

Ralph Locke. 2009. *Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.

Reviewed by Kristy Riggs

Western artists, writers, and scholars have long used images to represent the exotic Other. In 1835, the French writer and poet Alphonse de Lamartine entitled his travelogue *Souvenirs, impressions, pensées et paysages, pendant un voyage en Orient (1832–1833) ou, Notes d'un voyageur*. A few years later, Franz Liszt unveiled his *Album d'un voyageur (1837–1838)* labeling the first book *Impressions et poésies*. Ralph Locke's new book follows in a similar vein with the title *Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections*. Just as travel to a foreign region conjured snapshots and images in the minds of Lamartine and Liszt, Locke uses impressions and observations to arouse curiosity and appreciation for musical representations of exoticism.

The overarching goal of *Musical Exoticism* is to survey the “vast and varied repertoire of Western musical works that evoke exotic locales” (i). Locke presents his book as adding to and building on the growing body of music scholarship dedicated to examining the construction of the exotic Other. The opening chapters critique studies of exoticism and Orientalism—both music and otherwise. The overview brings together a wide variety of important scholarship. However, the majority of these studies—including several by Locke himself—focus on musical representations of a specific locale or people. Examples include studies of the *alla turca* style during the eighteenth century and the representation of Roma gypsy music in the early twentieth century.¹ Because of the prevalence of such narrowly focused accounts of musical exoticism, Locke chooses to take a broader, more comprehensive perspective that seeks to examine exoticism throughout Western art music.

This approach has its strengths and weaknesses. By not limiting his study to a single composer or time period, Locke is unable to offer the rich, highly detailed accounts afforded by a study of only a few compositions. Despite this sacrifice, the book's far-reaching parameters allow Locke to trace the changes in exoticist trends and thus give exoticism a historical trajectory. This strategy offers a fuller understanding of exoticism as a recurring phenomenon rather than as a smattering of unique occurrences.

Music scholars and neophytes alike will appreciate the new material and creative approaches presented in *Musical Exoticism*. Locke addresses many well-loved works within the Western art music tradition, such as

Rameau's *Les Indes galantes*, Verdi's *Il trovatore*, and Debussy's *Prélude à l'Après-midi d'un faune*. These explorations weave together musical analysis with thoughtful reflections. For instance, we learn that nineteenth-century audiences in Europe viewed Mozart's *alla turca* style as "totally from the Orient" (114) and that Liszt meticulously transcribed folk melodies that inspired his Hungarian Rhapsodies (139). These anecdotes provide fresh insight to time-honored classics for readers of all backgrounds.

Musical Exoticism begins with a series of introductory chapters that delve into postcolonial theory and critical theories of race and ethnicity. In the last few decades, scholars have wrestled with how to discuss representations of Otherness in art and literature. Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, among others, have grappled with the historically constructed binary of East and West and have offered approaches to help scholars better understand and write about these multilayered issues.² Locke evaluates various terms used to describe the musical Other such as "exoticism," "Orientalism," and "local color." As one might expect from his title, Locke prefers the term exoticism and draws attention to the ambiguity and confusion that surrounds the widely-used Orientalism. He argues that the latter term is not always applied in the full Saidian sense and is sometimes used to invalidate or reject musical works. "Naturally enough, then, 'Orientalism' has also become for some music critics and scholars—just as for literary critics and such—a curse word, a sharply disapproving substitute for a word—'exotic'—that had so long been used in a (now-considered-naïve?) spirit of delighted endorsement" (38).

The term exoticism is not without its own drawbacks. In the definitions cited by Locke, art and music scholars describe exoticism as the "imitation" or "borrowing" of "elements in alien cultures" (44–45). However innocent or neutral these definitions may sound, the representation of difference has strong historical and political implications. Addressing artistic representations of difference requires the identification of Self and Other, Insider and Outsider. These categories present a swirl of controversy as scholars seek to understand the implications of power and hegemony in such representations. Locke acknowledges the deeper issues surrounding exoticism, stating that "we need to pay attention to what the chosen musical materials were intended to signify, in context, and what they have meant to audiences and critics over the years" (46).

Locke offers a brief overview of the term exoticism, tracing its etymology to the designation of "places or settings 'away from' some vantage point considered normative" (43). He then provides his own definition of the term that illustrates the complexity of the topic at hand. His definition involves five lengthy considerations that serve only as starting points (46–47). Through his "broader definition," Locke states his aim to "encompass various consid-

erations that previous definitions have generally not addressed,” including the function of musical exoticism within culture (47). He also identifies what he describes as the two reigning paradigms that dominate studies of exoticism: the “Exotic-Style Only” and “All the Music in Full Context.” Locke uses the former label to refer to the “just-the-notes approach.” The latter paradigm takes a more holistic approach by accounting for the full context surrounding a composition. Locke argues that too often music scholars are preoccupied by the “Exotic-Style Only.” This approach leads to the perception that exoticism only exists if the notes themselves represent the Other. Locke writes that musical compositions may exhibit exoticism through other means than the notes on the score:

The conventional first line of approach in dealing with [exotic] repertoires is to look for some fairly evident relationship between the musical notes and the intended extramusical image. . . . But music, once it is given a text to comment on and support, commands a much wider range of expressive devices than this. (58)

Although the titles for his paradigms are a bit wordy and even awkward—I might suggest instead compositional and contextual exoticism—Locke crucially urges us to move beyond “just-the-notes” in order to understand music within its full context.

Parts II and III are ordered chronologically and reveal Western composers’ long fascination with the exotic Other. Locke identifies larger trends within musical exoticism such as “Baroque Portrayals of Despots,” “Gypsy Characters and Poor Andalusians,” “Submerged Exoticisms,” and “Pop Exotica.” Within these trends, Locke discusses compositions that are best approached using the “Exotic-Style Only” paradigm alongside those that are better understood through the “All the Music in Full Context” paradigm. Bizet’s *Carmen* serves as an example. Locke describes the “Exotic-Style” characteristics heard in the Prelude: the use of the augmented second and “slithering chromatic tremolos.” However, he contends, “once the curtain rises, we need the (broader) Full-Context Paradigm of musical exoticism if we are to grasp the full range of ethnic portrayals” (162). Features of the “Full Context Paradigm” of *Carmen* include the characters (Spanish and Gypsy) that exhibit ethnic stereotypes, costumes and staging (Locke examines photos of Emma Calvé and Rosa Ponselle in costume) and the portrayal of gender stereotypes, notably, the “irascible Spanish male” (Don José) and the “impudent and coquettish” female (Andalusian tobacco factory workers).

Throughout the book, Locke touches upon the subjects of empire and hegemony. Ranging from Rameau’s *Les Indes Galantes* to Paul Simon’s album *Graceland*, he notes the musical repercussions of the building and aftermath of empire. These thorny issues also point to a weakness of *Musical*

Exoticism, in that we are left wanting to know more about the political and social histories surrounding the music. For example, Locke's discussion about Russian musical exoticism in the early twentieth century barely addresses the overlapping cultural and political implications between nationalism, folk influence, and representations of the exotic Other in this period. The omission illustrates the difficulty of keeping in play a larger cultural and historical context in a book that stretches nearly three centuries. An exception to this is in the chapter "Imperialism and 'The Exotic Orient.'" Under the subtitle "Multiple Empires, Multiple Orients," Locke argues that several examples of exoticism were neither innocent nor a mere representation of a composer's well-meaning interest in the Other. Rather, they were culturally and politically influenced by European colonialism. Establishing such links results in a valuable portrayal of the relations between music and empire.

In the subsequent chapter, "Exoticism in a Modernist Age," Locke further classifies and systematizes various types of exoticism using terms such as "overt," "submerged," "absorbed," and "transcultural."³ Locke sees these adjectival appendages as crucial to understanding the use of the exotic from 1890–1960. The chapter covers a large amount of musical ground with discussions ranging from Debussy to Milhaud, Cowell to Partch, Puccini to Respighi, and many in between. The end of the chapter brings us to exoticism in popular song, jazz, musical theater and film. In this section, Locke addresses questions of intentionality and explores how composers altered their "exotic practices" to suit the audience (246).

In many of his previous publications, Locke has been highly adept at uncovering obscure composers and/or works that exhibit characteristics of the exotic. *Musical Exoticism* is no exception. Here, he discusses (among other pieces), Gluck's *La Rencontre imprévue, ou Les pèlerins de la Mecque* (1764), Gottschalk's *Le Banjo: Grottesque fantaisie* (1855), Joseph Achron's *Baal Shem* (1923), and Alan Hovhaness's *And God Created Great Whales . . .* (1970). In his penultimate chapter, "Exoticism in a Global Age," Locke examines the use of exoticism in music written after 1960. He looks at the music of Aminollah Hossein, Isang Yun and Halim El-Dabh, three composers who blend non-Western and Western musical techniques in their compositions. These examples exhibit the transforming use of exoticism. Locke suggests that in the mid-twentieth century, exoticism shifted from a device that represented the foreign Other to a tool used by the Other as a means to represent one's own heritage. This shift, coinciding with the advent of what we now call postcolonial scholarship, reveals the unstable categories of the representer and the represented.

Another recurring issue throughout *Musical Exoticism* is the question of value. Indeed, for Locke the subject is so pressing that he uses it as the title of his second chapter and returns to it in his epilogue. These ques-

tions articulate the tension that arises from listening to exotic pieces that are aesthetically enjoyable but ethically fraught. Locke acknowledges that many of the works discussed in the book exhibit racism, sexism, and other problematic characteristics. A paradoxical tension emerges as he describes his disapproval of certain offensive traits in musical compositions that he nonetheless loves and enjoys. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said recognized a similar tension. He argued that the historical context or “worldliness” of works of art does not reduce or diminish the value of the work but rather “because of their *worldliness*, because of their complex affiliations with their real setting, they are *more* interesting and *more* valuable as works of art” (1993:13). The question arises: can we still value music that expresses or depicts prejudice and discrimination? Locke makes a resilient plea to do just this. By striving to better understand and reflect on such pieces, he argues, we may acquire a fuller appreciation of them.

Several weeks after first reading *Musical Exoticism*, I am still contemplating the images, sounds, and impressions explored throughout the book. Locke’s project is an ambitious attempt to explore the musical evocations of the Other from the early eighteenth century until the present. Evident throughout the book are Locke’s strengths uncovering and discussing little-known works, his deep passion for the music at hand, and his far-reaching knowledge of exoticism throughout music history. In a book that stretches such a large historical span, it is impossible to explore and discuss each of the multi-faceted questions and issues posed. Nevertheless, *Musical Exoticism* opens new doorways for further scholarship. True to its name, *Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections* fulfills exactly what it states in its title. The book offers a series of snapshots, impressions, and sounds that will inspire deeper contemplation on the musically exotic.

Notes

1. For example, see Hunter (1998), Head (2000), and Brown (2000).
2. See Said ([1978] 1994, 1993), Bhabha (1994), and Spivak (1999, 1988).
3. Sindhumathi Revuluri’s recent doctoral dissertation also addresses the topic of musical modernism and the absorption of exotic tropes (2007).

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