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US NATIONAL ORCHESTRA HONOURS RUSSIAN CELLIST

# Playing language of democracy

Washington Post

THE CLAPPING began in the upper balcony of the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory and spread through the auditorium until the entire audience was clapping in rhythm, like a crowd at a sports stadium, speaking a universal language: Play us an encore.

The National Symphony Orchestra had just finished its first performance in Russia in nearly a quarter of a century. It arrived at a time when official relations between the two countries are, to put it mildly, fraught. And it demonstrated that, at a time when political rhetoric is heated, music may be offering the real language of diplomacy, formalised and couched in centuries of tradition. Indeed, it wasn't even clear whether people were clapping for what they had just heard, or for what this visit represented.

Sometimes a concert is just a concert. And sometimes it dips its toe into the complex world of cultural diplomacy.

"Culture stands tall above the din of politics," said John Tefft, the American ambassador in Moscow, speaking at a reception for the NSO at his residence on Tuesday night.

The NSO is playing another concert in Moscow on Thursday and one in St Petersburg on Friday before flying home. And the reason for this lightning-quick trip isn't actually diplomatic at all. The NSO has come to honour its late music director, Mstislav Rostropovich, at the annual festival which his daughter Olga created in his memory, on what would have been his 90th birthday.

Rostropovich, a brilliant cellist who took up conducting relatively late in life, led the NSO for 17 seasons, after he was exiled from the Soviet Union due to his support for Alexander Solzhenitsyn. When he returned in 1990 for the first time, he brought the NSO with him – and got a Beatles-style welcome, with people literally scaling the outer walls of the Moscow Conservatory's Great Hall to look in through the high windows that run around the top. Then came the 1993 tour, when the orchestra became the first in history to perform in Red Square, to a crowd of 100 000 people – while across town, guns were trained on Moscow's White House.

The present tour comes at another critical historical moment. As both countries deal with the fallout from allegations that Russia influenced the outcome of the US election, an American orchestra has come to Russia – still a relatively infrequent occurrence; the last big American orchestras to play here came in 2012 – to pay homage to a great Russian by playing a lot of Russian music.

On one level, these performances can be seen as an act of homage. The Russians are certainly noting the symbolic implications of an American orchestra coming to honour a Russian, playing literally under a banner emblazoned with Rostropovich's portrait above the Conservatory stage. On Tuesday afternoon, after the Rostropovich Festival held a news conference with the NSO at the TASS building there, Russian television – which is state-sponsored – ran a brief report that emphasised how important Rostropovich remains to the NSO today.

On another level, the NSO's performances can be seen as a viable alternative to political diplomacy, showing people from different societies brought together by a common love. The tour could even be read as an act of subversion, by both sides. In the US, the new administration is trying to stamp out the federal funding for the arts that used to make just this kind of cultural exchange possible. (The current tour is privately funded, in part by the state-supported Rostropovich festival



CULTURAL UNION: Cellist Alisa Weilerstein performs Shostakovich's cello concerto with Christoph Eschenbach and the NSO at the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory, where Rostropovich gave the piece its world premiere in 1959. Picture: SCOTT SUCHMAN, NATIONAL SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

and in part by private donors.) As for Russia, where people around the country just took to the streets to protest government corruption: Rostropovich, an outspoken foe of totalitarian governments, might well have had a thing or two to say about the current Russian regime, although, a message from Russian President Vladimir Putin stands on the first page of the Rostropovich Festival programme.

For diplomats on both sides, there's a lot about this tour to love. "Culture," said Ambassador Tefft, "does things that traditional diplomacy can't."

Two weeks before the orchestra left, the Russian ambassador to the US, Sergey Kislyak – the man notable for his conversations with now-ousted national security adviser Michael Flynn and then-Senator Jeff Sessions – hosted a reception for the NSO and its patrons, similar to the one Ambassador Tefft gave in Moscow, at the Russian Embassy in Washington.

"The tour," Kislyak said, "is one of the brightest elements in our current relations."

Trips like these, says Nicholas J Cull, the director of the master of public diplomacy programme at the University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, "have immense significance because of their symbolic nature."

They fulfil what he describes as some essential functions of cultural diplomacy. "Most basically," Cull says, "there's the idea of a gift. If you give somebody a fantastic gift it starts to establish a reciprocal relationship". Also it is a chance to "actually tell the recipient something about you they might not already know... Maybe today there's value in reminding people that we're not all about Taylor Swift. There is still high culture in America. Despite people backing out of humanities funding". And, he adds, "It helps to show respect to a cultural figure of the country of origin".

For many of the NSO's players, diplomacy is of far less concern than doing honour to their beloved former music director. At the news conference at TASS, William Foster, a viola player with the orchestra for nearly 50 years, took Olga Rostropovich's hand, saying he remembered her as a child, and was so overwhelmed with memories that he choked up. "I wasn't looking forward to this tour," he said later. "It wasn't until we got here that I really realised what we were doing here."

Later on Tuesday afternoon Steven Honigberg, one of many talented cellists whom Rostropovich drew to the NSO, gave a master class to young string play-

ers. Outreach is a buzzword for American orchestras, and this kind of exchange is a popular tool of cultural diplomacy as well, but that wasn't what motivated Honigberg. "It's the least I can do," he said, "for the man who was so important in my life."

Art doesn't offer neat answers. Indeed, performing during times of crisis underlines the messy way that crisis plays out. When the NSO was here in 1993, Daniel Foster, William's son and the orchestra's current principal viola, felt a sense of irony at learning what was happening by watching CNN, from Atlanta, in his Moscow hotel room.

It would be nice to say that the NSO had a triumphant return. But the reality wasn't so clear cut, as the orchestra faced the challenge of trying to live up to its own past glory, in a somewhat diminished present. Although there was brisk scalper activity around the ticket lines, the hall wasn't quite sold out. And Eschenbach's cerebral approach to musical emotion didn't seem to fully connect with an audience primed for a more vital, Rostropovich-like approach.

Eschenbach, like Rostropovich, is a soloist-turned-conductor, with lots of ideas about music and spotty conducting ability, but Rostropovich conducted with such commitment and energy that it was easy not to notice. "There was never a concert that was just tossed off," said Alice Kogan Weinreb, a flutist with the NSO since 1979. "It always felt like a matter of life and death whenever we performed, no matter how big or small the venue." Today, the NSO does not always communicate the same sense of urgency, though it sounded unusually full and warm in the beautiful acoustics of this iconic hall.

The tired truism that classical music is a universal language gets trotted out, like a dusty diplomatic ritual, for such occasions. If that were really true, it wouldn't matter how well or badly any piece was played. And in fact, Wednesday's concert got a little bit lost in translation: It was a concert pitched to Americans' ideas about discriminating Russian listeners, but played to an audience that seemed eager for some of Rostropovich's showmanship.

With music, like diplomacy, it can take a while for the effects to sink in. When the last notes of Schubert's Ninth Symphony died away, the applause seemed at first merely politely, then gradually built to that rhythmic, pounding clapping. We want to like music. And we want to like each other. That may be the most profound message, at the moment, that cultural diplomacy has to offer.

# The ultimate poetry collection

IN 2002, David Lehman began an intriguing exercise – to write poems that both honoured and mimicked the works of his favourite poets.

Lehman's choices were wide, including William Wordsworth, Walt Whitman, John Keats, Gwendolyn Brooks, Charles Bukowski and Bob Dylan. His approximations also paid homage to cultural icons, including Marilyn Monroe and the Brooklyn Bridge.

Together in one volume, *Poems in the Manner of* (Scribner), these works read like an eclectic course in major poets and poetic movements.

Lehman, who started and is the series editor of *Best American Poetry*, introduces each "poem in the manner of" with notes about the subject's style and approach, or about what he tried to achieve with his rendition.

The strongest work captures the spirit of the original, yet also stands on its own merits, as with *Poem in the manner of Basho: Pond/ Frog/ Splash* or with the lovely translation of Goethe's *Wandlers Nachtlied*, which begins with quiet com-

ing across the treetops and ends with "Just wait; soon you/ Will be quiet, too".

As the collection continues, readers see how modelling one's writing after the masters can lead to fascinating discoveries and extend one's own poetic range.

*Simulacra*, by Aire D Matthews (Yale), won the 2016 Yale Series of Younger Poets award, chosen by Carl Phillips. This challenging work leads readers through a surreal landscape of hunger, rebellion, desire and addiction.

Some poems focus on the mouth – a dark cavern that swallows speech, pills or one's sense of freedom. Several others feature Anne Sexton, who sometimes appears as a nurse.

Gertrude Stein and other historical figures also make cameos as the speaker probes what associations and likenesses can reveal about difficult realities – if anything is indeed real.

As with many Yale winners before her (including Adrienne Rich and WS Merwin), Matthews' writing is bold, innovative and complex. In *Rebel Opera*, a mother tells her daughter, "We inherit

the curse, not the illness", then explains a few lines later that "Want moves between or up/ or down or through the bloodline./ Desire is spacious./ Wants in the DNA."

Matthews' dark subject matter is balanced by her originality and insight, which leaves readers feeling that she can "reveal this enemy's backbone/ uncoil this helix".

Robert Wrigley's *Box* (Penguin) thoughtfully considers how human beings, relationships and the physical world are constrained by time, mortality and other invisible forces.

The collection, his 10th, opens with reflections on various kinds of environments, from his own extended family – who don't understand a writer's work – to the wind and sky and to language, with its many layers and levels of meaning.

Images and ideas introduced in that first section re-emerge later as Wrigley, whose honours include the Kingsley Tufts Award, meditates on "the fragility and strength of nature; the search for transcendence and connection". – The Washington Post

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**T1.1 TENDER NOTICE AND INVITATION TO TENDER**

Subcontractors are hereby invited from Targeted Enterprises for the SUPPLY AND ERECTION OF A PRECAST CONCRETE SECURITY FENCE AT THE OKAVANGO INTERCHANGE. This project is in the province of Western Cape.

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Preferences are offered to tenderers who comply with the criteria stated in the Tender Data.

Subcontract documents will be available as from 3 April 2017 and may be obtained from the Project Management Team (PMT) at the following address, 24 Canary Street, Joostenbergvlakte (Tel. 021-987 1922 during the hours 08:00 to 16:00 (Monday to Friday). Please arrange beforehand for collection of a document.

Each tenderer is advised that the route will not be traveled and that it will be the responsibility of each tenderer to acquaint themselves with the route and its condition.

The closing time for receipt of tenders is 11:00 on Thursday 13 April 2017.

Telegraphic, telephonic, telex, e-mail, facsimile and late tenders will not be accepted. Tenders may only be submitted on the tender documentation that is issued.

Requirements for completing, sealing, addressing, delivery, opening and assessment of tenders are stated in the Tender Data.

Queries relating to issues arising from these documents may be addressed to Mr. Martinus de Kock, tel 021 987 1922, cell 084 443 9903, and e-mail: [kokkie@mdcivils.net](mailto:kokkie@mdcivils.net)

**Public Notices**

**AVAILABILITY OF THE DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT REPORT FOR PUBLIC COMMENT**

**PROPOSED MARINE TELECOMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM (ACE CABLE SYSTEM) TO BE LANDED AT VAN RIEBEEKSTRAND ON THE WEST COAST OF SOUTH AFRICA**

Proponent: MTN (Pty) Ltd

Notice is hereby given in terms of the EIA Regulations (GNR. 982 of 8 Dec 2014), published under the National Environmental Management Act, 1998 (Act No. 107 of 1998), as amended, of the availability of the Draft Environmental Impact Assessment Report (DEIAR) for the above mentioned development for public review and comment. The proposed development of the ACE Cable System triggers a number of listed activities in terms of Listing Notices 1, 2 and 3 (GNR. 983, 984 and 985 of 8 Dec 2014), for which environmental authorization, following a full scoping and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), is required. Following the statutory 30-day public comment period, the final DEIAR will be submitted to the national Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) for review and decision-making. Additionally, an application to register the water uses triggered by the proposed development, in terms of Section 21 (c) and (i) of the National Water Act, 1998 (Act No 36 of 1998), has been submitted to the Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS) in terms of GNR. 509 of 26 Aug 2016.

The DEIAR will be made available in hardcopy and electronic form during the statutory 30-day public commenting period (3 April 2017 - 8 May 2017) at the following public venues:

Venue	Street	Contact Person and Number
Koeborg Public Library	Merchant Walk, Duynfontein, 7441	Ms. Roelida Brown 021 553 2514
Melkbosstrand Ratepayers Association	25 Jacobus Crescent, Duynfontein, 7441	Mrs. Smokie La Grange (Chairman) 073 357 6357

The complete DEIAR is also available on ACER's website: [www.acerfranca.co.za](http://www.acerfranca.co.za) under 'Current Projects'.

**Invitation to Comment**

To submit your comment or obtain further information regarding the proposed project, please contact the Public Participation Office by the 8 May 2017:

Giles Churchill or Mareike Strauß  
ACER (Africa) Environmental Consultants  
P O Box 503, Mtunzini, 3867 | Tel: 035 340 2715 | Fax: 035 340 2232  
[ace-cable@acerfranca.co.za](mailto:ace-cable@acerfranca.co.za)

This assessment is being conducted on behalf of MTN (Pty) Ltd. Please note: This is not a call for employment seekers, contractors or suppliers.

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