Few people have taken Western classical music to more places in the world than William Harvey. Harvey has taught violin at Afghanistan’s only conservatory of music and was concertmaster of a symphony orchestra in San Juan, Argentina. He appeared as guest artist in Myanmar and directed youth orchestras in Argentina, Qatar, Mexico, Tunisia, the Philippines, and the United States. Ten years ago he founded the non-profit organization, Cultures in Harmony, which has completed 32 projects in 13 countries. Harvey is clear about the organization’s objective. “Promoting Western classical music is not what we do. Our goal is to promote cultural understanding through music.”

Harvey’s association with Indiana University began at age 14 when he joined the IU String Academy. He has earned degrees from IU and Juilliard, and has returned to Bloomington periodically as a faculty member of the String Academy. He was a freshman at Juilliard when 9/11 struck. Families of those caught in the attack were directed to the 69th Regiment Armory in Midtown Manhattan to wait for news. A group of Juilliard students brought their music to the armory and played for hours and hours. Harvey stayed on playing alone till almost midnight at the request of one of the officers, who recognized its soothing effect on those finishing a shift at Ground Zero. “I’ve never understood so fully what it means to communicate music to other people,” Harvey wrote in a letter to friends and family afterwards.

The international dimension of music’s potential came when Harvey joined a trip the Bloomington Muslim Dialog Group had organized to Turkey. “Anti-American sentiment was running high in Istanbul at the time. When we visited one family home, I noticed a beat-up violin in the corner. With permission, I got it out and tuned it. Our host got out an oud, sort of a Turkish lute, and played it for us. He had some Sufi songs in Western notation, and we played them together. By the end of the evening, there were smiles and hugs. I thought: If music can change the atmosphere in this room, can it change the atmosphere in this city, in this country, in the world?”
His answer was Cultures in Harmony, a nonprofit organization committed to projects that take American musicians to localities all over the world, that expose U.S. audiences to world music, and that, through musical collaboration, promote cultural understanding. In its first ten years, the organization brought musicians from Tunisia and the Philippines to perform in the United States. It has sent U.S. musicians to teach master classes in performance and composition, appear in concerts, play alongside local musicians, and introduce music at schools and orphanages. They have performed in major concert halls around the world. They have traveled to a village in the jungle of Papua New Guinea to help young tribal members create compositions to raise awareness about the environment, HIV/AIDS, and cultural perseveration.

Western classical music serves well as the medium of interaction. “Classical music is more neutral. It does not pose the kind of threat that some groups see in Western popular music,” Harvey said. “Still, I don’t go with the goal of promoting Western music. If there are young musicians studying this tradition, as there are in the

“One thing the world needs more of is initiatives that can figure out how to use music to remind each other that we’re not really all that different, and the differences we do have are cause for celebration, not cause for enmity.”
—William Harvey

Pantaleon, a virtuoso and teacher of the n'gwe, a traditional instrument of West Central Africa, teaching a song to Rebecca Schlappich
If music can change the atmosphere in this room, can it change the atmosphere in this city, in this country, in the world?

Philippines and in Tunisia, I will teach them. In places where there are fewer students of this music, such as Pakistan and Papua New Guinea, then the promotion of Western music is not what we do at all.”

Western classical training and musicianship and western music notation “enable us very quickly to learn the music of other cultures. I can go to Zimbabwe, listen to someone playing their piece, write it down and play it with them in a way that they find quite beautiful,” Harvey said. For a concert for President Karzai, Harvey arranged Afghan patriotic songs for large orchestra. “Afterwards, a former member of the Taliban shook my hand and told my boss in Pashto, ‘This kind of music is allowed in Islam.’”

Nearly all cultures have their own forms of classical music, and classical musicians in those cultures face many of the same issues. “We can make common cause with classical musicians in Pakistan, who are struggling to convince young people in their country that the music of sitar and
The passacaglia is a form of Western music born in early seventeenth century Spain and Italy. It is usually built around a simple musical motif of very low notes. This “ground” is repeated over and over and is accompanied by variations that are often quite elaborate. Cultures in Harmony is taking a “common ground” of four descending notes to countries where they have done projects. Musicians in each country develop variations in their own style. By August 2015, passacaglias have been completed in the Bahamas, Pakistan, and Tunisia with work about to be completed in Egypt, Turkey, and Zimbabwe.

Harvey’s dream project is multilateral cultural diplomacy. “Most cultural diplomacy happens in exchanges between two countries. I would like to see projects that bring together people from countries around the world—for example, a world music festival with a roster of world-class artists who travel the globe to perform. We could have video links between the festival locations. Wouldn’t it be something if we could make it possible for audiences to scramble all over to these performances? It would be a powerful and regular reminder of music’s role as the universal language.”

Cultures in Harmony website: http://culturesinharmony.org/