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Ralph P. Locke, *Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Figures, musical examples, notes, bibliography, and index. \$99.00 U.S. (c1) ISBN 978-0-521-87793-0.

Review by Jann Pasler, University of California, San Diego.

In this sophisticated and wide-ranging book, Ralph P. Locke interrogates what it means for western composers and listeners to encounter the strange Otherness of another culture through music.[1] The cover image, Gauguin's "Women and a White Horse" (1903), gets us thinking with visual stereotypes. A curvaceous naked woman with golden skin, her large breasts protruding, seems posed for the viewer, straddling an erect white horse, while another woman in a white dress dances, her arched back creating a lovely arabesque from head to toe. Even without the third person in the rest of the painting, also wearing white, and the lush colorful landscape that surrounds these images, the use of white here seems odd, unnatural. And why a white horse in the middle of this painting? The subtitle of the book, "Images and Reflections," suggests that such subjects are not only objects of the Western gaze, but also constructions and reflections, sometimes allegories of the Western Self. Some meanings are relatively fixed, others "constantly open to negotiation." Exoticism is not "contained" in works, Locke argues, but rather arises through "an interaction" between work and perceiver (p. 3).

Locke thus draws us in, then challenges, instructs, and delights us with the myriad ways that composers from Rameau and Handel to Leonard Bernstein and Tan Dun have incorporated exoticism in music. Whereas many scholars today prefer related concepts such as cultural hybridity, "colonial encounter, cultural transfer, syncretism" or "transculturation," and notions like multicultural, "intercultural," or "transethnic" (p. 229), Locke returns to the older, vague idea of exoticism as "the process of evoking ... a place, people, or social milieu that is not entirely imaginary and that differs profoundly from the home country or culture in attitudes, customs, and morals ... or is *perceived* as different" (author's italics, p. 47). Focusing on exoticism, as thus defined, allows him to examine music that dates back hundreds of years and relate this phenomenon to similar practices up through the global present. In the book, then, Locke's aims "to establish some clear guidelines about what musical exoticism is (and is not), how it functions (from the composer's point of view, the performer's, and the listener's), and what broader cultural work it carries out," that is, how it might "reflect and reinforce Eurocentric prejudices regarding distant and different peoples; or the opposite: challenge those prejudices" (p. 1). In the four chapters of part one, Locke presents a taxonomy of various approaches and argues for the concept's ongoing relevance today. In the seven chapters of part two, he analyses exoticism in specific musical examples from many genres, especially certain works that recur throughout the book--Rameau's *Les Indes galantes*, Mozart's "Rondo alla turca," Liszt's Hungarian rhapsodies, Verdi's *Aida*, Saint-Saëns's *Samson et Dalila*, Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*, and Debussy's *Pagodes*.

Given their complexity and the enormous bibliography from which they draw, it is not surprising that the chapters that attempt to define musical exoticism are rich and provocative. Locke carefully considers the work of contemporaries such as Jonathan Bellman, Jean-Pierre Bartoli, and Tim Taylor, among others.[2] Importantly, he distinguishes the exotic from the Oriental, as conceived by Edward Said, but also returns to this concept in discussing Orientalist opera in chapter eight. When addressing objections to musical exoticism, however, Locke strangely concentrates on German scholars, although Germany historically had a small empire and a culture devoted to musical autonomy and the German classical heritage. Had Locke included more ethnomusicology in his study, Erich Hornbostel's perspectives could have balanced those of Heinrich Schenker, who probably knew very little about the Arabic, Japanese, and Turkish songs which he belittled (p.). Giving prominent attention to the opinions of Carl Dahlhaus is equally problematic, as the Berlin musicologist's focus on musical pitch as indicator of the exotic was perhaps, as Locke suggests, "shaped by Schoenberg's version of modernism" (p. 49) rather than any real interest in the genre.

In examining "the extent and nature of the borrowing" (p. 32) as well as the expressive and ideological ends it may have served, Locke comes up with two models. His "Exotic Style Only" paradigm, or "just-the-notes" approach (p. 56), describes music that has conventionally been considered exotic because of "specific musical signifiers of Otherness" (p. 48)--scales and harmonies other than major-minor, "intense chromaticism," static harmonies, distinctive rhythmic or melodic patterns associated with foreign cultures, monotone singing, melodic ornaments, unusual instrumental timbres, and other such emblems of difference (pp. 51-54). Readers will also want to consult Bartoli's recent work that throws into question the pentatonicism and whole-tone (if not also the octatonic) scales favored by modern composers such as Debussy and Stravinsky as well as, implicitly, the scholarly industry that has developed around their use (pp. 236-238).[3]

Wishing to include music that portrays exotic locales without using foreign musical devices, Locke also proposes a second category, the "All the Music in Full Context" or "Full-Context" paradigm. This refers to not only opera's use of costumes and decor, but also musical binarisms expressing various forms of Self and Other, near and far, real and fictive. Locke also considers how "exotic musical works reinforce, engage creatively with, or possibly even undermine [such] binaristic categories" (p. 72). In other words, "what makes a work more or less powerful and more or less nuanced often has to do with its handling of stereotypes" (p. 81). Moreover, "what the chosen musical materials were intended to signify, in context, and what they have meant to audiences and critics" could change over the years (pp. 46-47).

Most of part two concerns these two forms of musical exoticism. Insightful analyses of works such as *Belshazzar*, the Babylonian tyrant Handel portrays semi-comically, allow the reader to reflect on why such subjects were chosen, what they may have meant to contemporary audiences, and why we might want to hear them again today. Unpacking the four contemporary societies represented musically in Rameau's *Les Indes Galantes*, he tells us about the Native American dance inspired by a tribe from Louisiana who

Rameau once saw perform in Paris in 1728. One of the strongest aspects of the book is the extended discussion of “Turkish exoticism” (pp.110-26), inspired by the percussion instruments of the Turkish Janissary troops. Locke includes illustrations and a table of its characteristics, c. 1750-1830, before analyzing Mozart’s use of it in detail.

Particularly fascinating are Liszt’s Hungarian rhapsodies as they point to the role that gypsies or Roma have long played in eastern European musical life and a style that, despite its difference, had also “absorbed central features of Western music” (p. 147). Locke proposes an apt description of them as “internal outsiders,” a characterization also appropriate for composers such as Saint-Saëns who frequently lived abroad. Liszt himself used the word “exotic” to describe gypsies’ improvised music. Locke cites Liszt’s criticism of Schubert’s gypsy adaptations, and ponders why he named his own gypsy-inspired Rhapsodies “Hungarian” and not “Hungarian-Gypsy,” Locke’s preferred nomenclature. Gypsies return in the next chapter as operatic characters in Verdi and Bizet, especially with a new reading of *Carmen*. Locke also warns against too-obvious referentiality, such as in Meyerbeer’s *L’Africaine* in which subsequent revisions transported a story, originally set on the Niger River in West Africa, to India and later, Madagascar.

When it comes to empire and its presence in Western opera, Locke notes that most had a similar plot--the “quest romance” of a Westerner abroad, complicated by a romantic triangle. *Madama Butterfly* and Bizet’s *Les Pêcheurs des perles* are the main focus of this chapter but, to understand the complexities of semiotic possibilities in such operas, the reader should also take a look at Locke’s prize-winning article, “*Aida* and Nine Readings of Empire.”[4] As for the press rarely discussing politics or colonialism in reviewing such works (p. 179), this is basically true. However, contemporary events often underlie the choice of what works were put on stage, particularly in a related genre not examined here, “exotic spectacles.” Politics often provided the grist for wildly popular urban entertainment, such as *Michel Strogoff* in the 1880s and 1890s, as Russia was becoming an important imperial power, or *Au Dahomey* in the early 1890s, during imperialist conflict there just before domination and colonization.[5]

In the last chapters, Locke shows continuity with earlier decades even though, “since the 1950s, self-defined ‘serious’ composers who were born and raised in the United States and Europe... have tended to avoid straightforward evocations of the exotic” (p. 284). Here he proposes three more categories: Submerged Exoticism, Transcultural Composing or Absorbed Exoticism (with its “loss of the exotic aura” [p. 217]), and Overt Exoticism. The first refers to the use of musical materials previously considered exotic, but not used to evoke exotic references, for example, the presence of arabesque-like melodies in Debussy’s music and the octatonic scale, previously associated with Russianness, but no longer explicitly referential in Stravinsky’s neoclassical works (p. 236). Submerged Exoticism also describes exotic references removed or downplayed, such as Jolivet’s sub-Saharan-inspired *Equatoriales*, whose title the composer later changed, and Milhaud’s *La Création* which, despite its jazz influences, was originally composed as a ballet about the creation myths of tribal Africans (pp. 237, 243).

In contrast, transcultural composing involves blending, interweaving, or merging western musical elements with those of the “distant Other” (p. 228). Such a process may have developed from a more heightened awareness of the value of non-Western music. In an essay on “taste,” Debussy once inverted the conventional notion of “noise” or “un bruit barbare,” commonly used to describe how non-Western music often sounded to European ears, in contrasting “our” music with the sophisticated counterpoint of Javanese music.[6] Reacting against the notion of “escape through sound,” Debussy sought to expand the western musical language by adapting exotic elements as part of their own language. Here the discussion would have benefited from comparing the transcultural composing of Debussy with that of earlier composers who shared this purpose. At the end of the book, the short reference to David Fanshawe’s *African Sanctus*, with its juxtaposition of African ritual music and Catholic Mass, and other such examples of transcultural composing plant the seeds of another, future volume. [7]

Alongside the subtle relationships to exotic materials in some modernist music, Locke also finds Overt Exoticism throughout the twentieth century, such as in Soviet era nationalist music, light orchestral music, popular song, film, and musical theater. Lyrics and images complement these analyses, such as a caricature of the Black Birds performing at the Moulin Rouge in 1929 and photographs from the original Broadway production of *West Side Story*. One of the most insightful analyses comes from Locke’s discussion of Bernstein’s “evenhanded portrayal of the rival ethnic groups,” perhaps equally unfamiliar to most American audiences, with both groups singing “identical” music and dancing the Mambo. Does this signal the “death of exoticism” and the “birth of a multiracial, multiethnic, mutually tolerant society,” he asks, or at least “plant the seed of that better world” (p. 275)?

Where Locke’s definitions run into problems are in the discussion of nationalism and the conflation of exotic and folk traditions, in part because the thorny issue of race is not really addressed. Locke builds on Herder’s overarching notion of exoticism (p. 109) and suggests that a composer’s “overt use of folk-like tunes such as tourist might have expected to hear” constitutes exoticism, even if the borrowed source was a popular song of the time (p.). Likewise, Mendelssohn’s “Italian” Symphony is exotic because “we are expected to think of Italy as a locale in which the dancing is understood as taking place” (p.). But what if the music does not evoke Italy for the listener? And can Italy ever really be exotic for French listeners, especially since so many artists and musicians lived and worked there during their Prix de Rome years? Is the “will to represent” or the “will to evoke” (p. 74) really sufficient to mark a work as exotic? If the “rural villages of Poland must have seemed exotic indeed to the highly refined Chopin” (p. 75) who spent a summer vacation there, where is the line between exotic and nationalist, or between auto-exoticism and nationalism? If the associations of race with national identity had been more explored, then the connections to Italy and the meanings associated with the folk song movement throughout the west might have argued for excluding this genre as exotic.[7] Moreover, even if in many literary works, “the basic category of Other applies to women,” this does not mean that the word exotic should also be applied to gender (pp. 82, 273).

Because it may provide for “some degree of reciprocity between the two cultures in question,” Locke’s choice of the word “transcultural” begs certain questions (pp. 66, 106). How do people in foreign cultures respond to depictions of themselves as exotic Others? And, perhaps even more important today, how does the Other look at us? What does it mean for non-Westerners to adapt Western music and Western instruments for their own uses, especially the electric guitar, and why do we tend to call their assimilation of Western traditions modern, as if this is a neutral process, instead of exotic or “reverse exoticism,” as Locke suggests (p. 66)? Locke’s analysis of Tan Dun’s music points to ironies--his adaptation of western musical conventions led subsequently to his incorporation of Japanese instruments. If, in non-westerners’ affection for such forms as hip-hop, theirs is an “ignorant exoticism” (p. 67), can’t the same be said of most Western composers’ exoticism, at least before the twentieth century? Since exoticism has been a “defining force in the growth and elaboration of Western art music” (p. 2), we need to understand much more about it in the rest of the world, also characterized by migrations and interculturalism.

One of *Musical Exoticism*’s many strengths is that it takes on the risk of defending what Appiah has called the “necessary and inevitable part of cultural contact” (p. 41) and gives us many new reasons to appreciate this music. With its subtlety and wide-ranging analyses, music lovers will find many occasions here for fruitful “reflection.”

## NOTES

[1] See also his earlier book, Ralph P. Locke, *Music, Musicians, and the Saint-Simonians* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1986); also translated as: *Les Saint-Simoniens et la musique* (Liège: Mardaga, 1992).

[2] Jonathan Bellman, ed., *The Exotic in Western Music* (Boston, Mass.: Northeastern University Press, 1998); Jean-Pierre Bartoli, “L’Orientalisme dans le musique française du XIXe siècle,” *Revue belge de musicologie* 51(1997): 137-70; and Timothy Taylor, *Beyond Exoticism: Western Music and the World* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2007).

[3] In his entry on “Debussy,” in Francis Pouillon, ed. *Dictionnaire des orientalistes de la langue française* (Paris: Karthala, 2008), Jean-Pierre Bartoli reviews the French scholarship on this subject that has tended to see the use of the whole tone scale in Debussy’s music as “a personal invention,” inspired by the pentatonicism he heard in the gamelan performances at the 1889 Exhibition (p. 266).

[4] This article, which won the Colin Slim prize from the American Musicological Society in 2006, appeared in *Nineteenth-Music Music Review* 3(2006): 45-72.

[5] See Jann Pasler, *Composing the Citizen: Music as Public Utility in Third Republic France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), pp. 416-418; 669-671.

[6] Claude Debussy, "Du goût" (1913) in *Monsieur Croche et autres écrits* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), pp. 228-231.

[7] See my "Theorizing Race in 19<sup>th</sup>-century France: Music as Emblem of Identity," *Musical Quarterly* 89, 4(Winter 2006): 459-504 and "Race and Nation: Musical Acclimatization and the Chansons Populaires in Third Republic France," in Julie Brown ed., *Western Music and Race* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 147-167.

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