

USC CENTER ON PublicDiploacy

Jazz, Public Diplomacy and Dizzy Gillespie:
Remarks from Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice
October 12, 2006

It is my pleasure to join you in celebrating a landmark event in our nation's public diplomacy – Dizzy Gillespie's 1956 world tour with his jazz band. Back then, America's civil rights movement was still in its infancy and we still had a long way to go to live up to the democratic ideals of our country's founding.

But it was in American culture, in the story of people like Dizzy Gillespie that one could see the future promise of our country. A young man of modest means, the youngest of nine children, whose creative genius transcended boundaries of race, and class, and culture.

Even at a time when liberty was denied here in America – a time that I remember well as a girl growing up in the segregated city of Birmingham, Alabama – the music of Dizzy Gillespie spoke the language of freedom; the freedom to think, to innovate, and to speak in one's own voice.

This liberating power of jazz resonated here at home and it had great appeal to millions of people around the world, many of whom still longed for their own liberty. For these audiences, in Latin America, in Europe, and in the Middle East, Dizzy Gillespie's world tour left an indelible impression of the vibrancy of American culture,

the diversity of American society, and most of all, the power of hope that freedom holds for all people.

In the past half century we have witnessed over and over again the power of art in America's diplomacy. It is the power that speaks to all people, that expresses the full range of our ideas and our emotions, and reminds us that despite our differences of language or nationality, race or religion, politics or policy, our human experience is a shared one.

I know that Dean Geoff Cowan shares this belief and we appreciate all that the USC Center on Public Diplomacy is doing to help increase international understanding.

Today America is building on and expanding upon our proud tradition of cultural diplomacy. Recently First Lady Laura Bush and Under Secretary of State Karen Hughes launched a new partnership between our federal government and our private arts institutions called the Global Cultural Initiative. This initiative will help more of our nation's art and artists tell America's story to the world. And of course, by welcoming more foreign art and artists here to America we will help our fellow citizens to better understand the people and places beyond our borders.

Tonight I am honored to help you celebrate one of our great achievements in cultural diplomacy. The historic partnership of American diplomacy and that uniquely American form of music ... jazz.

I especially wish I could be with you this evening to listen to the music of Dizzy Gillespie in the company of the incomparable Quincy Jones, ably supported by Shelly Berg and the USC Thornton Jazz Orchestra.

Fifty years ago Dizzy Gillespie carried America's music and America's story to the people of the world, sharing the hopes and ideas that make us who we are, Americans.

Thank you for the opportunity to be a part of this very special evening.