

# Global is Local

June 7, 2024

MARK PEMBERTON: I'm going to introduce myself quickly. I'm Mark Pemberton, I am a freelance consultant in the orchestral sector, but I was for 15 years chief executive of the Association of British Orchestras, the UK equivalent of the League. Think of me as Simon Woods's mini-me. And that's an accurate description. So I'm here today thanks to the League, thank you, with an esteemed panel of speakers.

I've got here Blake Anthony Johnson, president and chief executive of the Chicago Sinfonietta. Jessica Lustig, founder and managing director of 21C Media Group. And we're very honored to be — have here with us Dr. Ahmad Sarmast, founding director of the Afghan National Institute of Music. Now, you may notice there is a chair missing. Now, sadly, Matias Tarnopolsky of the Philadelphia Orchestra can no longer join us. We're having to do a bit of improvisation, so do forgive us if things don't quite go according to plan. But we are improvising a way in which we can bring in what he was going to say.

Now, you've had a description of this topic. We're talking about how orchestras are engaging in partnerships in their communities, on tour, and in the humanitarian arena, to maximize the power of music as a human right, and a shared language. And we're going to look today at how you can deepen your orchestra's commitment to music diplomacy, from inspiring leaders that are crossing political boundaries, cultivating international partnerships, and celebrating the cultural diversity of music making here in the US and across the globe.

This is in line with our conference theme of dream big. So we're going to go big today. Usual format. We're going to hear from our panelists, have a conversation. But of course, we want to hear from you on — from the floor, what you have to say about this crucial topic. So I'm going to start with a quick introduction. What are we talking about here?

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This is cultural diplomacy. This is the kind of standard definition from the Institute for Cultural Diplomacy. Effectively, it's about influencing. And influencing through public sector, private sector, or civil society. Orchestras, of course, fit into this definition. You are all about exchanging ideas, values,

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traditions, culture, and identity. And about promoting interests. So you're very much in that. And as we're going to discuss today, that concept of cultural diplomacy can be directed both outwards onto the international stage, and inwards towards the communities that you serve.

You may also have heard this term, soft power. This adds a more political dimension. Soft power is a tool used by governments to complement hard power. That is the use of military and economic means to influence the behavior interests of other political bodies. Now we're not in that business. We're in the business of being soft, and helping influence behaviors in other places, and creating those international connections. Our governments get terribly excited about soft power. And there is actually an annual global soft power index published by Brand Finance. And which country is in first place in the league table of soft power? The USA. There you go.

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But let's unpack what that means in practice. This is how they quantify placing USA in first position. And what you might see is USA scores very high on familiarity. Everybody's heard of the USA. It scores quite highly in various areas around influence. And it's third place for culture and heritage, which is quite pretty high score. But not so well on reputation and people and values. This may be because of a global perception that the USA has become more polarized, dysfunctional, and closing itself off from the world. So we need to monitor that you don't lose your position in first place through some of the global and national issues that are swirling around at a very challenging time for the world.

But now like little — another little shout out for the country that comes second. And that is UK. Go UK. Who knew? Again, its high scores come from familiarity and reputation. The world has heard of this country, however small it might be. But it's only fifth place for culture and heritage. So you do better than the UK, in spite of the UK having many, many centuries of heritage as part of its ethos as a nation. But this is where I want to put in a word of warning about how politicians manipulate soft power.

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The UK is in the midst of a bitterly contested election with a general election next month after 14 years of a conservative government. And the Conservative Party decided to use its second place in the global soft power index for political point scoring. And they put out this social media post. And it massively backfired for some very simple reasons. If you look at the images used, the container ship bottom right, that's owned by Switzerland. The fighter jet top left, that's an American warplane. The

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England soccer team bottom left lost — that's taken at a match against Brazil, which they lost that night. And also the UK is actually combined of Four Nations. The Scots, Welsh, and Northern Irish were furious that it conflated England with the UK.

But most embarrassing of all, it had to be withdrawn, because you cannot use an image of the king for political purposes without his permission. So that was a political blunder. Which leads on to, shortly, a little more analysis of this political problem of what do we mean by cultural diplomacy. Just in culture and heritage, just to know that Italy is actually top of the tree when it comes to culture and heritage. But as I said, USA is pretty — in pretty good. Now, let's look at cultural diplomacy in action. Here is one of the most famous examples from which was the visit by the New York Philharmonic to North Korea in 2008.

[VIDEO PLAYS; MUSIC]

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MARK: But that's great. I mean, the North Koreans don't look like fun loving people. But clearly there was value in that cultural exchange and bringing an American orchestra into the diplomatic arena. But the word of warning is there's a fine line between cultural diplomacy and cultural imperialism. Because here is another example, which I think we might all feel rather uncomfortable about, particularly with what is happening currently in Ukraine.

[VIDEO PLAYS]

SPEAKER: Playing for Syria in Syria, the orchestra from Russia's Mariinsky Theater has staged a surprise concert in Palmyra's Amphitheater. Russian airstrikes helped force ISIL militants out of the ancient city. There were tributes to Khalid al Assad, the site's longstanding archaeologist who was beheaded by the extremists. Much of the UNESCO site was destroyed. The head of St. Petersburg State Hermitage Museum told the audience that could have been saved. Without naming names he appeared to criticize the US-led coalition. The battle went on for so long and many of the exhibits were smuggled out, he said, the extremists could have been bombed into the ground in an instant, but they weren't, while our guys weren't there back then.

Vladimir Putin addressed the audience by video link. The conductor Valery Gergiev, a prominent supporter of the Russian leader, described the concert as a protest against ISIL barbarism. In Moscow, much criticized over its Syrian policy, will be hoping that this projects Russia as a force for good. Our correspondent says a symphonic concert at the Palmyra Amphitheater was impossible until recently. The ancient city was under ISIL control, its monuments deliberately destroyed. Now,

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this leads to calls for international solidarity to restore Palmyra. Euro News on a media facility in Syria provided by the Russian Ministry of Defense. Our reporting is not subject to military control.

[VIDEO ENDS]

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MARK: So as you see, it does raise questions about where we fit in terms of soft power. Cultural diplomacy, and the dangers, risk perhaps, of being subjected to some political manipulation. So I'd now like to turn to our panel. Now, I would first — and ask them what this term cultural diplomacy means to them. I was going to turn to Matias Tarnopolsky first, who, as I say, is sadly not here. So I'm going to read out something that he has sent us. And we're going to try to work out where his slides were going to fit this particular exercise. So do please bear with us as this might be a slightly clunky section of our session today.

So Matias says, "It's a real honor to be here." Well, it would have been an honor to be here and participate on the panel. And he was — would have been — was flattered to be sitting alongside such esteemed panelists. And only — sorry, he cannot be here. But this is due to some of the travel difficulties some people have been having. "I'm sure that all of us in this room today believe in the power of music to make positive change in the world on a one-to-one basis in a rehearsal room, classroom, chamber hall, or park, all on a large scale in a major concert with a massive orchestra.

"We've all seen it and experienced it somehow. And I'm sure on a fundamental level, it's why we are all here today, at this panel, at this conference, engaged in wonderful work, helping advance and connect the world through music. For some personal context, my own connection to the idea of music diplomacy or cultural exchange or people to people exchange for music has four main chapters.

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"My involvement when I worked at the CSO in bringing Daniel Barenboim and Edward Said's West-Eastern Divan Orchestra to Chicago in 2001, their first visit to the US, and subsequent service on the board of the American organization for several years. And my role whilst working performance as a residency to Pyongyang, North Korea of the New York Philharmonic in 2008, which we've just seen. And his main focus today, the Philadelphia Orchestra's relationship since 1973 with China, an endeavor my colleagues and I together have been involved in since 2018 when I started there.

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“On October 20th, 2023, as an ensemble of the Philadelphia Orchestra, to prepare to travel to China to mark the 50th anniversary of the orchestra's historic 1973 visit to China, we received a letter from President Biden. He said warm greetings, thanked us for our dedication, and noted importantly, that music moves us forward, helping transcend language, overcome geography, and unite cultures around the world. Thank you for your dedication to spreading goodwill and friendship through the power of music. The tireless work of organizations like the Philadelphia Orchestra is part of the reason I've never been more optimistic about the future of our nation and our world.”

And President Xi responded in a — in a letter to Matias. “Half a century ago, the orchestra's historic China tour marked a thaw in China-US cultural exchange, which was a very important part of the normalization of the two countries' diplomatic relations.” He noted the 12 subsequent visits by the Philadelphia Orchestra and its continuing role in China-US ties. So that's amazing, these two global presidents taking such a keen interest in the work of the American orchestra in helping build those connections and forge more — a healthier relationship between these two great countries.

Now, Matias has stressed the Philadelphia Orchestra is not a political organization. It's about music. They do not participate in diplomatic processes. Rather, they create an environment and atmosphere around music where dialogue becomes a little more possible. They build bridges through music. And it's noticed by — the New York Times has noted this. So it has really helped put the orchestra on the global map. The key is committing to collaboration on the human level, to do so humbly, avoid institutional glorification, and listen, and always be true to your values.

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On there — so this — there they are in 1973. And there they are in 2023. So it's — this has been many decades of — of connections, that has managed to survive in spite of the occasional difficulty diplomatically between the two countries. On their visit to China last fall, they worked and created projects with the China National Symphony Orchestra, Shanghai Philharmonic, and the China Music Conservatory, among others. Venice arranged for masterclasses to ensemble projects, side by side concerts, sharing the stage at the Shanghai International Arts Festival.

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So Matias firmly believes in the idea of music as a democratizing force for good. “We're all equal in front of the music, and the power of the shared experience of the concert, the power — and the shared experience of the concert hall. We're all equal before the music and something extraordinary

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can happen when we sit next to each other and listen to music together. But cultural diplomacy, a term sometimes weighted by unrealistic expectations, can be as crucial and relevant at home as it is abroad.”

So he wants to flag up the — opening the Marian Anderson Hall, which is actually the reason he cannot be here, because he has to be at that opening. This has been thanks to inspirational leadership, which has been crucial to the orchestra. They've announced the rededication of their home at the Kimmel Center called previously — now Verizon Hall — as of tomorrow, it will be called the Marian Anderson Hall. Named for the great 20th century contraltos, civil rights icon, and Philadelphian. And I have to credit a wonderfully selfless act of philanthropy by Richard Worley and his wife, Leslie, their decision to give a \$25 million naming gift and place the name of a great Black musician on their hall will certainly inspire additional and always much needed given.

“What it will also do is continue and amplify the core philosophy of the Philadelphia Orchestra, that music is for all, and that all can and should be part of the musical journey on stage, and as part of the audience. As our musical world evolves in the 21st century, in all its challenging complexity, this is an extraordinary and exciting act of cultural diplomacy.” So Matias is speaking out there on the thing I said earlier that cultural diplomacy is both the work they do in China, but also the work they do in Philadelphia. So that is — was Matias’s presentation.

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And I was going to then extend this question to the others around what does cultural diplomacy mean to them. I'm delighted that Dr. Sarmast is going to go on first and speak about the work of the Afghan National Youth Orchestra. So over to you.

AHMAD SARMASTA: Good morning, everyone. It's a great pleasure to be standing here today and to share with you the experience on how we've been using music and education as a source, or as a powerful force for culturally engaging Afghanistan on a local level, on the regional, and also worldwide. I'm not speaking here much about Afghanistan National Institute of Music and its objective. Tomorrow will be a big hit bigger presentation. We'll be speaking about Afghanistan National Institute of Music and its fate and where we're standing today.

Today, I will be focusing mainly on how we use arts, culture, education, and music in Afghanistan, for better understanding between Afghan people themselves, between Afghanistan and the regions which have been surrounded Afghanistan, but also, on a bigger picture, to get Afghanistan out of

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isolation and connect Afghanistan with the rest of the world. I'll — briefly, we'll be focusing all those areas on the — on the local level.

Afghanistan has been divided badly during this last 50 years of civil war. A number of changes of the government system in Afghanistan. Politician, even the political parties of Afghanistan have been based on ethnicity rather than on national interest. And therefore, there was a big rift between African children and African youths and African people. So what we've been doing to education and music, we've been facilitating dialogue between Afghanistan children, by the youths of Afghanistan and young people in Afghanistan, through education and making music together.

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The program of the Afghanistan National Institute of Music for us based for everyone. Regardless of their gender, ethnicity, social circumstances. We did our best to create an equal opportunity for everyone. But through this, and also through education, as well as through music making, we created a platform for our students to learn about respecting each other's differences. Engaging in dialogue, respecting each other's differences, but also living in peace and harmony. And therefore, I strongly believe that when 50 students with many different backgrounds, ethnic, linguistic, and religious background are sitting in orchestra, listening to each other, playing for each other, supporting each other, creating a piece, creating a piece of beauty. Through these differences, they can also learn that outside of the orchestra, we can also support each other, talk to each other, respect each other's differences, and live in peace and harmony.

That was not just to connect Afghanistan, but also Afghanistan have been very badly the — badly dealing with the woman. And after the collapse of the first time of the Taliban, still Afghan women have been in very disadvantaged positions. But through music, education, and involving girls and women of Afghanistan into music program, we've been also trying to not only contribute to gender equality in music in Afghanistan, but also to — to the cause of Afghan women and to the empowerment of women in Afghanistan to give them an equal rights, and to make sure that they are equally presented in all aspects of life in society.

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Therefore, when we began our program, we began with only one girl, but by the time the Taliban returned, one-third of the school community were made of girls. And we had an all-woman orchestra entirely made of women of Afghanistan and conducted by two young female conductors.

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Afghanistan in the last 15 years enormously suffered because of the regional struggle between the regional powers. And Afghanistan, due to its geopolitical situation, has always attracted huge interest. For centuries. But in the last 50 years, also in the delivery between regional powers, Afghanistan was also in the center, and Afghanistan turned into a proxy, or was used in a proxy war between different regional powers.

What we've been doing through the Afghanistan National Institute of Music, we've been traveling to the neighboring countries. We've been playing side by side concert with local musicians. We've been inviting musician from those countries to come and to work with our students, and also to play with our faculty for the community. And our message was that each time we've been going to these countries to take a message that the best way to move forward for our nations is to live in peace and harmony. And the best way is to support each other and to send message of peace, brotherhood, and equality to the neighboring countries like Pakistan.

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Pakistan all the time been harboring radicals who've been destroying Afghanistan. But we went to Pakistan with a big concert tour. To call on the Pakistani people, on the Pakistan government, let's live in peace and harmony, and they — let's make music together, let's get engaged in cultural dialogue. Let's make a better place, Afghanistan and Pakistan, for our people, through dialogue, not through confrontation. So we traveled to many countries, and we keep still even that we are not operating in Afghanistan, but still we are traveling to neighboring countries with the same messages.

Stop supporting the Taliban. Respect the Afghan people. Respect the women rights of Afghanistan. So we continuously doing — using the soft power of music, arts, and culture for intercultural dialogue between Afghanistan and its neighboring countries. Afghanistan was very much isolated since the invasion of Afghanistan by Russian, then civil war, the emergence of the Taliban. And Afghanistan was totally isolated and separated from the world. When the Taliban regime collapsed in 2001, it was then also that Afghanistan should be connected with the rest of the world.

There was a lot of interest. There was armies from all over the world in Afghanistan, supporting Afghan people to move towards a democratic society. But we could not build that democratic society without respecting the cultural rights of the Afghan people. So that was the first cornerstone of our activities. While we've been providing a state of arts, music education to our students, but at the same time, we've been trying to get engaged not only in the regional and local, but also worldwide.

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For that purpose, we've been not only traveling, not only playing concert in the prestigious concert venues within — in 11 years of our existence in Afghanistan, but we also traveled to 47 countries. We played at Carnegie Hall and Kennedy Center, we played at the World Economic Forum in the — in Davos. But we played in many countries. We traveled with small and larger orchestras. But everywhere we've been going, we've been going to show the positive side of Afghanistan. The changes that occurred in Afghanistan after the collapse of the Taliban. The changes to be supported.

This did not let — continue long, because soon Taliban were back brought to power. As the geopolitical games have been changed, interest in Afghanistan has been changed also. A terrorist group that have been created back in 1990s, in 2021 that project has been reactivated in Afghanistan and the Taliban come back into power. I will not be speaking about how we run away from Afghanistan, where we are right now, but are we focusing what we do today also in terms of people to people, and cultural diplomacy to attract attention to Afghanistan.

If in the past we've been talking only the showing the positive side of Afghanistan to the global status to the world. But today, when we are traveling with the Afghan Youth Orchestra, Afghan Women Orchestra, small ensemble Afghanistan National Institute of Music, we go with a different message, with a different mission. Not only to safeguard Afghan music, not only to share the beauty of Afghan music with the rest of the community, but we're also using the power of music to call — to quote or to bring to the attention of the international community what's happening today in Afghanistan.

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What's happened with the music and musician of Afghanistan. What's happened with the women of Afghanistan. So we've got a different mission today. Since our departure from Portugal, we played in many, many prestigious concert venues with the same message of positivity, and also to send positive messages of hope, inspiration, and resilience to the Afghan people and to the international community. We played in prestigious venues, and we will keep playing in the coming weeks and coming months.

And before I conclude my presentation, I also would like to note that in continuation of our — of our musical diplomacy between Afghanistan and the international community today, though we are not located in Afghanistan, we very soon will be traveling to the United States where the Afghan Youth Orchestra will be playing side by side by some member of the European Union at Carnegie Hall. And this concert will be played by a concert in Kennedy Center, and I wish that we will be meeting some of you or all of you there.

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[APPLAUSE]

MARK: Thank you, Dr. Sarmast, that is absolutely inspirational. And I think it absolutely puts it in context.

AHMAD: If I may add on only one more word. We've been not only traveling, but we've been also inviting musician from around the world to come to play and to teach in Afghanistan. I've just seen a very dear friend of mine, John Ferguson, in the audience. That's — he traveled to Afghanistan with American Voices with the jazz orchestra in 2009 and in 2010 and 2011. We had Afghanistan National Institute of Music to host him for teaching and running masterclasses.

MARK: Thank you so much. And as I say, totally inspiring. And we'll come back and have a conversation about certain aspects of what you said. That was great. But now Jessica is going to talk about her work, please.

[0:30:10.2]

JESSICA LUSTIG: Can you hear me? Thank you for having me, League, and especially Heather and Simon. Really happy to be here, talking about something near and dear to my heart, cultural diplomacy. Just a few words about cultural diplomacy at 21C Media Group. First of all, 21C Media Group is a cultural consulting and communications company. We have been working for 24 years, working with artists and institutions of all kinds within classical music. Our diplomacy work started in 2005, when we were invited to work as cultural consultants at the World Economic Forum.

And just to set the stage, in Davos, these are the things that I saw and that inspired our company to do this work. We saw the power of artists, we saw the results of bringing people together, and we saw the power of art bringing people together through commonality and creating a space without words. So witnessing that was really sort of the inspiration for why we thought that this is important work that we should do, and we've been doing it ever since. Here's a little trailer that we created about our cultural diplomacy work.

[VIDEO PLAYS; MUSIC]

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JESSICA: Just to give you a sense of it. Just trying to figure out how to move forward now. I think I got off track on forwarding. Here we go. So our cultural diplomacy work has sort of funneled into three areas. International cultural exchange, which I'll talk a little bit about. Domestic initiatives, which I'll mostly be talking about. And tech initiatives and collaboration, we've truly been doing every chance we get with major tech companies. This is just a select list of a couple of the projects that we've worked on over the years.

I'm going to speak about a few in depth. But just starting sort of at the bottom. I spoke a little bit about the World Economic Forum. We also have done quite a lot of work with orchestras, youth orchestras. Besides the Afghan Youth Orchestra, the Cuban American Youth Orchestra, and the Chinese American Youth Orchestra. And there were a lot of very interesting things to learn in those kinds of projects. We also worked with the Global Fund on a very interesting project, trying to highlight what's happening right now with TB and AIDS through their casting of La Boheme production from the townships. So that was a very interesting and inspiring project.

And our original big project in cultural diplomacy, besides the World Economic Forum, was the YouTube Symphony Orchestra, which really aimed to bring musicians together from all over the world through music and technology. I also don't have on this list something that we did very recently in September of this year during the UN GA week. The State Department asked us for assistance on hosting Ukrainian cultural leaders. This was a very inspiring project. We had the head of PEN Ukraine, so the Authors Guild, head of one of the major museums, and basically the cultural minister.

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And we brought them to meet various institutions in New York, mostly in the world of music, because those are people that I know, and really try to help them with some information more about preserving their cultural heritage. So this is just something that we did very recently. This is a project that we worked together with the New York Philharmonic and the Shanghai Symphony on highlighting the plight of Jews during World War II who went to the Port of Shanghai. A very little-known story and bright moment in Chinese diplomacy during World War II.

I wanted to spend a little time talking about our work with Teddy Abrams and the Louisville Orchestra. If you haven't heard about this project, I would just encourage you to do a little looking around. He had this idea quite a long time ago, the In Harmony Tour. His idea was to take the Louisville Orchestra on tour all around the state, and to some of the most disadvantaged regions. Parts of the state that hadn't seen a live symphony orchestra or didn't have a lot of experience with professional music making.

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And he's a very unique person, in that he can improvise, he can play all kinds of music, he can arrange. And he actually arranged a piece that they took around, where any of the local musicians and the different towns around Kentucky could play with the orchestra. And they played everywhere from, you know, high school auditoriums, to gymnasiums, to whatever was around in these towns. And he continues to do this work. He raised this money from the Kentucky State Legislature. And it was so successful that he just got another round of \$4.3 million.

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This, I think, is a very important project for us to think about here in the US, because it really is meant to partly address the red-blue divide. Louisville is a very blue city, and the rest of the state is quite red. He was looking for a place in this space to find some commonality between people and try to take down the tensions a little bit in the state, as well as bring the music making that they have in Louisville to places that don't normally have it. And I don't know how many of you may know Graham Parker, the CEO of the Louisville Orchestra, but he wrote to me this morning and said to make sure to say, talk to your state legislatures about getting money. It is an untapped resource. So I delivered that from the CEO of Louisville orchestra.

I also wanted to speak a little bit. Before I talk about Polyphony, I wanted to mention the work that Marin Alsop has been doing for many, many years now, in OrchKids in Baltimore. I don't know how many of you may be familiar with this program that was founded in 2005 or

'06. She created it herself, to start with money that she received from a MacArthur Award. She went to the two most disadvantaged public schools in Baltimore, in West Baltimore. Is there anyone here from Baltimore? I think it's West Baltimore.

Started with two — two classes, 40 kids, and continued the program, raising money along the way, getting state and federal money along the way. And now it's an enormous program in Baltimore. It's been going on long enough that some of the first students from that original class had been going — are going to college and even music school. So she's incredibly proud of that program and looks to and wishes for it to be emulated in other cities. She's very, very generous about her time and information about creating that project. So if there is anyone who's interested in looking at doing a pilot type program, I would say let us know and we'll put you in touch with her and the people who are currently running OrchKids.

Even though she's left the Baltimore Symphony, she's still very, very involved with that program. And it's taken very deep root, not just with the kids, but with all of the families. And it's also done a lot in

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terms of who comes to the Baltimore Symphony with her and with Jonathan Hayward. So that is a very important program that she created.

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This project is a current ongoing project. Polyphony. Galilee Chamber Orchestra. This is a school that is in Nazareth. Earlier, I think in Matias's speech they talked about the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, which is also a client of ours. That orchestra — this is a feeder for that orchestra. So this is run by two brothers, one is in Berlin, and one is in Nazareth, and they educate Palestinian Israelis, as well as Arab Israelis and Jewish Israelis together in the school, and the — there will be a small string ensemble that's actually going to come this summer and play together for — of each in the NYO USA youth orchestra program. The same — the same week that the Afghan Youth Orchestra is coming.

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So this is obviously a very, very crucial issue for everyone who is interested in what's happening in Gaza, because there are people who are using music and have been for a long time. This has been going on for a long time. This didn't just start. To bring people together to create sort of commonality and cultural understanding. And that's it. These are my two partners who work together to create the space for mutual understanding and cooperation, and really do believe that music can play a role and art can play a role when words fail. We've also seen this with visual artists, chess grandmasters, filmmakers. It's not just music. But in places where it's not about the words, it does allow people a space to come together. So thank you very much.

[APPLAUSE]

MARK: Thank you, Jessica. Brilliant, thank you. Again, bringing in that dimension around the value it brings both on the international stage, but also back home. And now finally, handing over our final speaker, Blake-Anthony. Give us your take on our topic of cultural diplomacy, please.

BLAKE-ANTHONY JOHNSON: So, good afternoon. You guys have not been to the Chicago Sinfonietta concert before. So I'll just keep trying. It's good afternoon. One more time. Good afternoon. I love it. I'm a performer, I need the energy. I love it. So my name is Blake-Anthony Johnson. I'm the president and CEO for Chicago Symphony Orchestra. I'm just going to give you a little bit of context that really informs my work, and then I'll give some definitions. I'll throw out kind of a thesis and a leading question that kind of came when they brought up this topic, and then hopefully give you some really hard tangibles to how it relates to Chicago Symphony Orchestra.  
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And then kind of close again with some kind of context that have informed to work. So this idea that global is local, and new music and diplomacy, kind of when I hear this, I'm going to talk about global is local and talk about scale quite a bit throughout this. And then this idea that new — new music, or the new music diplomacy is really around soft power, which they talked about earlier. And the idea that global sometimes actually is global and like local — and when we get into definitions, it's going to be different for every institution.

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So the context in terms of how I deal with this work. My other role, which if you follow me on LinkedIn, I kind of post the most about, is I'm chair for the City of Chicago's Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events Council. And the reason why this is kind of interesting is because Chicago has an economy roughly under 900 billion. But we don't have a dominant sector. So unlike New York, which is like 1.7 trillion, but they're heavy on finance. Or like Houston, which is around 500 billion. Chicago has about 13 or 14 formalized sectors, and the creative industry is one of them.

Because of that, it is a — it's an interesting dynamic because, for instance, Chicago has the same economy size of like Switzerland. Switzerland and we have roughly the same economy. To give you more context, like LA, a little bit more than one trillion, is much closer to like Saudi Arabia. So I only mention this because when my primary duties as chair is to really just nurture the creative industries within Chicago. So things like the film office, things like architecture, visual arts. But because Chicago, given the size of the economy, is very much still a global market.

And then the secondary duties which are not necessarily written in the legislation or ordinances of the chair, is really around the role in the mayoral office, through World Business Chicago, which is our economic agency that focuses on international business. And then sister cities. So Chicago actually has the largest citizen diplomacy kind of framework or function. There's — we have 28 sister cities, around 600 volunteers that participate in it. And there is a great group.

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But for me specifically, so scale, when I'm talking about scale, I'll start from neighborhoods. So neighborhoods to municipalities to cities, and then cities within states,. States obviously are within regions, there's regions within sovereigns, and then there's sovereigns within continents, and then continents. So that's the scale, the kind of eight that I'm going to work through. And for traditional

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soft power, so in my — my role as chair, we look at soft power through foreign policy, culture, and political values.

I should mention that culture obviously informs foreign policy. So that's kind of the direct correlation. But in terms of government, it's around foreign policy, culture, and political values. How that lives is for World Business Chicago, again, we really focus on business-to-business interactions. This idea of doing direct foreign investment, this idea of if people want to expand in United States, we're like, don't go to the coast, go to the center of America, because that's a much easier way for you to like get your market in.

And same thing for Chicago. So like when people want to expand to other countries outside of the states, we're like, well, Chicago is really the best place for you to have a headquarters, because we have the strongest kind of civic engagement outside of just New York being the best in terms of size. And so soft power for Chicago Sinfonietta, if I were kind of just the convert this a little bit, is foreign policy for us is going to be around civic engagement. So this idea of how we engage with other institutions and CBOs, community-based organizations. When we think of culture, this again, is peer to peer relationships.

So in Chicago, we have 50 wards and 77 neighborhoods. So we're really intentional about how many people can we get cross-pollinated. And then for political values, which we all have for a cultural institution, it's really just our mission statements and value statements. So that's kind of the conversion from foreign policy to civic engagement. Culture, obviously, is more or less the same, but peer to peer interactions, and then political values being our mission. So the kind of thesis statement that I had, there's obviously art for art's sake doesn't need any defense. Yet music is a universal tongue or universal language. And it communicates and articulates ideas and links people in a unique way that no other medium can.

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And so one of the questions when we were kind of prepping for this that I kept kind of reading it in my head was like in the context of global is local, the new kind of music diplomacy, and in the context of soft power and scale, like what communities or individuals can music and the arts specifically serve that no other medium can? And at least for Chicago Sinfonietta, again, this idea of art, traditional soft powers, this political values, foreign policy, and culture. For a cultural institution, it's going to be mission, civic engagement, and peer to peer engagement.

For our — for us, for Chicago Sinfonietta, our operational mission, if you will, is championing equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging by creating community through bold symphonic experiences. Our aspirational mission is an orchestra in service for all of Chicago, with an asterisk being that Chicago is a global city and a unique doorway for American culture and history. How this looks in terms of our civic engagement, and again, civic engagement in this context of soft power is B to B, so businesses that other businesses, and community-based organizations and institutions.

We do things like, you know, if you go to a sports game in Chicago, you're going to see Sinfonietta. So whether it be Cubs or the White Sox or the Bulls or SS tennis or the Blackhawks, it doesn't matter. Chicago Fire, you're going to see us. When we have inaugurations in the state, you're going to see Chicago Sinfonietta. Things like, you know, one of our largest partners is Chicago Public Library. And it's just — it's really a matter of just like low hanging fruit and convenience. There is a Chicago Library branch in every single neighborhood.

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So the idea of like, when we're looking at civic engagement and what's local for us, like for us to scale up in the way that is kind of meaningful, we need partners that allow us to do that. So the public library is one of them. And then we be partner, obviously, with our government agencies as well. For culture for us, is really — again, this is kind of the peer-to-peer engagement. There's a little over 30 nationalities that exists within our orchestra on stage. And we really try to highlight that. So when people come to our events, or they come to our programs, we spend a lot of time profiling and doing storytelling to make that direct connection.

Chicago is kind of unique in the sense that it almost mirrors the population of the country in terms of demographics by percentage, with a very small variance within the city. So an orchestra that has almost 35 nationalities is pretty accurate, given that there are even more within the city. And we really try to make that connection. And then we worked with the consulate generals quite a bit. So the consulate generals, there's a lot of civic engagement, that we tried to kind of pull them in. Some of that has been like — this was cancelled during the pandemic, unfortunately, but we were supposed to be the cultural performer for the State Department at World Expo in Dubai.

There's some other kind of practical ones like just touring in general. We just finished doing an HBCU tour, which was really important to us, this idea of, again, like if you're looking at arts or you're looking at music, diplomacy as a tool, how do you build soft power? The HBCU tour was a really meaningful example for us to do it. And I'll say, I guess, because I know we're going to get to questions, what kind of gives me the framework, obviously, is the government work, because all we do is talk about soft power.

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But I would say for, you know, a lot of the artists that are in your institutions, what kind of originally started this for me was Michael Tilson Thomas, in the sense of I was getting ready for Queen Elizabeth Competition. I'm a competition baby, I'm a cellist. And I was frustrated and kind of not the most pleasant student. And he was like, "What do you really want, like, ultimately? Like, once we get done with you being on the hamster wheel?" And I was like, "You know, I don't — I can't answer that question quite yet. But I do want to be a global citizen." And he was like, "Tell me more about this." And I was just like, "You know, being on tour as a kid is kind of interesting, because you do really get to see how universal music is. And if it's used as a tool, you can get a lot of things done."

And I think when people think about equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging, they don't make their own definition. Same thing, this idea of global is local. Chicago has a lot of nationalities. So global for us really is global, but you know, Louisville is a really good example. So I love Graham and Teddy, that Commonwealth tour. My old gig was Louisville before I went to Chicago. But the idea of doing a Commonwealth tour in Louisville made a lot of sense, because we have people who are like in the mountains who have never been down to the city. We have a lot of infrastructure in terms of human infrastructure that might not exist in rural areas, but they had the same amount of culture that, you know, any other part of the state has.

And so just really redefining scale has been really important. But this idea of kind of building soft power, again, for us, for a cultural institution, is really around the idea of focusing on mission, focusing on civic engagement, specifically with institutions and community-based organizations, and then really just focusing on the peer to peer.

[APPLAUSE]

MARK: That's absolutely brilliant. Thank you. So we've learned quite widely here around the international dimension, the global, the local, or should we say "glocal." And I want — we obviously do want to hear from you. So we've got — there are a series of questions that we've had posed to us for you to think about. And then we're going to have a quick conversation. I'm expecting people to want to leap to that microphone, and give us a contribution from the floor.

But some key questions for us are, how do cultural diplomatic efforts enhance your organization's value proposition at home? What does it bring to your organization? What does it look like domestically? And what steps can you take to grow those connections with cultural partners

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internationally, and in your location? And what's the role of repertoire? What sort of music should you be playing, that extends your reach, and makes you more of a cultural diplomat in your work? So that's the sort of framework for questions.

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But while you're thinking about your response, I wondered if any of you wants to add anything. I know that Matias did have a response to my first question, which was that home audiences are invested in the success of their orchestra, and in the good that they do. Most crucially, they like an orchestra to have a moral dimension. And its international endeavors are a projection of hometown civic pride. And those audiences, as I say, have an ethical, moral approach to their life, and value their contribution towards a better world, and they expect the same of their local institutions.

So it's crucial to embed those concepts within your organization's strategy and ambitions. So that's the starting point. If any of you'd like to add anything around those questions around who — you know, identity, value, repertoire? Yes, please Ahmad.

AHMAD: To the first question, how our international engagement give us credibility. So that was significantly important that I would like to note that here. When we established Afghanistan National Institute of Music, and also the Afghan Youth Orchestra. At the very beginning, there was a lot of hesitation within the community, because we've been promoting music education promoting Western music, musical diversity in Afghanistan in a post-Taliban — Taliban one. So Taliban managed their first round to brainwash our generation.

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So it was significantly important and hard for us to break the ice, to change the attitude of the locals. But also Afghanistan National Institute of Music orchestras began to traveling outside Afghanistan. And when the news was coming in, that the broadcasting was coming in, slowly, it broke the ice and gave us credibility, and people began to appreciate what we were doing. It's not only for us, but it's important for the country, and we're showing a different Afghanistan that people wants the world to see.

So that level of international engagement played a significant role in giving us local credibility. But also in terms of repertoire, because Western classical music is not very popular in Afghanistan, because especially in a time that music was not there. Civil war. So many people are not familiar with, what's a symphony? What's a quartet or what's an opera? So for us, it was also what we've been

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promoting, musical diversity. It was in a way important to use the language and the tools that are accepted and understanding to the community.

And therefore, when we've been playing, for example, a Western classical piece, there was always a new arrangement. A new arrangement, which has been incorporating in an orchestra, in a symphony orchestra, also Afghan local musical instruments. So the use of musical instruments in Western classical music made it much more acceptable to the community, and much easier to digest that. So our repertoire was made of local, but also international. That was part of our commitment to promoting musical diversity, but through a local language.

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MARK: That's great, because I've — fantastic response. And I've gone quite widely across the world attending conferences and working with orchestras globally. And something I have heard quite often in orchestra for — is Western — bringing Western classical music to certain countries. It is the music of the colonizer. And one has to be very careful, then, as to what statement you are making about the repertoire you have chosen to bring with you. Because there are tensions within those populations around the colonizer versus the colonized. And governments thinking that they should be focusing their efforts and funding on traditional music, and not on Western classical music, which is perhaps the music of previous — considered to be music of the oppressor. So there's — these are very delicate conversations that have to be had.

AHMAD: But today, I strongly believe in Afghanistan. The Afghanistan National Institute of Music did not see Western classical music as a music of colonialism. So we saw it as part of the cultural heritage of the world, that the people of Afghanistan has all the right also to be engaged in this music, and also to learn about it, and also to be able to listen to it. So, and also to use the achievements of the Western classical music for the betterment of Afghan music and preservation of Afghan music. So, for us, it was not the music of oppressors. For us, it was part of a world musical heritage, to which Afghanistan, Afghan children, and Afghans youth has also the right to have access and also to practice it and to learn it.

MARK: Brilliant. Blake-Anthony, Jessica, anything you wanted to add in?

[0:57:47.9]

BLAKE-ANTHONY: Sure. I mean, on the notion of repertoire, I was looking for papers, because I was like, I know I wrote down at least one quote about this. But it's the Carnegie quote. Remember that a [520 8th Avenue, Suite 2005, New York, NY 10018](https://www.carnegiehall.org/520-8th-Avenue-Suite-2005-New-York-NY-10018)

person's name, it's who that person, the sweetest and most important sound in any language. And so, you know, Chicago Sinfonietta, we do a lot of commissioning. We obviously — we program a lot of females and a lot of people of color.

But I think, you know, like, we still have the canon or traditional canon, if you will. There are a lot of ways for someone to hear their name, besides just the composer onstage being female, or it being a Black composer. Like before you even get to the concert experience, there's a lot of communications and storytelling that — just shared human experiences, that they can hear their name. I think, obviously, in the United States, there's no way to like not — when you're talking about equity, diversity, inclusion, belonging, not bring up race.

But I just also feel like it can be unnecessary, like narrow way of thinking about all the other people that you're trying to reach with music, because it really is universal. So I was speaking with — I don't remember — yesterday, as you know, we have a very large concert hall. It has 3,300 seats. And one of the things, they're like, oh my god, the world is ending. But I'm like but think of it another way. What can you do in a concert hall that has 3,300 seats that you can never do in a standard 2,200 seat theater?

So for us, it means we can have sound jackets for sensory, we can have braille programs, we can have a sensory room. I mean, like there's all these other people that we can bring into the concert experience that we wouldn't really be able to in a smaller hall that allows us to like let these people hear their name. If you know — if you only have — like, I have nothing against MLK concerts, we have one, but I'm like, you know, when you do a women's month or a Black month, and then that's the only time you deal with that population, it's really just like a festival. It's not like ingrained with the institution.

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And so I think, you know, within the limitations of like the music is what it is, what are the other touch points that really allow people to feel seen, that they feel that they're a part of that experience. And you know, in our mission it literally says champion equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging by creating community through bold symphonic experiences. The experience part, we actually have a lot of control over it, making it feel like, oh, this repertoire is for me as well. But it's — it's a lot easier, I think, to go that way than trying to erase the last 400 years of the field. [LAUGHING]

MARK: I'm very keen to hear from the floor. Is there anybody who wants to make a contribution this around what this all means for your organization? What's — anything you want to add? Yes, do please. The microphone is there on the stand.

JOHN FERGUSON: John Ferguson with American Voices. We're not an orchestra. We're an international cultural diplomacy, and my favorite word, engagement organization. It's great to see my old friend, my young old friend, Dr. Ahmad Sarmast, here. We've worked together many years ago in Afghanistan. I was very inspired by what we heard at the opening speech yesterday with the challenge for composers to involve composition in the orchestral programs. And I think Gabriela left out maybe one word, to do something useful for composers. And this is what I would like to say about cultural diplomacy.

Whatever you're planning, I hope it would be useful to people abroad or international communities within your own community. For example, American Voices has run a youth orchestra program in Iraq for 18 summers. And we've gotten to the point where we're seeing the students of our original students coming into our program. So we've been able to see, you know, lives transformed, and life trajectories transformed as well. So I would — this would be — I'd be very interested in hearing all of you either now or, you know, grab me later, or my colleague to hear about what your plans are for international cultural diplomacy.

[1:02:14.9]

If you're working, say, with orchestras in your sister city relationships, or have special relationships developed. But I think performances are wonderful, but digging in and creating an academy program, or some kind of online training program with composers in another country, something that is really useful, that shares knowledge, that's a long term mentorship, that's of long term use to international audiences avoids perception of colonialism, and I guess you could say white savior syndrome, which is something I think we have to be very careful about in international cultural diplomacy. We will be teaching a two-week course on this at University of South Carolina next summer, if anyone is interested in going deep into this subject. So thank you very much.

MARK: Thank you very much. Anyone else? Like really, you know, we want to hear from you about what this means for your organization. Other than that, I'll just turn to the panel and just get any immediate responses. I think it's an interesting question around, what does home mean for you now, Dr. Sarmast? We talked about the civic pride of home, but where are you at home? Or if Afghanistan is still really — you were exiled from your home.

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[1:03:40.8]

AHMAD: I'm originally from Afghanistan. But anywhere where the rights of my children, where the freedom of expression, where is the opportunities for young Afghans to chase their dreams, that's the place that we can call home. We were forced to leave Afghanistan. But today we are based in Portugal. We try our best to make Portugal our new home while we are still committed to our origins, and we will do everything to create an opportunity to return back one day to Afghanistan. But for the time being, Portugal is our home. And we do our best to be useful and to contribute to the cultural and diversity of culture in Portugal while we're still there.

MARK: Great. And Jessica, I want to just bring you in, because I think that there is an interesting dimension here too. We just — obviously the contribution just from the floor, about it's no longer really about just going on tour. It's what you do, the partnerships that you build, the added value around being in an — away from home, and the benefits of being back home. Anything you wanted to add?

JESSICA: Well, it's also a little bit about what you learn when people come here, right? I'll give you two examples I was thinking about from the youth orchestras — youth orchestra experiences. They were both very different. The Cuban American Youth Orchestra, I mean, there's so many greatly gifted kids in — in Cuba, and they're in such need of instruments and everything that has to do with making music, the music itself. I had the opportunity to speak with Paquito D'Rivera about doing something with these students.

And he gave me a very strong response, which was no. And the reason was because he doesn't want to lend his name to the current regime. He said he's absolutely happy to work with anybody who's in the United States but does not want to go to Cuba and work with them. So that was really eye-opening for me, because you think, you know, if you're an orchestra, and you want to invite someone to do this kind of music with collaborators, that they're going to be willing, but there can be sensitivities.

[1:06:00.9]

So I'll put that out there. And then the other thing that I would just point out from the Chinese American Youth Orchestra, was that that orchestra, it only happened one time in the US, this particular orchestra, and it was coached by major principals of the major orchestras. And they were all quite shocked about the fact that the string players, almost all of them had never played in an

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orchestra. They were playing like the Dvorak New World Symphony. Something very, very standard repertoire. But every single one of the string players was being trained to be a soloist.

So the main work that the principals of these major orchestras had to do was to teach them how to be a section. So that was to me extremely eye-opening in terms of how the music has taught in conservatories around the world, and why it's different, you know, in a place like — I mean, every kid who's a string player who goes to conservatory here in the US has been playing in a youth orchestra since they were a kid. They know how to be in a section, they know how to bow as a section, they know how to behave in a rehearsal.

And that — those were actually the kind of skills that were taught. So I would just say that there's a lot to learn from how others do it and how people who are actually in that community who might be performing in America feel, and to just not make assumptions and see what you can learn.

MARK: Blake-Anthony, were you trying to catch my eye? Yes, please do come to the microphone.

SANDY CHOI: I feel like we're on the same wavelength. You both sort of addressed this a little bit. I'm Sandy Choi from DC Youth Orchestra program. And we are actually taking our youth orchestra on tour to Europe this summer. And I've been thinking a lot about not just what we're bringing on tour to the cities where we're performing, but what our students are bringing back home. What we're bringing back home to our community and what that value is, how we communicate that, and how we grow from that experience. So I was just wondering if any of you could just talk about that a little bit more?

[1:08:04.5]

BLAKE-ANTHONY Yeah. The League of American Orchestras, they had a delegation that came with our last tour, which was cool. And part of that experience was actually documenting the tour, because I think when people think of an orchestra on tour, they think we're just going to play in the hall. And I'm like, no, it's like way more connection points. So I think for us, for musicians — obviously, I'm a cellist. So it's like, for musicians, part of touring too is this idea of like it is a chance to also remind the organization like what their — your principles are. I found it really interesting for our orchestra when went on tour that they on their own volition spent a lot of time understanding the origins of the institution.

The name of our tour was actually called Homecoming. So one of the questions was, what's your definition of home? And I was like, well, it's not really a place, but it's a verb. And how we create home  
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is through peer-to-peer connections. And, you know, whether that be through the, you know, education programs that we had on tour, or whether it be, you know, the workshops. I mean, there's so many — the concert itself was just a culminating event, kind of like the party. But the tour was this soft power, this idea of like, do they really understand who we are fundamentally and outside of just playing a concert?

MARK: Great. Well, sadly, I've just had the international language for wrap up. So we are drawing to a close. I wanted to ask each of my panelists, just in 30 seconds, a takeaway for our audience. What is your diplomatic takeaway from our discussion today? So Dr. Sarmast.

AHMAD: What I learned today from — especially from your presentation about the definition of cultural diplomacy, and also the power of music, it's not only the value that we shared, but there was a lot of new ideas that I got here about the cultural diplomacy, people to people engagement, and orchestral practices, and its meaning.

MARK: Brilliant. Jessica?

JESSICA: My takeaway is that music can create space for people who are not aligned in any other area to align.

MARK: Blake-Anthony?

[1:10:11.8]

BLAKE-ANTHONY: It's this quote, this idea of ideas. New people, like flowers, need bees, no matter how brilliant or colorful. Others must work to spread them, or they'll die. And I think for cultural diplomacy, this idea of like use it as a tool to — the universal language to get other things done.

MARK: And my takeaway for you all is, we are all diplomats. And it's crucial about — and this is so important now in a world that is very divided, and where there are serious challenges around cost of living, global conflicts, and — and the future of the planet. We all have this moral responsibility, but we're all incredibly good at it. So go forth, be diplomatic. And I wish you well. And I look forward to hearing Dr. Sarmast's keynote speech tomorrow afternoon. So make sure you're there for the closing session. Thank you all very much for coming. Thank you, my panel.



[APPLAUSE]

### END OF TRANSCRIPT ###