

# DOWNBEAT



Louis Armstrong  
visiting Egypt in 1961



COURTESY LOUIS ARMSTRONG HOUSE AND MUSEUM

## Exhibit Shows Jazz's Cold War Diplomacy

The Meridian International Center in Washington, D.C., kicked off Jazz Appreciation Month in April with the photo exhibition "Jam Session: America's Jazz Ambassadors Embrace the World." Picked from various collections, the 100-plus photographs capture luminaries such as Dizzy Gillespie, Dave Brubeck, Louis Armstrong and Sarah Vaughan extending American government-sponsored goodwill abroad during the Cold War.

The exhibition gives glimpses of Gillespie and Melba Liston mesmerizing dancing cobras in Pakistan; Armstrong pointing his trumpet upward and sending a crowd of Egyptian kids into ecstasy; and a curious Duke Ellington stooping over to check out some musicians in India. The photos represent the jazz ambassador tours that the U.S. State Department sponsored from the mid-'50s through the mid-'70s.

"This show represents what we are as an organization," said Curtis Sandberg, Meridian International Center vice president for the arts. "Our mission is to promote international understanding through the exchange of people and ideas."

Sandberg began thinking about doing a photo exhibition last summer, after he read an article about Brubeck's contributions to cultural diplomacy. The article featured a vintage picture of Brubeck, credited to the University of the Pacific in Stockton, Calif. Sandberg called the university and the ball started rolling. He gained invaluable advice from Penny Von Eschen, a scholar of jazz diplomacy at the University of Michigan. With Eschen's guidance, Sandberg amassed the photographs to exhibit.

"We needed to find photographs that represented what the State Department hoped to occur with the tours—musicians meeting leaders and elites from countries around the world," Sandberg said. "All of the musicians wanted to jam with local cats."

"Jam Session" will travel across the United States for the next three years. The exhibit will run at the Community Council for the Arts in Kinston, N.C., from late August through the middle of October.

—John Murph