

Ralph P. Locke

**MUSICAL EXOTICISM:
IMAGES AND REFLECTIONS**

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xviii, 421 pp.; music examples, illustrations, bibliography, index.

The large number of studies on musical exoticism that have appeared in the past fifteen years proves that this once ambivalent area of scholarship has come a long way. Ralph P. Locke, Professor of Musicology at the Eastman School of Music of the University of Rochester, counts as one of the pioneer voices in this field—his numerous articles and essays discussing issues of exoticism, especially in nineteenth-century opera, constitute landmarks of musicological acumen and sound foresight. *Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections* marks his first monograph in an area of musical scholarship that has expanded extensively since the first forays into the field. In this book, however, Locke does not simply set out to perpetuate previously established theories of examining the diverse repertory of Western music that centers on the exotic Other, but rather aims to challenge accepted practices and redefine the field by advocating for a paradigm shift.

European fascination with the non-Western world involved a tight nexus of signification, appropriation, and construction of the Other, that grew in complexity as aspects of politics, religion, race, colonialism, and power problematized the discourse. In his seminal publication, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), Edward W. Said opened up new paths for addressing this obsession with the Other by situating it in imperialist attitudes, which he invariably defined as the “Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (Said, *Orientalism*, 3). When an artist attempts to evoke or represent another culture, issues of authenticity, stereotyping, ideological and political biases, clichés and prejudices are never divorced from the work itself. Western musical representations of the Other may be seen in works as diverse as Mozart’s “Rondo alla turca” (from his Piano Sonata K. 331), Brahms’s Hungarian Dances, Bizet’s *Carmen*, Stravinsky’s *Firebird* and Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly*—to name a few. How these works distinctly evoke and signify Turkey, *style hongrois*, Spanish culture, Russian identity and Japanese traditions respectively, has been the focus of studies and analyses by generations of scholars. (See the other two major book-length publications in this field, Jonathan Bellman’s edited collection of essays *The Exotic in Western Music* [Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998] and Tim

Taylor's *Beyond Exoticism: Western Music and the World* [Durham: Duke University Press, 2007]). In recent years such treatment has also been applied to divergent West-centric works that involve jazz, musical theater, film and pop music and, although Locke occasionally includes them in his discussion, he does so in an effort to expose problematic areas inherent in studies of exoticism. Locke's major contribution in this book, however, lies in his adoption of a broader and more inclusive methodology than that previously used in the study of musical exoticism.

The thrust of his argument lies in Chapter Three, where he proposes a new definition of musical exoticism and a broader paradigm that "can respond to a wider range of musical evocations of exotic regions and people" (59). He views the established scholarly approach of looking at portrayals of the exotic Other through specific stylistic markers (for example, vocal melismas, instrumental arabesques, intense chromaticism, static textures, modal elements, etc.) as limited and inconclusive. He calls the application of this lexicon of musical exoticisms (which he aptly summarizes on pp. 51–54) the "Exotic Style Only" Paradigm, and he juxtaposes it to a broader one which he calls the "All the Music in Full Context" Paradigm. Locke admits that he gave this name to his approach "half-humorously," possibly to exaggerate the broader context he wished to create for this new approach. Instead of looking through the lens of a tightly controlled system of musical significations (that may or may not suggest "an exotic locale or culture"), Locke proposes a more inclusive approach that takes into consideration not only the music but also all aspects of the work (scenery, settings, etc.), as well as its interaction with the listener. The two approaches are not mutually exclusive, but rather they overlap and complement each other. (Locke had previously proposed this dichotomy in his article "A Broader View of Musical Exoticism," *The Journal of Musicology* 24 [2007]: pp. 477–521.)

The "All the Music in Full Context" Paradigm provides a fertile ground for Locke's investigation. He suggests that musical exoticism should not be simply reduced to a lexicon of musical devices. As he insightfully argues, certain works may still use similar musical markers, but do not necessarily convey strains of the musically exotic. Or, some works may "portray exotic locales, cultures, and individuals but *without* using exotic stylistic devices" (20). To that effect, Chapter 5 ("Baroque portrayals of despots: ancient Babylon, Incan Peru") deals with Handel's *Belshazzar* and Rameau's *Les Indes galantes*, as examples of works whose exotic qualities lie in their textual and dramatic aspects rather in their musical devices. In Chapter 6 ("A world of exotic styles, 1750–1880") Locke discusses a plethora of major and minor instrumental compositions, by famous and not-so-famous composers alike, that

helped popularize the specific stylistic devices associated with the exotic. Works that exhibit stylistic features long associated with the *alla turca* and Gypsy styles here receive an exciting fresh treatment.

No other music genre has contributed to such rich representations of exoticism as opera. In Chapter 7, aptly titled “Exotic operas and two Spanish Gypsies,” the reader is immersed in operatic evocations of Otherness, with emphasis on the alluring image of Carmen—in particular, the opera’s Card Scene, which is free of musical-exotic markers but rich in exotic characterization. Locke rounds off his venture into the operatic tradition with yet more examples from the world of opera, especially those works that can be analyzed in relation to Europe’s colonial expansion. Chapter 8, “Imperialism and ‘the exotic Orient,’” presents yet another case study between western attitudes and the Orient, and culminates in an appreciation of certain rarely-discussed scenes in Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly* that via non-musical means highlight the hegemonic power of the West over the East. Locke magisterially meshes traditional interpretations with solid musical analyses that inform astutely nuanced exegeses of the new paradigm he proposes.

At the turn of the century, historical trends (such as hostility toward the empire and general ease of access to distant cultures), coupled with modernist aesthetic tendencies, produced what Locke describes as “d disdain” toward Overt Exotic representation. In addition, twentieth-century composers who found inspiration in music of other cultures, invariably incorporated such elements in works that did not make pretensions to musical exoticism. In order to help clarify the boundaries among all these diverse manifestations of exoticism, Locke proposes the creation of three new categories: Submerged Exoticism, Overt Exoticism, and Transcultural Composing. In Chapter 9, titled “Exoticism in a modernist age (c. 1890–1960),” Submerged Exoticism is described as “the tendency ... for general musical style to incorporate distinctive scales, harmonies, orchestral colors, and other features that had previously been associated with exotic realms” (217), while Transcultural Composing is adopted as a term in order to denote the “practice of composing for Western contexts ... a work that incorporates certain stylistic and formal conventions of another culture’s music, often a music that has a quite different context” (228). With discussions that include early twentieth-century exoticist ballets, jazz and popular music, operetta, musical theater and film music, this chapter confirms that the boundaries that Locke wishes to establish seem to become fluid, and terms and categories dissolve easily under the strain of the intended classification. Chapter 10, “Exoticism in a global age (c. 1960 to today)”, investigates the proliferation of exoticism in music of diverse sources. Numerous twentieth-century compos-

ers, cultures, genres, styles, and media make an appearance in this chapter, a tribute to the eclecticism, versatility, diversity, and experimentation that characterize the music of our multicultural, globalized present. Locke deftly navigates between musical analyses, socio-cultural readings and ideological interpretations for the sake of formulating an astutely informed and nuanced picture of the problems at hand.

Locke's superb book will undoubtedly help amplify the horizons of scholarship in the ever-expanding area of musical exoticism, by exploring the pitfalls, proposing alternative interpretations, broadening the repertory under discussion and, ultimately, by heightening our understanding of our position as listeners and consumers. In the book's last chapter he invites us to reconsider and reappraise this repertory in our diverse musical present. Clichés and distortions, biases and stereotypes will never cease to exist. But Locke, quite rightly, ends by emphasizing not the music and its creators, but us, listeners and audiences. What are we to do with works (especially opera and other dramatic genres) that reinforce exotic stereotypes that may be demeaning or offensive to certain contemporary sensitivities? Locke does not shy away from proposing what—to many—may seem to be an extreme solution: either rid the work's performance of all time- and culture-specific visual references, or "refrain from performing it" (324). This is only a temporary solution, however. Locke concludes his book by advocating the importance of rehabilitating this repertory in its proper context by getting to know it better—both for the sake of the work's autonomy, and for fostering tolerance toward "cross-cultural understanding" (327). I would add that, no matter how troubling the visual and verbal rhetoric occasionally may be, it is the ability of this dynamic repertory to constantly transform its referential codes and thus elude any single interpretation, that compels us to indulge in its perpetual allure.

Ralph Locke's book came out as I had finished teaching a graduate seminar on musical exoticism. Although my students at Bowling Green State University did not have the opportunity to benefit from the author's most recent investigation on the subject, our exploration into such fascinating issues were an eye-opening experience—we all enjoyed it tremendously and, thanks to this remarkable new publication, we will continue to learn.

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