural diplomacy seen in The Rhythm Road and similar programs continues to offer a unique return on a modest investment from the State Department. Long may it continue.

-- Nick Cull, Professor of Public Diplomacy, Director of the Masters Program in Public Diplomacy, University of Southern California

*Huffington Post, Jamming for Uncle Sam: Getting the Best From Cultural Diplomacy, By Nick Cull, July 26, 2010  
Los Angeles, California, U.S.*

“From the opening note, it was clear the Syrian teens liked what they heard...the experience changed their minds about Americans: ‘They were very down-to-earth,’ one girl told Smith. ‘Nothing like anyone ever says about Americans.’ Smith asked Chen Lo if there was a connection made with the audience ...if, ‘for that moment, you made a difference?’ ‘No question. Definitely. The impact was felt, I think, in both ways. I know I was affected.’”

-- Chen Lo, Chen Lo & The Liberation Family, With *CBS Sunday Morning*

*CBS Sunday Morning, U.S. Diplomacy: Hitting the Right Notes, July 4, 2010  
New York, New York, U.S.*

At its most successful, the Rhythm Road is a two-way cultural exchange. Mr. Horner remembers stellar jam sessions with local music students in small towns in Colombia and Uruguay. For his

current tour, his quartet wrote jazz arrangements of folk songs from each of the countries they would visit.

Mr. Berntson and his band members spent an afternoon in Jeddah jamming and swapping instruments with Saudi musicians. The emotional highlight of the tour, for him, was a concert in a Saudi special-needs school where the kids—again, a mixed audience—boogied with abandon to the song "Promised Land."

-- Tim Horner, Mark Sherman-Tim Horner Quartet & David Berntson, Little Joe McLerran Quartet  
*Wall Street Journal, America's Musical Ambassadors, By Corinna Da Fonseca-Wollheim, June 17, 2010  
New York, New York, U.S.*

"When the saxophonist Chris Byars took a band to Saudi Arabia this year, he played the music of Gigi Gryce, a jazz composer of the 1940s and '50s who converted to Islam and changed his name to Basheer Qusim. "When I announce that I'm going to play compositions by the American jazz musician Basheer Qusim, that gets their attention," he said. "Afterward several people came up, very appreciative, saying very intensely, 'Thank you for coming to our country.'"

-- Chris Byars, Chris Byars Quartet

*New York Times, When Ambassadors Had Rhythm, By Fred Kaplan, June 29, 2008  
New York, New York, U.S.*

For Roland, the goal has always been simple: to share the universal elements of a musical style rooted in the African-American experience. In jazz, musicians improvise around a melody and then play around the improvisation without disrupting the group harmony.

"The idea of being able to have your own personality and being able to be who you are [while being] considerate of your community – people can relate to that when they see jazz," says Roland. The music marries Western emphasis on the individual with Eastern notions of community, he says.

-- Ari Roland, Chris Byars Quartet

*Christian Science Monitor, US sends a jazzy message overseas, By Moises Velasquez-Manoff, September 6, 2007  
Boston, Massachusetts; U.S.*

## **Musicians – Blogging from The Road:**

It all seemed normal to me, you know, the Cambodian version of street musicians. Upon closer view, I realized they were land mine victims from land mines left behind over the course of three decades of war. The fact that they were land mine victims wasn't as striking as the spirit of the music they played. One of our main messages to students who attend our Rhythm Road Master Classes is to never give up one's dream.

*Johnny Rodgers Band, Cambodia, November 23, 2010*

The 600 seat auditorium was over half full with traditionally dressed women. The crowd also included a number of kids from the campus day care center. The girls took to our Blues by clapping and hollering, at times standing, waving their arms and swaying back and forth in unison. They gave Little Joe three encores then came on stage for autographs. Another successful day I would say.

*Robbie Mack, Little Joe McLerran Quartet, Saudi Arabia, April 11, 2010*

This is definitely a place in the world I never thought I would be, but I made it here doing what I love to do most, music. I was able to see it from a perspective of openness, compassion and connectedness. I don't know what Syria thinks of me, but I have major love for Syria.

*Chen Lo, Chen Lo and the Liberation Family, Syria, April 22, 2010*

It is great to meet people along your travels that you can connect with, who will show you around and give you the inside perspective on a new place...We had great conversations about our individual experiences in our respective music industries. It was a great opportunity to build and connect on a real level with like minded artists from another country through a common love of hip hop music.

*Ken White, Chen Lo and the Liberation Family, Tunisia, March 26, 2010*

"I love the idea that instead of just wishing for peace between the U.S. and the rest of the world - hoping for communication, for self-examination and mutual growth on each side - we got to DO something and (even better) to do it through our art. "

"...Guild of musicians" moments; we come from different parts of the world and play different music, but we completely understood each other from the first moment. I can't really describe how that happens, but it's magical."

*Alicia Jo Rabin, Hoppin' John String Band, Guatemala and Belize, May 19, 2009*

"After we played and spoke for a while, we were followed by a group of Jakarta bluegrass musicians. Top notch at that. They knew all the standards, so of course there was a huge jam session at the end. Also, the event was at a park only a half mile away from where Obama went to school. Small world."

*The Student Loan, Jakarta, March 9, 2009*

### **Embassy Reports:**

"The highlight for me was the concert in Sala Al Jadida which saw 300 people in the hall and 2000 people outside watching on the projection TV. Rarely have we seen that kind of energy and excitement at an Embassy-sponsored program."

*Matthew Long on Chen Lo and the Liberation Family, Rabat, Morocco, 2010*

"They [Chen Lo and the Liberation Family] were a huge hit. They partnered with an Algerian hip-hop band and taught them techniques that were outstanding. They also partnered with an Algerian band to make a song for the World Cup - that is amazing." Lawrence Randolph, post in Algeria.

The band played to a crowd of nearly 1,000 people last night at the Kingdom's premiere venue - the King Fahd Cultural Center. The audience was engaged, energetic, and at points - actually dancing...All in all, for the Kingdom's first public performance of an American act - Little Joe, Robbie Mack, Ron, and David did a heck of a job!

*U.S. Embassy Report - Saudi Arabia on Little Joe McLerran Quartet, Saudi Arabia, 2010*

"A major highlight of this year's visit was witnessing the reaction of the largely female student audience at Buraimi College. A three-hour drive from Muscat, Buraimi is a comparatively isolated and conservative community, but the Quartet had the students engaged and enthusiastic from the first note. Another highlight was their interaction with the younger students at a school in Muscat: Omani kids playing harmonica is a sight!"

*Robert Arbuckle on Little Joe McLerran Quartet, Oman, 2010*

“People were actually dancing at the Little Joe McLerran Quartet's performance at Kuwait University. And at the end of the show, the band was applauded with a standing ovation.”

***Salama Walid Ayyad on Little Joe McLerran Quartet, Kuwait, 2010***

“The University of Liberia students and other Choir members were on their feet. The songs that the Turning Pointe included were very familiar to Liberians. Therefore, the audiences were singing along. It was uplifting and inspiring.”

***Dehab Ghebreab on Turning Pointe, Liberia, 2010***

“One of Liberia’s most influential newspapers, the FrontPage Africa, carried the headlines ‘ A Night of Bliss, American Gospel Music Quartet, Turning Pointe, Rocks Monrovia’. The paper said that those who were at the Monrovia City Hall’s theater on Tuesday evening would never forget the excitement and peace they found for their souls while the University students, on the other hand, will forever remember their evening of entertainment. As a member of the audience put it, ‘it was a night of bliss, a day of excitement and an historic experience’, as Turning Pointe- a contemporary gospel quartet that unites four talented artists with soulful voices and a passion for music, took the center stage in the theater of Monrovia City Hall on Tuesday in a grand gospel extravaganza, followed by another live performance at the University of Liberia.”

***U.S. Embassy Report - Monrovia, Liberia on Turning Pointe, Monrovia, Liberia, 2010***

“The audience loved the group so much that they requested not one, not two, but THREE encore performances of their final song “Freedom.” The entire crowd rose to their feet to sing along and dance with the music. The audience was mainly composed of Congolese youth ages 15-35.”

***U.S. Embassy Report - Congo-Brazzaville on Turning Pointe, Congo-Brazzaville, 2010***

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