Forging Ties
MORE THAN PEACEFUL CO-EXISTANCE

Despite the complex political climate the Cold War rivalry engendered, the two super-powers remained connected through a variety of exchanges, both official and those privately initiated by "citizen-diplomats."

An Iowa woman wrote a newspaper editorial inviting Soviets to visit an American farm to learn how U.S. agriculture produced surplus food for export – and Premiere Nikita Khrushchev came. A young U.S. musician, Van Cliburn, won hearts, along with Moscow's International Tchaikovsky Piano Competition, while established ones, like Duke Ellington, brought jazz to Russian audiences. Americans, meanwhile, found themselves enchanted by the touring Bolshoi and Kirov ballets, and the Leningrad Symphony.

International expositions displayed the latest achievements of the competing economies. During a 1959 Moscow exhibition, in what became known as the "Kitchen Debate," then-Vice President Richard Nixon showed off American appliances such as dishwashers and color televisions – and Khrushchev replied that Russians had the same, but of better quality.

Top: Van Cliburn receives the gold medal from Dmitri Shostakovich at the First International Tchaikovsky Piano Competition, 1958, © Sovfoto. Middle left: Premier Nikita Khrushchev with American farmer R. Garst in Iowa, 1959. © Sovfoto. Bottom left: Vice President Richard Nixon cuts ribbon at opening of the first American Exhibition in Sokolniki Park, Moscow, 1959. © Sovfoto. Bottom Middle: Jazz great Duke Ellington plays a balilika, Leningrad, 1971, © Sovfoto. Bottom right: Life magazine reports on the opening of regular commercial air travel between Moscow and New York, 1968, Getty Images.