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## CULTURAL DIPLOMACY THROUGH MUSIC: EVALUATING THE ROLE OF EMBASSIES AND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN INTERCULTURAL ARTS PROGRAMMING

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### Abstract

*This study examines the role of embassies and educational institutions in advancing cultural diplomacy through music, focusing on the Béla Bartók Memorial Concert held in Ghana. By analysing the collaborative efforts of the Embassy of Hungary, the University of Ghana's Department of Music, and Healthy-Minds International School, the research highlights how intercultural arts programming fosters mutual understanding, empathy, and shared cultural creation. Employing a qualitative case study approach with interviews, observations, and document analysis, the paper reveals that music serves as a dynamic medium for transcultural dialogue and pedagogical diplomacy. The findings emphasise the importance of relational and participatory diplomacy, where cultural exchange is co-created rather than unidirectional, and demonstrate the educational and diplomatic impact of such partnerships in promoting global citizenship and soft power. The study advocates for sustainable intercultural collaborations as vital infrastructures for peacebuilding and international cooperation.*

**Keywords:** Cultural diplomacy, intercultural arts programming, music education, soft power, relational diplomacy

### 1. Introduction

Cultural diplomacy has emerged as a powerful tool in international relations, offering a unique approach to promote understanding and cooperation among nations. Among the various forms of cultural

diplomacy, music stands out as a particularly effective medium for bridging cultural divides and promoting dialogue. The deployment of cultural diplomacy through music and collaborative music programmes is an expression of soft power (Nye, 2004). Soft power contrasts with hard power, which is characterised by the use of coercive tools such as the military force, threats of invasion, and economic sanctions by a state to get other state(s) to behave in ways they prefer, soft power is prime on persuasion through the exchange of ideas. Focusing on the Béla Bartók Memorial Concert, co-organised by the Embassy of Hungary in Ghana, the Department of Music at the University of Ghana, and Healthy-Minds International School, this research evaluates the effectiveness of embassies and educational institutions in implementing intercultural arts programming. McConnel et al. (2021) explained that embassies and educational institutions play pivotal roles in orchestrating and facilitating intercultural arts programmes, leveraging the transformative potential of music to advance diplomatic objectives and promote intercultural competence. Additionally, Canabate (2019) points out that these institutions, acting as key conduits for cultural exchange, are uniquely positioned to curate and disseminate artistic expressions that reflect the values, traditions, and aspirations of their respective nations.

The Department of Music at the University of Ghana has established numerous international programmes in collaboration with various countries and embassies in Ghana, such as Hungary, Iceland, Israel, Iran, the United States, and Germany. These partnerships, which dovetail the push for the internationalisation of higher education, encourage the integration of languages and cultures, making it crucial for students to acquire the skills necessary to function effectively in professional environments with a multicultural perspective and comprehend the elements that boost their productivity and development. How does collaboration between embassies and higher education institutions promote cultural diplomacy? Using the Béla Bartók Memorial Concert as a case study, this paper underscores music's exceptional capacity to cross linguistic and cultural divides, acting as a potent means of connecting nations and fostering mutual understanding. This study investigates the diverse roles of embassies and educational institutions in promoting cultural diplomacy through music. By analysing the strategies and initiatives these organisations employ, this research offers insights into how intercultural arts programming can further diplomatically goals and enhance international relations.

The remainder of this paper is divided into six sections. The next section discusses the theoretical framing of this research, followed by the methodology. The subsequent section provides detailed information on our selected case: the Béla Bartók Memorial Concert. We then present our analysis and findings, followed by a discussion. The final section concludes the paper.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

In framing our study of the role of embassies and educational institutions in intercultural arts programming using music, we adopted a cultural diplomacy lens. According to Cummings (2009, p. 1), cultural diplomacy is “the exchange of ideas, information, art, and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples to foster mutual understanding.” Falling within the broader constructivist tradition, where states in the international system create their social reality through the exchange of thoughts and ideas (Jackson, Sørensen, and Møller 2022), cultural diplomacy is conceptualised as an aspect of a state’s soft power. According to Nye (2004, p. x), the concept of soft power is “the ability to get what you (a country) want(s) through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country’s culture, political ideals, and policies.” This type of power emphasises a country’s ability to attract and co-opt rather than coerce. As a crucial source of soft power, culture manifests in several ways, including literature, art, education, music, drama, and food. It has been argued that culture is a powerful tool for shaping international preferences and building long-term relationships. Consequently, cultural diplomacy involves the deployment of cultural resources to accomplish foreign policy objectives (Clarke, 2020; Einbinder, 2013). In the context of international relations, cultural diplomacy is increasingly viewed as a strategic tool for peacebuilding and conflict resolution, shaping preferences, and building alliances.

As one of the many manifestations of culture, music can serve as a bridge between cultures, enabling emotional connections and shared experiences even in the absence of a common language. It has been argued that music can be used as a tool for cultural diplomacy to enhance global intercultural cooperation and communication (Einbinder, 2013; Prévost-Thomas & Ramel, 2018). In the 1950s, for instance, to counter Soviet propaganda, the United States designated a group of musicians as Jazz Ambassadors who travelled widely to spread American culture (Leon Robbin Gallery, 2024).

Institutions such as embassies and universities are key actors in cultural diplomacy. They serve as platforms for organising concerts, artist exchanges and educational programmes that promote intercultural understanding. According to Einbinder (2013), non-state actors, including educational institutions and NGOs, are particularly effective in conducting cultural diplomacy as a “two-way street,” engaging in mutual learning rather than advancing narrow national interests. The Festival of Embassies in Prague happens every year and brings together countries and their ambassadors to share their culture, give out food, and use it as a way to do public diplomacy (Pantoja 2023). Such events are held internationally and at the bilateral level within countries, where embassies and high commissions host cultural exchange events. Isar (2018) argues that institutions mediate cultural exchange by shaping the frameworks within which culture is produced, interpreted and circulated. These institutions also play a role in legitimising certain cultural forms over others, which raises important questions about representation and power in intercultural programmes. In this study, we present a partnership between institutions of higher education and embassies in Ghana using music as a tool of cultural diplomacy. The interaction emphasises the relational and pedagogical shifts that emerged and characterised the interaction on both sides. Mutual learning was displayed in the process.

### 3. Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative case study approach to investigate how embassies and educational institutions engage in cultural diplomacy through music, focusing on the *Béla Bartók Memorial Concert*. The case study method is particularly suited for exploring complex social phenomena in real-life contexts (Yin, 2018). This allows for an in-depth understanding of the institutional, diplomatic, and educational dimensions of intercultural art programmes. Qualitative methods are particularly suited to cultural diplomacy research because they allow profound engagement with the meanings, experiences, and contexts of cultural exchanges (Arceneaux and Bier 2022).

The Béla Bartók Memorial Concert, co-hosted by the Embassy of Hungary, the Music Department of the University of Ghana, and the Healthy Mind International School, serves as the case for our study. This bilateral cultural exchange event between Ghana and Hungary celebrated the work of renowned Hungarian composer Béla Bartók and showcased Ghanaian music. This case was selected based on its relevance, accessibility, and potential to illuminate the dynamics of intercultural engagement through music education. Additionally, some of the authors of this study were part of the concert, providing a way to observe the activities firsthand.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted with embassy staff, university faculty members, and performers involved in intercultural music initiatives. These interviews provided information on institutional motivations, programme design, and participant experiences. Participant observations during rehearsals and musical events provide contextual information on the performative and relational aspects of cultural diplomacy. We conducted a document analysis

of programme materials (brochures), press releases, policy statements, media coverage, and institutional perspectives on this initiative. This triangulation of data sources enhances the credibility and depth of our findings (Denzin, 2012).

The data generated through interviews, observations, and document analysis were analysed using thematic coding following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. Codes were developed both inductively from the data and deductively, based on the theoretical framework. The analysis focused on identifying patterns across three narrative domains: institutional (organisational goals and structures), diplomatic (soft power and cultural exchange), and educational (learning outcomes and pedagogical strategies). This triangulation of narratives allows for a holistic understanding of how music functions as a tool for cultural diplomacy.

Given the intercultural nature of the research, particular attention was paid to cultural assumptions and the researchers' reflexivity. As Arceneaux and Bier (2022) argue, qualitative research on public diplomacy must account for the encoding and decoding of meaning across cultural boundaries. The researcher maintained a reflexive journal throughout the study to document their positionality, assumptions, and evolving interpretations.

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant Institutional Review Board. Participants were informed of the study's purpose, and consent was obtained prior to the data collection. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured, and the data were securely stored.



**Figure 1.** Béla Bartók Memorial Concert Flier

*The official flyer for the Béla Bartók Memorial Concert held on May 10, 2025, at Healthy-Minds International School in Madina, Accra, showcasing the collaborative event between the Embassy of Hungary in Ghana, the University of Ghana's Department of Music, and Healthy-Minds International School.*

#### 4. Background: The Béla Bartók Memorial Concert

The *Béla Bartók Memorial Concert*, held on May 10, 2025, at Healthy-Minds International School in Madina, Accra (see figure 1), represented an important collaboration between the Embassy of Hungary in Ghana, the Department of Music at the University of Ghana, and Healthy-Minds International School. The event celebrated cultural diplomacy through music and education, bringing performers, educators and diplomats together in a shared act of artistic exchange. The concert was conceived to honour Béla Bartók (1881–1945), an eminent Hungarian composer, pianist, and ethnomusicologist, whose pioneering work in collecting and systematising folk songs laid the foundation for modern ethnomusicology. Bartók’s belief that music is rooted in folk traditions and expresses the soul of people resonates strongly with Ghana’s musical heritage, where oral traditions and communal performance serve as vessels of history, spirituality, and identity (Gillies, 2019; Lampert, 2020).

This event was designed not only as a commemorative performance but also as a living dialogue between two cultures. It sought to highlight how folk-inspired art music from Hungary could meaningfully engage with Ghana’s dynamic choral and traditional music. As Schneider (2022) observes, such performances function as “*public acts of soft power*” that build mutual respect through shared creativity rather than through political rhetoric.

##### 4.1 Organisational Collaboration and Vision

The partnership between the Embassy of Hungary and the University of Ghana’s Department of Music exemplified a modern form of cultural diplomacy, combining state diplomacy with academic and community participation. According to Isar (2020), effective cultural diplomacy depends on *relational collaboration*, where exchanges are reciprocal and participatory. In this case, each partner made a unique contribution.

- The Embassy of Hungary provided diplomatic leadership, artist coordination and funding.
- The University of Ghana contributed artistic expertise, ensembles and pedagogical framing.
- The Healthy Minds International School served as a host, ensuring youth and community engagement.

This tripartite partnership aligns with the University of Ghana’s Strategic Objectives, particularly *Transformative Student Experience* and *Engagement and Partnerships*, emphasising that education extends beyond the classroom into global cultural participation.

##### 4.2 Musical Programme and Cultural Dialogue

The concert programme was carefully curated to encourage intercultural dialogue between the two countries. Hungarian works by Bartók and Zoltán Kodály were paired with traditional and contemporary Ghanaian compositions, emphasising the commonalities between the two musical worlds—modal melodies, complex rhythmic structures, and communal performance dynamics.

The selections included Bartók’s *44 Duos for Two Violins*, Kodály’s *Advent Song* and *Túrót eszik a cigány*, Bartók’s *Four Folksongs for Voice and Piano*, and excerpts from *Microcosmos*. These were performed alongside Ghanaian folk songs such as Ephraim Amu’s *Bonwire Kente*, Amakye-Boateng’s *Senyiwaa dendende*, and Newlove Annan’s *Sansakroma*, arranged for choral and orchestral presentation by the University of Ghana Choral Ensemble and Wind Orchestra. The interaction between Hungarian art music and the Ghanaian traditional repertoire established a venue for transcultural performance, where musicians reconciled phrasing, tone, and rhythm across diverse traditions (Cook, 2018). In the process, performers learned to listen

beyond stylistic boundaries, embodying what Meinhof and Triandafyllidou (2020) describe as “*transcultural dialogue in motion.*”



**Figure 2.** Department of Music Choral Ensemble  
*Photograph of the University of Ghana’s Department of Music Choral Ensemble performing at the Béla Bartók Memorial Concert, illustrating the collaborative musical engagement between Ghanaian and Hungarian artists.*

#### **4.3 Performers and Audiences**

The concert featured a blend of professional and student musicians, reflecting an educational ethos that is grounded in collaborative learning. Hungarian artists, including violinists and vocalists, performed alongside Ghanaian students and faculty members to create an ensemble that symbolises equality and partnership. This structure mirrors Schippers and Grant’s (2016) model of *ecological music exchange*, in which cultural sustainability depends on mutual learning rather than a one-sided presentation.

The audience included members of the diplomatic corps, educators, students, and music enthusiasts from Accra’s artistic community. Ambassador Tamas Feher, in his opening remarks, emphasised Bartók’s role as a cultural bridge builder and commended the partnership for translating historical friendship into contemporary artistic collaboration.



**Figure 3.** Tamas Feher, Hungarian Ambassador to Ghana, delivering his address  
*Image capturing Ambassador Tamas Feher during his opening remarks at the concert, emphasising Béla Bartók's role as a cultural bridge builder and the diplomatic significance of the event.*

Likewise, Mrs. Alipt Sanam Hari, principal of Healthy-Minds International School, expressed that the initiative represented the school's commitment to “*giving back to society through education and the arts.*” Such remarks illustrate how cultural events extend beyond aesthetics; they articulate the shared values of education, empathy, and international friendship (Ang et al., 2015).



**Figure 4.** Mrs. Alipt Sanam Hari, Principal of Healthy-Minds International School, delivering her remarks. *Photograph of Mrs. Alipt Sanam Hari addressing the audience, highlighting the school's commitment to education and the arts as a form of giving back to society.*

#### 4.4 Educational and Diplomatic Impact

From an educational perspective, concerts offer student musicians transformative experiences. It introduces them to new performance practices, interpretive styles, and cross-cultural teamwork—skills vital in today's globalised music industry. Pedagogically, the project embodied what Hess (2019) calls “*music education for social change*”—learning through collaboration, diversity, and reflection. Diplomatically, the concert strengthened Hungary–Ghana cultural relations by adding a human dimension to bilateral ties. Through co-creation rather than representation, it exemplifies what Isar (2020) terms “*relational diplomacy,*” where long-term understanding grows through shared creative labour. Such events reposition embassies as facilitators of social connectivity, rather than gatekeepers of culture.

#### 4.5 Broader Significance

In the broader context of international cultural relations, the Béla Bartók Memorial Concert demonstrated how intercultural music projects can bridge continents and history. This reaffirmed that music diplomacy is not limited to state protocols but extends into classrooms, rehearsal spaces, and communities. This integrative model, in which cultural diplomacy intersects with education, suggests a sustainable pathway for fostering empathy and global citizenship.

As Figueira (2015) notes, “*The most effective cultural diplomacy initiatives are those that create spaces of co-creation, where all participants are both learners and teachers.*” The 2025 concert stands as an example of such a practice: a coming together of artistic excellence, educational innovation, and diplomatic vision—one that continues Bartók’s own legacy of connecting people through sound.

## 5. Analysis and Findings

### 5.1 Intercultural collaboration: process and outcome

The *Béla Bartók Memorial Concert* revealed that cultural diplomacy in this context operated less as a one-time event and more as a *mutual learning process*. The collaboration between Hungarian and Ghanaian performers unfolded through rehearsals, workshops, and informal exchanges that preceded the concert. This aligns with Schippers and Grant (2016), who view intercultural music-making as an *ecological system* in which participants negotiate shared meaning over time.

During rehearsals, students and visiting artists compared rhythmic idioms and melodic phrasing across traditions. Hungarian musicians were intrigued by Ghanaian polyrhythms, while Ghanaian performers analysed asymmetrical meters and modal scales in Bartók’s duos. These acts of curiosity and adaptation echo Cook’s (2018) notion of *music as a creative practice*, a dynamic space in which analysis, performance, and social encounter are inseparable.

### 5.2 Educational Transformation and Student Experience

Students reported that intercultural engagement deepened their technical and reflective capacities. Most of them were not used to tonal choices in Hungarian music. Many described learning to “listen differently,” adjust ensemble balance, and interpret notation through culturally informed phrasing. This type of experiential learning resonates with Hess (2019), who argues that *activist music education* must expose learners to diversity, not merely as repertoire, but as *relational practice*.

From an institutional standpoint, the project achieved one of the University of Ghana’s Key Strategic Objectives: *Transformative Student Experience*. By integrating live collaboration into the curriculum, the Department of Music demonstrated how cultural diplomacy can operate as a pedagogy, cultivating empathy, adaptability, and intercultural literacy among emerging artists.

### 5.3 Embassy–University Synergy

The aftermath of the concert highlighted the importance of relational diplomacy, in which embassies and academic institutions share authority in shaping cultural programmes. The Embassy of Hungary acted not only as a sponsor but also as a co-educator, offering a historical context for Bartók’s ethnomusicological legacy and coordinating artist exchanges. Meanwhile, the University of Ghana has provided a scholarly framework and ensemble infrastructure. Isar (2020) stressed that such *co-creation between state and civil actors* transforms diplomacy from a symbolic display into participatory exchange. Thus, the concert exemplified how embassies can function as facilitators of learning rather than custodians of the national image. This model of cooperation fostered what Clarke (2020) calls *ethical diplomacy*, rooted in transparency, reciprocity, and respect.

#### 5.4 Audience Engagement and Cultural Perception

Audience feedback, collected through post-event interviews and observations, showed strong affective responses, including pride, curiosity, and emotional connection. Diplomats praised the “spirit of friendship,” while educators noted the “lesson in diversity” that the concert offered their students. These reactions mirror the findings of Schneider (2022), who described cultural performance as a form of *soft power with emotional intelligence*, where music builds trust by humanising foreign policy. Audience engagement also underscores the notion of *public diplomacy through participation* (Ang et al., 2015). By situating diplomacy within a communal concert space rather than a formal embassy hall, organisers transformed spectators into co-witnesses of intercultural dialogue.



**Figure 5.** A section of the audience at the Béla Bartók Memorial Concert  
*Visual depiction of the diverse audience comprising diplomats, educators, students, and music enthusiasts from Accra’s artistic community, reflecting broad engagement and cultural interest.*

#### 5.5 Transcultural Aesthetics and Musical Synthesis

Musically, the performance generated a *transcultural aesthetic*—a soundscape in which Hungarian folk-derived motifs intertwined with Ghanaian rhythmic energies. The alternation between Kodály’s choral writing and the traditional Ghanaian call-and-response created moments of dialogue. As Meinhof and Triandafyllidou (2020) observe, such hybrid performances embody *transcultural Europe*; however, in this case, the geography expanded to Africa, illustrating the fluidity of global cultural currents. The joint finale, blending Bartók’s *Romanian Folk Dances* with Ghanaian percussion, exemplified what Ronström (2020) terms *transcultural musicking*: the conscious crossing of cultural sound boundaries to create shared meaning. Rather than eliminating differences, the arrangement highlighted how each tradition complemented the others, thereby enhancing their emotional impact.

#### 5.6 Challenges and Learning Curves

While the collaboration was largely successful, participants noted challenges such as limited rehearsal time, tuning adjustments between Western and African instruments, and the absence of a long-term framework for the continuity of the project. These difficulties reflect what

Lampert (2020) calls *the fragility of intercultural performance*, the tension between artistic aspirations and logistical realities. However, these challenges are instructive in several ways. They revealed the need for ongoing capacity building, intercultural mediation, and institutional memory to sustain future projects in the region. The learning process itself became an index of growth, echoing Schippers' (2016) emphasis on *sustainability through reflective practice*.

### 5.7 Rehearsal and Performance as Pedagogical Diplomacy

A site of educational diplomacy, the rehearsal process for the Bartók Memorial project sheds light on how cross-cultural learning may overcome stylistic differences. Aside from performing African art music as their core duty, the choral ensemble at the University of Ghana is also grounded in the legacy of Western hymns, harmonies from the Baroque era, and African gospel idioms, a "tonal tradition" that was fostered through colonial church music and local hybrid gospel forms, like what many Ghanaian choirs do (Amuah & Arthur, 2014). However, a clear stylistic tension was shown when Zoltán Kodály's *Adventi Ének* ("Veni, Veni Emmanuel") and *Túrót eszik a cigány* ("See the Gypsies") were compared. Modal scales, folk-derived dissonances, and unusual harmonic shifts that are outside the choir's typical diatonic comfort zone are all used in Kodály's (and Bartók's) a cappella compositions (Thayer, 1985).

Practically speaking, members of the choral ensemble were used to four-square hymn harmonies and lush church chords, but now they had to deal with sharp cluster intervals and chromatic voice-leading. Initially, this clash of choral cultures made them feel uncomfortable. This shows the pedagogical problem at the heart of cultural diplomacy: how to help local musicians learn a foreign musical language without destroying their identities or confidence.

One of the main challenges was practicing these compositions completely a cappella. Without the keyboard's safety net, the group first found it difficult to keep the pitch and tonal centre in Kodály's intricate passages. In Ghanaian choral practice, rehearsals are frequently supported by a keyboard instrument that provides reference pitches and reinforces harmonies. Singers were now forced to rely on both groups listening and their own audiation. Kodály's educational dictum that solfège is essential for cultivating the inner ear, a wonderful aid in strengthening all musical skills: sight-singing, part hearing, hearing and singing harmony, and seeing form, was emphasised by this situation (Agbenyo et al., 2022).

The choir leaders took on this task by bringing back tonic-solfa warm-ups and drills to help the singers improve their pitching on their own. Sopranos and tenors were taught to "hear" their entry notes inside their heads. Altos and basses, on the other hand, worked on holding dissonant sounds against humming reference drones. The group gradually improved its tuning and trust by repeating the same process. Because there were no instruments, singers had to learn how to use their voices as their own tuning forks and echo chambers. In a way, singing without a safety net pushed a big step forward in musicianship, which fits Kodály's idea of choristers as literate, independent musicians (Agbenyo et al., 2022). What started out as a source of stress—the silence between notes and became a source of strength as the choristers learned new ways to focus and train their ears.

Choral directors implemented a decolonial rehearsal approach to facilitate the ensemble's engagement with Hungarian art music. Instead of presenting Kodály's unique harmonies as a "superior" form of European art to be replicated, directors elucidated unfamiliar harmonic and formal concepts using African musical paradigms familiar to the students. For example, the Kodály pieces that utilised antiphonal textures or imitative entrances were compared by the

conductors to an Akan call-and-response sequence, with the soprano's motif characterised as a "call" and the lower voices' contribution as a "response." This analogy engaged the singers' musical intuitions, as call-and-response structuring is fundamental in Ghanaian music-making.

Kodály's thematic variations across verses were analysed in relation to variation techniques found in African folk songs and drumming. This highlights the concept that a musical theme can be reiterated with spontaneous modifications, as an Ewe song introduces new rhythmic offbeats in each cycle. The modal shifts in the Hungarian pieces, such as abrupt transitions from minor to Mixolydian, were clarified by referring to familiar scales from indigenous songs and the concept of pentatonic modal interchange observed in highlife music. The instructors developed a bi-musical interpretive framework by translating European musical concepts into the local musical language. This method aligns with the principles of decolonial pedagogy in music, promoting the instruction of "foreign" repertoire according to the learners' perspectives (see Sánchez-Gatt et al., 2025).

Instead of forcing Ghanaian pupils to view Kodály and Bartók through a Eurocentric lens, the rehearsal space accepted Ghanaian knowledge. Harmonies that were once abstract puzzles have now become comprehensible. Foreign dissonances were heard as deliberate tensions, like the spicy harmonic inflections of indigenous styles, giving them context and meaning. This code-switching is consistent with Amuah and Arthur's (2014) concept of a syncretic blend of Western and African musical logics that lets performers comfortably inhabit both worlds. Cultural translation succeeded when the choristers sang the notes accurately and with understanding by mid-rehearsal.

The result of their actions was a transformative rehearsal. Observers noticed a change from mindless performance to expressive ownership as the choir assimilated the once intimidating piece. The ensemble's body language during the early rehearsals showed uncertainty: timid entrances in Kodály's melismatic phrases and worried brows amid Bartók's clashing harmonies. However, the singers became substantially more self-assured and enthusiastic after rephrasing the learning process using principles with which they were familiar. As if to demonstrate that Ghanaian pupils could meet Bartók and Kodály on their own terms, they started to take satisfaction in their ability to master challenging works.

This change supports Hess's (2019) claim that by connecting students' cultural settings with contemporary work, socially engaged music education can foster "critical empathy" and musical development. The rehearsal process essentially turned into a two-way educational process, with Ghanaian choristers learning Hungarian music and the ensemble applying its own cultural understanding to the pieces through indigenous learning methods. Once timidly whispering through dissonances, the choir was now delivering them with vigour and genuine passion by concert week. Kodály's Advent Song no longer seemed "foreign," according to several singers. One alto stated, "*It sounds like us now*," emphasising the deep internalisation that had taken place. Students were able to consider themselves competent interpreters of a global repertoire since the rehearsal space served as a space for identity negotiation in addition to note learning. The transforming impact of culturally reflective teaching was confirmed by this pedagogical diplomacy in action, which transformed an originally difficult intercultural assignment into a source of pride and a newly discovered skill.

Crucially, to confirm the local musical significance of the European pieces, the performance repertoire was purposefully balanced with accompanying Ghanaian tunes. By showcasing Ghanaian art music jewels that spoke to the performers' own roots, the Bartók Memorial

Concert avoided the danger of intercultural programming turning into a biased exhibition of Western "great works." One of the highlights was *Bonwire Kentenwene* by Ephraim Amu, a choral work honouring the art of Kente cloth weaving in Bonwire and frequently referred to as Bonwire Kente. According to Dor (2014), *Bonwire Kentenwene* celebrates Ghanaian traditional knowledge, wisdom, and craftsmanship, honouring a local cultural practice through choral idioms. Scheduling this work alongside Bartók and Kodály had several diplomatic benefits. Because they could pay homage to their own past with the same pride as European compositions, the Ghanaian vocalists saw it as an affirmation of their cultural identity on stage, demonstrating that Ghanaian art music is just as worthy of a concert.

Amu's composition, which was backed by piano, added a textural contrast to the concert's atmosphere and engulfed the audience in the comforting melodies and Akan lyrics. The choir's confidence in the upcoming, more difficult Hungarian songs was increased by the ease and excitement with which they performed Amu's songs, which also served as an emotional anchor. Additionally, a modern choral piece by Newlove Annan, titled *Daa Daa Kente*, was featured. This supported the concert's equitable cultural exchange while also providing the singers with a joyful, rhythmically driving tune to display their skills in an indigenous style.

Instead of being a one-way cultural exhibition, the programme's selections reflected what some academics may refer to as a "transcultural aesthetic": Hungarian folk motifs entwined with Ghanaian rhythmic energy. In conclusion, a reciprocal exchange was guaranteed by alternating Ghanaian accompanied pieces with Kodály's a cappella compositions: While African art music gained recognition on a global commemoration stage, Western art music was accepted in an African performing environment. The act of juxtaposition itself confirmed that respecting and showcasing multiple aural identities is the most important way to engage in cultural diplomacy in the contemporary world.

In hindsight, the rehearsal area evolved into a miniature representation of cross-cultural compromise and diplomacy in music instruction. The rehearsal studio became a cross-cultural communication lab as Ghanaian students and teachers interacted with Hungarian musical texts on a daily basis. Here, creative choices were constantly discussed, such as how to modify vocal timbre when moving from the bel canto style required for Kodály to the open-throated projection of an Akan song, or how to shape a phrase in Bartók's Four Slovak Folk Songs without sacrificing its folk character while still adding a touch of Ghanaian warmth. The practice of transcultural performance, a setting where musicians "negotiate[e] phrasing, tone, and rhythm across traditions" in real time, is reflected in these negotiations.

Every argument during rehearsal, whether it was about how to pronounce Latin lyrics versus Twi or the nuanced distinction between an Akan drum groove and a Hungarian tempo giusto, was an instance of musical diplomacy. The choir room served as a secure diplomatic table during these times, where cultural disparities in sound were not only recognised but also imaginatively overcome. When the Ghanaian conductor invited students to share their thoughts on the similarities and differences between Hungarian folk scales and African pentatonic scales, the project leaders presented these exchanges as educational opportunities for all parties.

On the other hand, the Hungarian Cultural Attaché learnt about the symbolic rhythms of Kente weaving from the choir's performance of *Bonwire Kente* during a practice session. The hierarchy that frequently afflicts cross-cultural arts projects where one culture "teaches" and the other merely learns was broken down by these reciprocal interactions, which gave the rehearsals a spirit of respect and curiosity. Rather, information flowed in various directions,

consistent with participatory intercultural pedagogical concepts. In addition to preparing an outstanding concert, the ensemble demonstrated a model of participatory diplomacy by the time of the performance.

Therefore, the rehearsal process was just as important to the concert's success as the actual performance itself. Such educational partnerships are an example of "relational diplomacy," where long-lasting understanding develops from shared creative labour rather than one-time diplomatic messaging. The experience of the University of Ghana's choral ensemble shows that cultural diplomacy is not limited to embassies but can also be co-created in classrooms and in rehearsal spaces. In this instance, teaching and learning music across cultural boundaries created empathy and skill bridges that lasted beyond the event itself, turning music education into a form of diplomacy. In fact, via the act of creating music together, the Béla Bartók Memorial Concert confirmed that music diplomacy is "not restricted to governmental protocols, but extends into...rehearsal settings," encouraging critical intercultural fluency and global citizenship.

This pedagogical shift in cultural diplomacy provides a potent model for upcoming cross-cultural arts interactions, in which practice and performance function as interwoven acts of learning and cultural negotiation. All things considered, the rehearsal area became a diplomatic platform: an avenue where young Ghanaian artists interacted with the musical legacy of Hungary, thus fostering a greater understanding of one another's cultures. According to this perspective, the group's journey serves as an example of how artistic pedagogical diplomacy may convert aspirational learning goals into real, life-changing musical experiences.

## **6. Discussion**

### **6.1 Cultural Diplomacy as Relational Practice**

The findings from the study of the partnership that underpinned the *Béla Bartók Memorial Concert* affirm that cultural diplomacy operates most effectively in a relational rather than representational collaboration. Traditional models of diplomacy often privilege the state as the sole actor, transmitting culture outwards in a one-directional flow. However, the collaboration between the Embassy of Hungary, the University of Ghana, and Healthy Minds International School reveals a more inclusive paradigm in which culture is co-created through shared artistic labour. Isar (2020) describes this shift as a "*paradigmatic reorientation toward participatory diplomacy*" where embassies act not as curators of the national image but as mediators of intercultural engagement. This human-centred approach aligns with contemporary soft power theories (Nye, 2004; Schneider, 2022), emphasising persuasion through empathy, creativity, and collaboration. The concert's success lay not merely in the performance itself but in the relational bonds it fostered between artists, educators, and audiences from diverse backgrounds.

### **6.2 The Educational Turn in Cultural Diplomacy**

An important insight that emerged from this study is the educational dimension of cultural diplomacy. The project blurs the boundaries between art, learning, and diplomacy, transforming performance into pedagogy. This resonates with Hess's (2019) argument that socially engaged music education must cultivate critical empathy, an awareness of how art shape's identity and ethics in a globalised world. By situating students at the centre of the concert's creative process, the University of Ghana exemplified what Ang et al. (2015) call "*mutuality in cultural exchange.*" Students were not passive recipients of diplomatic programming but rather active agents who shaped the narrative through performance, rehearsal,

and reflection. This model represents a significant educational innovation, one that embodies the university's strategic objective of Transformative Student Experience through international and experiential learning.

## **6.2 Intercultural Dialogue and Mutual Listening**

Intercultural dialogue, as theorised by Dervin (2018), depends on mutual listening, the willingness to encounter differences without seeking to dominate or erase them. The concert enacted this principle musically; Hungarian and Ghanaian performers had to attune to one another's tempo, tonalities, and expressive gestures. This *musical negotiation* became a metaphor for diplomatic listening. Through these sonic interactions, participants practiced empathy, not as an abstract virtue, but as a concrete, embodied act. Meinhof and Triandafyllidou (2020) call this "*transcultural musicking*," where sound mediates cultural borders and fosters a shared affect. This experiential mode of dialogue is particularly relevant in postcolonial contexts, where cultural histories of asymmetry can complicate exchanges. The success of the event lay in transforming potential tension into creative coexistence, an example of what Cook (2018) terms "*music as relational inquiry*."

## **6.3 Institutional Synergy and Sustainable Partnerships**

The concert's organisation demonstrated the potential of institutional synergy in advancing the goals of both diplomacy and education. By integrating the diplomatic mission of the Hungarian Embassy with the pedagogical vision of the University of Ghana, the event bridged the often-separated worlds of policy and pedagogy. As Figueira (2015) observes, such synergy strengthens the legitimacy of cultural diplomacy, making it not an isolated performance but a part of a long-term strategic relationship. However, sustainability remains a significant challenge. While the concert achieved a significant short-term impact, participants identified the need for formalised structures, such as memoranda of understanding, exchange programmes, and annual joint performances, to ensure continuity. According to Schippers and Grant (2016), successful intercultural music collaborations necessitate an "institutional ecology" a framework that simultaneously addresses artistic, educational, and logistical aspects. The Ghana-Hungary partnership is well positioned to evolve into such a model if the resources and commitment persist.

## **6.4 Diplomacy Beyond the State: The Role of Community**

One of the most compelling aspects of the concert was the involvement of the community and youth through the Healthy Minds International School. This expanded the reach of cultural diplomacy beyond elites and professionals, embedding it in everyday cultural experience. Clarke (2020) and Schneider (2022) argue that contemporary diplomacy increasingly depends on *non-state actors*-artists, educators, students, and civic organisations, who animate the social networks where understanding takes root. By including schoolchildren and local audiences, the concert democratised diplomacy, embodying what McConnell et al. (2012) call "*grassroots internationalism*." In this way, the initiative advanced a vision of diplomacy not confined to embassies but diffused through communities, transforming cultural performance into an act of citizenry.

## **6.5 Rethinking Music's Role in Intercultural Policy**

This case study contributes to the broader debate on the role of music in intercultural policy. While governments increasingly fund music festivals and exchanges as tools for nation branding, the *Béla Bartók Memorial Concert* challenges this logic. Instead of projecting identity outwards, it invites participants into an intimate space of *co-creation*. As Ronström (2020) observes, transcultural music projects are most effective when they resist the spectacle

and focus on a shared process. This insight has implications for the cultural policies of both Ghana and Hungary. Embedding intercultural collaboration into national arts strategies nurtures long-term diplomatic and educational dividends. Music departments, conservatories, and embassies might collaborate in residencies, co-compositions, and digital archives that sustain dialogue across distances and time.

### 6.6 Theoretical Implications

The concert provides an empirical grounding for a constructivist understanding of diplomacy, where international relations are constituted through cultural interaction rather than dictated by the political hierarchy (Jackson, Sørensen, & Møller, 2022). The Ghana-Hungary partnership demonstrates that artistic collaboration is not ancillary to diplomacy; it *is* diplomacy in practice. Furthermore, the findings validate Nye's (2004) notion of soft power, extending it to the participatory domain. Instead of soft power as persuasion, the event revealed soft power as *co-presence*, the capacity to create spaces in which identities meet on equal terms. This redefinition challenges policymakers to view art not as ornamentation but as an infrastructure for peacebuilding and mutual understanding.

### 6.7 Summary of Discussion

Overall, this discussion illustrates that the *Béla Bartók Memorial Concert* transcended its status as an isolated event. It became a microcosm of global cultural relations, demonstrating how music can serve as both a pedagogical and a diplomatic instrument. Through partnership, empathy, and shared performance, the project transformed intercultural ideals into lived experiences, showing that cultural diplomacy, when humanised, can harmonise differences rather than manage them.

## 7. Conclusion

The *Béla Bartók Memorial Concert* is a vivid example of how music can function as both an instrument and language of diplomacy. Beyond its artistic merit, the concert illuminates the transformative potential of intercultural collaboration between embassies, educational institutions, and communities. This demonstrates that cultural diplomacy is most impactful when it moves beyond performance toward participation and becomes an act of shared creation and mutual learning.

The collaboration between the Embassy of Hungary in Ghana, the Department of Music at the University of Ghana, and the Healthy Minds International School redefined diplomacy as a human encounter rather than a political abstraction. Through rehearsals, performances, and dialogue, artists and students transformed Bartók's ethnomusicological ideals into lived experiences, bridging continents with rhythm, melody, and empathy. This co-creative model embodies what Isar (2020) describes as *relational cultural diplomacy*: diplomacy built on trust, reciprocity, and shared authorship.

From an educational perspective, the concert reaffirmed that intercultural engagement fosters what Hess (2019) terms *transformative learning*, where students move from technical competence to critical empathy. It advances the University of Ghana's Strategic Objectives of *Transformative Student Experience* and *Engagement and Partnerships*, positioning music not only as a discipline of study but also as a medium of global citizenship.

Diplomatically, the event strengthened Hungary–Ghana cultural relations through soft power, grounded in authenticity. In Nye's (2004) framework, soft power is derived from attraction and shared values; the concert extended this idea by embodying a *soft presence*, a visible expression

of friendship that transcends words. This exemplifies Schneider's (2022) argument that music diplomacy humanises foreign policy by turning listening into understanding.

Theoretically, this study situates cultural diplomacy within a constructivist paradigm in which meaning and influence are socially constructed through performances and participation. The concert reaffirmed that cultural relations thrive not on symbolic representation but on sustained collaboration. This suggests that embassies and universities can function as complementary agents of peacebuilding by uniting artistic imaginations with institutional frameworks.

Practically, the findings call for sustained initiatives residencies, academic exchanges, co-curated concerts, and digital archives, that preserve the spirit of Ghana-Hungary collaboration. Such projects would embody what Schippers and Grant (2016) describe as *sustainable intercultural ecosystems*, ensuring that cultural diplomacy is continuous, rather than episodic.

Ultimately, the *Béla Bartók Memorial Concert* demonstrated that when diplomacy listens and education is performed, music becomes a bridge across differences. In such encounters, nations find not only harmony in sound but also harmony in understanding, a reminder that in a divided world, cultural dialogue remains one of humanity's most profound and hopeful forms of communication.

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