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EXOTICISM AND THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY


In Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), Ralph P. Locke surveyed and pondered three centuries of the phenomenon of exoticism in Western music from Handel’s Rinaldo (1711) to our time (see my review in this journal; 66, no. 4 [June 2010]: 774–76). Six years later, he has
produced *Music and the Exotic from the Renaissance to Mozart*; in his words, a “prequel” (p. 3). The years 1500–1800 create a chronological overlap that is justified by the prequel’s significantly more thorough coverage of the eighteenth century, with its additional, intensive focus on the plurality of genres that incorporated exotic representation. More fundamentally, *Music and the Exotic* (2015) is the only book-length study that provides a theoretically-framed, encyclopedic exposition of the pervasive phenomenon of musical exoticism during the early modern era—notwithstanding important, yet less comprehensive antecedents such as Miriam Karpilow Whaples’s dissertation “Exoticism in Dramatic Music, 1600–1800” (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1958), G. S. Rousseau and Roy Porter’s edited volume, *Exoticism in the Enlightenment* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), or Thomas Betzweiser’s *Exotismus und “Turkenoper” in der französischen Musik des Ancien Régime* (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 1993).

It is remarkable that, despite strong “postcolonial” (and even more narrowly post-Saidian) critical trends in musicology since the 1990s, no writer well-versed in Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) has attempted to present such a detailed history of exoticism that runs parallel to the first long period of European exploration, conquest, and colonialism. Yet Locke is not interested in simply filling the gaps left from the 1990s, but rather stretching the theoretical framework to include the multivalent cultural and political meanings of various kinds of exoticisms, with particular attention to endotic political readings that require more proactive scholarship (since dehumanizing stereotypes would be immediately clear to most scholars today, whereas the function of exoticism in critiquing particular domestic situations requires historical inquiry).

It is equally possible that a more rounded summary of exoticism in the Renaissance and baroque was hindered in the past by what Locke considers a narrower paradigm of “exotic style only,” which he previously moved away from in “A Broader View of Musical Exoticism” (*The Journal of Musicology* 24, no. 4 [Fall 2007]: 477–521), and subsequently in his 2009 book. Like its predecessor, *Music and the Exotic* (as I shall henceforth abbreviate the title of the 2015 prequel) begins by pitting the style-only paradigm against the broader paradigm he terms “all the music in full context,” which means, in a nutshell, considering every instance where music is involved in exotic representation, whether the musical style sounds exotic or not (what it sounded like to historical audiences and how performance decisions can alter perceptions beyond an analysis of the score, are further complications that Locke considers here and throughout the book).

This theoretical section (Part I) necessitates another overlap with the introductory chapters of the previous book, but there are useful (and study-friendly) vignettes (“boxes”) that summarize some of these issues and new ideas about the limits of exotic meaning, including an interesting continuum between the two paradigms (box 2.4, p. 22). In terms of linearity, this part could have led directly to the discussion of music in Parts III and IV, but Locke opts for another long section (Part II) that looks at the history of cultural encounters and exotic representation prior to 1500. Readers who already know a fair bit about the history of the Crusades, the ascendency of Venice and the Ottoman Empire, famous maritime explorations, and so on, may not need to read most of chapter 3, but there is an argument for its necessity in this book. Chapter 4, with its cultural survey of exotic representation beyond music, leading to the book’s main object of inquiry, is completely necessary. Whether *Music and the Exotic* needed more than 100 pages to set up a theoretical and historical background to the survey proper is debatable, but again, those less familiar with the “rich and complex heritage” of exoticism (I quote the title of Part I), will undoubtedly benefit from reading those pages.

Part III, “songs and dance-types,” comprising two chapters, is the shortest. It explores repertoires that were hardly examined for their representation of “others” (like the English ballad); explains exotic contexts for familiar genres such as the sarabande and chaconne; and highlights, in especially illuminating pictorial detail (pp. 117–25). The case of the *moresca* is special, as it was the most explicitly exotic dance of the sixteenth century and appears
to have been the only nontransferable type of exoticism, always associated with “Moors” through visual representation (p. 117). This fixed association may suggest another indication of the unique phenomenon of Orientalism within European exoticism, but the case is somewhat weakened by later mention of morescas used in non-Orientalist context (e.g., a shepherd’s dance in Claudio Monteverdi’s Orfeo; see p. 125).

Every book of this scope and ambition will have omissions. Readers will no doubt identify individual pieces that could have been mentioned to great advantage (Monteverdi’s Com battimento di Tancredi e Clorinda, for example). But individual pieces are of less consequence. More serious is the absence of the genre of the madrigal (although the villancico and frottola are mentioned). There has been research about the madrigal in relation to the “New World” (see Ian Woodfield, English Musicians in the Age of Exploration [Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1995]), and it would be interesting to explore a genre that involves poetry, polyphony, and word painting within an expanded “full-context” paradigm. This is, perhaps, for a second edition of Music and the Exotic.

In the present edition, Locke’s main interest is in dramatic and semi-dramatic genres. These come up in Part IV, which takes us on a whirlwind tour from courtly ballets to the opera house. Chapter 7 not only exposes us to the extent of exotic display in courts, and what it all meant, but also allows us to recalibrate the modern ear to perceive more clearly how exoticism is encoded in seventeenth-century music, whether in terms of (what was then) an exotic style (p. 157), or simply by providing useful rhythmic support for exotic choreography (p. 159). The following chapter acquaints us with the related Italian ballo and its relationship with the (already part-exoticized) commedia dell’arte. Chapter 9 then turns to exploring rarely-discussed exotic aspects of sacred vocal works, including the strategies of self/other in a religious context (Bach’s two passions), and some surprisingly “positive” exotic portrayals (Alessandro Scarlatti’s Agar et Ismaele esili ati). I was especially fascinated by the reading of Antonio Vivaldi’s oratorio Juditha tri umphans (1716), which is meant to allude to Venice’s contemporaneous war with the Ottoman empire, yet treats the figure of Judith (symbolizing Venice) as partly exotic (pp. 197–98).

Indeed, there are many points that are left unresolved in Music and the Exotic that would undoubtedly spur discussion. The more the book progresses, the more Locke allows himself space for interpretation and analysis, and this is particularly true of the last four chapters on opera, the most important genre for amplifying the exotic through drama, plot, and staging as well as music. Here we visit every important stage of opera and operatic subgenres, from Monteverdi’s Orfeo (1607) to Mozart’s The Magic Flute (1791), as they interact with the exotic. Of particular interest is Locke’s willingness to allow degrees of exoticism: there is the exoticism of peripheral regions and social groups, and that of truly remote and alien peoples and locales; exotic representation that denigrates, equivocates, or ex tolls; and sometimes there are works where two groups are exotic but one more so than another, as in Thomyris, Queen of Scythia, where Persians are pitted against the valorized “Warlike Northern race” of the Scythians (pp. 265–66).

Locke reserved his longstanding specialty in operatic Orientalism for the very last chapter, “Obsession with the Middle East” (although Orientalism crops up in previous chapters, most notably in his discussion of the “Turkish” scene in Molière’s and Lully’s 1670 Le bourgeois gentilhomme, pp. 223–27). After surveying the evolution of opéra comique and the role of Orientalism within it, the chapter focuses on three historically influential operas (respectively) by Gluck (La rencontre imprévue, 1764), Grétry (La caravane du Caire, 1783), and Salieri (Tarare, 1787); and then three canonic operas by Mozart (Entführung, Zauberflöte, and Cosi, in this order). In Gluck’s opera we finally encounter the famous Viennese alla turca, and in this context, Locke provides a fascinating insight into its selective, generic use in opera (“when it is used, when not, and why,” [pp. 299–301]). Given that alla turca was “perhaps the first internationally recognized style for portraying a non-Western region through musical means alone,” (p. 299) more could be said about its (sudden? long-anticipated?) arrival in Gluck’s opera, but admittedly this would have invited a very focused “style-only”
perspective which was not the aim of this book.

Most of the operas in this chapter were also chosen for their endotic political meaning, with direct evidence for that reception in some cases (“social criticism under the surface,” p. 299). In that sense the most striking is Salieri’s Tarare, whose dissident librettist, Beaumarchais, noted with satisfaction the opera’s intimation of the French Revolution (p. 306). Clearly in this opera “swipes at Eastern backwardness” (ibid.) should be historically understood as censorship-evading devices, using what was then politically acceptable (though reprehensible today) in order to push through a subversive agenda.

Mozart’s Orientalist operas are far less politically explosive in that way, but Locke manages to discern some ambivalence and complexity even in the extremely stereotypical role of Osmin in Die Entführung as well as the unusual exotic masquerade of Così, which provides rare diegetic exoticism that adds psychological depth to the opera. This part of the chapter also offers small but potent surprises along the way. I was struck, for example, by an illustration from 1795 of a scene from Die Zauberflöte, showing Sarastro and his men all dressed as Turks: such raw Orientalism provides direct evidence of exoticist perceptions of the opera in its early years (p. 314). A page later, Locke reproduces an excerpt from act 2, scene 1 (no. 9), which opens with three long chords (p. 315). The received explanation for this is that it was intended as a secret Masonic code. Locke, however, provides a fresh interpretation: the opening chordal gesture, and specifically its I–V7–vi progression, as an “ancient-exotic march” topos that goes right back to Lully’s “Marche pour la cérémonie des Turcs” from Le bourgeois gentilhomme (p. 228; other works that use this device are cited on p. 227).

Such small yet riveting revelations are found throughout the book, and I have dwelt on the final chapter to give tangible examples of what readers should expect. There is a difference in that respect between chapters 5 to 8, which largely survey genres and have overall fewer music examples, and chapters 9 to 13, which also delve into individual works (some of them known masterpieces). In all of these chapters there is greater scope to expand the cultural analysis of any one of the examples Locke brings, as well as to read the scores more closely and search for more material. I do not mean this as a criticism, but rather think that is the pedagogical purpose, and strength, of this book. Its breadth often allows only a cursory analysis with provocative observations that continuously invite further development, discussion, and debate. The list of recordings and videos in the appendix serves the same pedagogical end. Above all, Music and the Exotic makes a pretty strong case for the pervasiveness of the exotic in “early music,” and as such it should refresh learning in the area at every academic level.

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The compositional, cognitive, and pedagogical history of eighteenth-century music and musicians has experienced a groundswell in contemporary scholarship. Still in its nascence a few short decades ago, several important studies have propelled these challenging topics to a position of prominence in the field (Robert O. Gjerdingen, Music in the Galant Style [New York: Oxford University Press, 2007]; Rosa Cafiero, “The Early Reception of Neapolitan Partimento Theory in France: A Survey,” Journal of Music Theory 51, no. 1 [2007]: 137–59; and Giorgio Sanguinetti, The Art of Partimento: History, Theory, and Practice [New York: Oxford University Press, 2012]; to name but a few). As the de facto nucleus of eighteenth-century musical training, Naples and its population of teachers and composers have garnered particular attention. Unlike their French and German contemporaries, who penned lengthy treatises, Neapolitan musicians left precious little prose or explication con-