Miriam Karpilow Whaples
Exoticism in dramatic music, 1600-1800

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The primary objective of this study is "to examine for the first time the body of Baroque and Classical opera and ballet on exotic subjects, and to determine to what extent, if any, this subject matter influenced their music." The author defines "exotic" as "equivalent to non-European," a definition that excludes the Spanish and the East European. Nor does she consider the Florentine Camerata, although she does acknowledge their achievement in effecting one of the most far-reaching style changes in music history. A distinction is made between music for plots which take place in exotic locales and musical patterns borrowed from music indigenous to distant lands.

The principal task of the author has been the examination of approximately 100 scores, the titles of which suggest exotic topics. These are selected from about 400 such titles in standard opera bibliographies.

Opening with the "furious Moresca" danced at the wedding party given by the Duchesse de Berry on January 29, 1393, the author proceeds with a survey of the diffusion of exotic entertainments in Europe. Chapter II deals primarily with the subjects and the social philosophies implied by the librettos, among them, the "Noble Savage" and "Back to Nature." Subsequent chapters discuss the musical scores set to plots about exotic lands as well as the native music of these countries—principally Turkey, China, and the Americas. The final chapter summarizes her findings and is followed by a bibliography, valuable appendices, and a general index.

Particularly detailed analysis of Lully's *Bourgeois Gentilhomme* (1670), Campra's *L'Europe Galante* (1697), Rameau's *Les Indes Galante* (1735), Gretry's *Le Caravan du Caire* (1783), and works by Speer, Müller, Gasparini, etc., discloses little exotic music. In certain situations composers resort to minor mode, chromaticism, primitive harmony, repeated motifs, gibberish, and exotic instruments, and Gluck succeeds, to a limited degree, in imitating certain melodic formulas of Turkish music in *La Rencontre imprévue* (1764).

Considerable space is devoted to the patterns and instruments of Turkish music as utilized by Europeans. Whaples concludes that none of the actual exotic music brought by travelers from Turkey

and the Orient was ever quoted in these operas. Extended, monotonous repetitions and tunes based on a few tones within a narrow compass do not occur. Indeterminate pitches, microtones, ejaculations, glissandi, vibrato—all characteristic of the style—were known but not used. What passed as "stilo alla turca" was primarily "farcical in intent" and therefore utilized the musical vocabulary of the comic opera.

Whaples found no musical differentiation between the Spanish and American characters in the *Montezuma* operas: "None go beyond the use of primitive drone, repeated rhythmic patterns, or melodic formulas standardized for stylized incantation scenes, but without ethnomusicological authenticity." Among the rare exceptions she cites the Peace Pipe Dance in *Les Indes Galante,* the torture scene in Dalayrac's *Azémia* (1786), and the part of a runaway negro slave in a trio from Rudolph Kreutzer's *Paul et Virginie* (1791). She concludes: "Musical representation of primitive [Savage] peoples on the European stage contained some stylistic features for differentiation but not native music itself (p. 258). We have found no instance of musical exoticism before 1800 which uses non-European devices not also found in the European vocabulary" (p. 263).

The author calls attention to the glaring disparity between the enthusiastic acceptance of Oriental decorative arts and literature on the one hand, and the rejection of exotic musical idioms on the other. She offers several hypotheses to account for this attitude. First, aural taste and aesthetics are probably conservative psychological factors much more difficult to overcome than responses to visual arts or literary forms, hence the general distaste of Europeans for oriental and primitive music. Second, content with their "superior" musical tradition, 17th- and 18th-century composers felt no need to seek new musical resources such as those that swept Europe at the turn of the present century when the traditional vocabulary was regarded as exhausted. Third, Europe lacked adequate knowledge of actual exotic musics; there was no interest in ethnomusicology. Fourth, Whaples speculates that there may have existed a subconscious ideational conflict between the concept of the "Noble Savage" and the exotic musics which Europeans found "repellent"—a cleavage between the philosophy of the librettos, which regard the non-European sympathetically as a part of mankind, and distaste for his utterly alien musical language.

Whaples presents 56 excerpts from primary and secondary historical sources containing descriptions of the music of exotic lands. The quotations range in length from one sentence to eleven pages, and include items from the "Itinerary of Richard I and others to the Holy Land," Captain Cook's travel journals, and the writings of Dr. Charles Burney.

Early examples of exotic music are brought together from scattered sources, such as the Tupi melodies from Brazil (1592) and the Turkish tunes in Donado (1688). Among the more significant is a piece of Turkish Janissary music, *mehter,* reconstructed in recent years by

Turkish scholars (p. 81). She stresses the conjectural nature of the reconstruction inasmuch as it is based on literary sources and not music. "Just how much conjecture is involved we have not been able, after a year of persistent inquiries to learn." She notices little affinity between this piece and imitations of "Turkish music" in 18th-century Europe.

The author accomplishes the task she set out for herself and confirms that European music remained fundamentally unchanged by exotic subjects.

While the major thesis and conclusions of the dissertation are sound, a spot-check disclosed more errors and oversights in minutiae than might be expected.

1. The author fails to lay sufficient weight upon the difficulty of adopting alien musical idioms. In spite of our widespread and intimate knowledge of exotic musics today, only one "European" composer, Alan Hovhannes, has succeeded in making exotic idioms his own musical vocabulary after years of intensive study. Composers of the Baroque and the Classical times, even of today for that matter, could not be expected to submit to such discipline in order to absorb and compose in a foreign musical language. In any case, performance practice—one of the essential ingredients—would have eluded them.

2. Several pertinent tributary aspects of the problem have been all but ignored. Sometimes stage directions call for an exotic instrumental group for which no music is provided in the score. No attempt is made to discover what the nature of this music might have been. Differences between vocal and instrumental style do not receive due attention, particularly in view of the obvious dissimilarities between the *mehter* music and the 18th-century imitations of "Turkish music." Nor is a serious attempt made to trace the probable role of exoticism in the introduction to Europe of ornate, florid style.

3. Occasionally the discussion is interrupted by digression into material not directly relevant. In one conspicuous instance (p.192) the author launches into the controversy over the authenticity of some pieces ascribed to Mozart, which Fokine had used for his ballet *Chung Yang and the Mandarin* (1936). The involved discussion concerns errors by several persons, particularly the program annotator. The problem had been clarified already by a final footnote in Mojsisovic's article on this subject (*Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft* 12:480), and in the Köchel-Einstein *Mozart Verzeichnis* (3rd ed.) to which she refers.

4. Some of the minor discrepancies are probably due to conciseness. The remarks within the text about the Turkish instruments Donado mentions are likely to be misconstrued if one does not refer to the fuller extract in the appendix. The same is true of Whaples' criticism of Burney's discussion of the *Siege of Rhodes*. Burney specifically states his remarks are based on the 1679 edition. At this point the author commits a second oversight. A footnote for this passage in the 1935 edition of Burney names John Coleman as one of the two composers responsible for the instrumental music; here his name is omitted without explanation.

Her comments on the symbolism of keys, the nature of vocal and instrumental bass lines, reasons for unisons and octaves, and the gibberish might be revised by a broader knowledge of these topics than is evident from her statements.

In view of the considerable excerpts from several languages occasional typographical errors might seem inevitable. There are seven of these in the one page quoted from Donado. For instance, "bi e" should read "bize," meaning "to us."

Her own translation adheres literally to the original texts without attempting a literary style. Occasionally one meets passages such as "Daul, a drum somewhat larger than is ordinary, with a wooden body" (p.328), or "When they have quitted work at the sugar-works" (p.379). In the translation of "etlichen Oboen, oder Violinen," the violins are omitted (p.320), and in one case "trois" becomes "two."

To sum up, on the basis of the operas examined it is highly probable that the results of Whaples' study will remain substantially the same if the remaining 300 exotic titles are also examined. Furthermore, we should be grateful to the author for bringing together such copious excerpts from travel diaries as well as examples of exotic musics from early historical sources.

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