

All that Jazz

Perspectives on power and music, plus diplomatic comings and goings

BY GAIL SCOTT

WHAT'S POWER ON EMBASSY ROW?

To many, power on Embassy Row means getting instant return calls from the White House. Others count the number of Cabinet secretaries and Supreme Court justices they can attract to a dinner. Some count their Sunday morning talk show appearances as badges of power.

But on the fifth anniversary of the American occupation of his country, Iraqi Ambassador **Sameer Shaker Sumaidaie** wishes he had less "power." "I don't see myself as 'powerful,' he said recently. "In the old days, when communication was so different, ambassadors wielded the influence of their nation in the host country. The British ambassador in a small country projected the power of the whole empire. Today, communication is much more direct between heads of state."

"Power and access overlap," Sumaidaie continued, "and access depends on the perception of which country's affairs are more important. I look forward to the days when Iraq is less important and the situation in Iraq has quieted down and there is no need for this higher profile. I envy the ambassadors in that situation."

JAZZ AMBASSADORS

During the height of the Cold War, Nikita Khrushchev dispatched the Bolshoi Ballet around the world to win the hearts and minds of their audiences. At the urging of Rep. Adam Clayton Powell, President Eisenhower retaliated by sending Dizzy Gillespie and his Big Band on a world tour, followed by more of America's jazz greats: Dave Brubeck, Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, Miles Davis, and Washington's own Charlie Byrd. They were our front line troops of cultural diplomacy.

Meridian International Center's hot new exhibit, *Jam Session: America's Jazz Ambassadors Embrace the World* revisits the fascinating journeys



Benny Goodman performs for a young audience in Red Square, Moscow, Soviet Union, 1962 (Courtesy of the Irving S. Gilmore Music Library, Benny Goodman Papers, Yale University)

of these unofficial diplomats. At the opening party last month, jazz great **David Brubeck** was in the audience listening to Poland's leading jazz ensemble, the Andrzej Jagodzinski Trio. Afterwards, when asked how it felt to listen, 50 years later, to Poles playing music they once weren't even allowed to hear, Brubeck smiled and his eyes sparkled behind his signature broad brims. Then he sang in this reporter's ear, "It's wonderful, it's marvelous, that you could care for me." Not only did the Jazz Ambassadors embrace the world, but their audiences embraced them.

SPRING'S NEW CROP

After an official farewell party for India's popular **Ronen** and **Kalpna Sen** was canceled at the last minute, word spread that the couple will be staying one more year. Not so for the Japanese Ambassador **Ryozo Kato** and his wife **Hanayo**, who are leaving right after Meridian's big Japanese Spring garden benefit, "An Evening in Kyoto" later this month. Palestine's **Afif Safieh** thought he and his wife **Christ'l**

would be retiring, and he could finally finish that book, but instead they are departing mid-month for a new posting in Moscow. Thailand and Sri Lanka are also set for Spring departures. Egypt's **Nabil** and **Nermin Fahmy** expect to leave by summer's end. Mosaic Foundation will especially miss Nermin.

Argentina's new Ambassador, **Hector Timerman**, is a human rights advocate and former newspaper publisher whose father endured brutal imprisonment at the hands of the junta. Timerman now fills the chair of the ambassador he once openly opposed during Argentina's military dictatorship. He is not the only political refugee serving in Washington. Chilean Ambassador **Mariano Fernandez** was exiled and worked as a journalist during General Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship, and Uruguayan Ambassador **Carlos Albert Gianelli** and his family were forced to flee during military coups. **WL**

Readers wishing to get in touch with Gail can email: columns@washingtonlife.com.

DO YOU KNOW EMBASSY ROW?

- The Tidal Basin's famous cherry trees were originally a gift from the Mayor of Tokyo in 1912.
- Tulips are originally Turkish, not Dutch, but The Netherlands grows the most tulips in the world.
- The Colombian and Ecuadorian Embassies vie for bragging rights over who receives the most glorious shipments of native roses.
- And, do you know what's in the Norwegian Crown Princess' bouquet?