

RALPH LOCKE, *MUSICAL EXOTICISM: IMAGES AND REFLECTIONS* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), ISBN 978-0-5213-4955-0, 440pp, £25.

It is a paradox of exoticism that the more we study it the less exotic it becomes. Modern musicology has wrestled with exoticism arguably since the 1920s, when Erich von Hornbostel sought to define it in his eponymously titled essay 'Musikalischer Exotismus' (1921).¹ Ethnomusicology contended with issues of exoticism long before the term was invented,² even as far back as the sixteenth century, as illustrated in Frank Harrison's important collection *Time, Place and Music: An Anthology of Ethnomusicological Observation c. 1550 to c. 1800* (1973). Born of comparative musicology (*vergleichende Musikwissenschaft*)—which Jaap Kunst calls 'the study of mutual influences in Western art music'³—modern ethnomusicology distrusted the methodologies of comparison and the metanarrative it produced. Shedding increasingly unreliable anthropologies in the face of advances in ethnographic science, ethnomusicology gradually helped domesticate knowledge of foreign musical cultures.

From the eighteenth century, especially from the time of Orientalist and scholastic polymath Sir William Jones, foreign music not only became popular, it was also more accurately understood, at least theoretically. While some collectors and publishers of Hindustani airs, for example, moderate the extent of musical foreignness by employing 'satisfyingly' Western harmony, few seem as committed to accuracy as William Hamilton Bird, whose landmark volume *The Oriental Miscellany* (1789) ushered in a new era in ethnomusicological history.⁴ Despite the prospect of alienating his audience with unprepossessing music, Bird claims that he 'strictly adhered to the original compositions though it cost him great pains to bring them into any form as to TIME, which the music of Hindostan is extremely deficient in'.⁵ Bird's consciousness of foreign difference is matched by a growing scholarly (dare I say ethnomusicological) conscientiousness regarding foreign music. To understand it its integrity must be preserved. For budding ethnomusicologists this was a dawning. For composers it was an opportunity, for while knowledge of foreign (i.e. non-Western) music broadened, the quality of that knowledge deepened. And as it deepened it carried more influence. With the colonial expansion of Western empires, especially those of France and

¹ *Melos*, 2 (1921), 175–82.

² Helen Myers, *Ethnomusicology: Historical and Regional Studies* (New York: Norton, 1992), 4.

³ Jaap Kunst, *Ethnomusicology: A Study of the Nature of Ethno-musicology, its Problems, Methods and Representative Personalities*, 3rd edition (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 2.

⁴ Gerry Farrell, *Indian Music and the West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 32.

⁵ William Hamilton Bird, *The Oriental Miscellany* (Calcutta: Cooper, 1789), introduction.

Britain, progress in global exploration and developments in transportation, the world's geographical extremes were lessening, and while they lessened interest in their music grew. Contact with the East, with Africa and with other areas of the world broadly considered Oriental was becoming more commonplace, and by the beginning of the twentieth century non-Western music would form an integral part in the rise of modern music. Exoticism was a significant part of that historical process.

If the study of musical exoticism mirrors this same gradual process of acculturation, the addition of Ralph Locke's recent book to musicological knowledge should make the musically exotic more understood, and consequently less exotic as a musicological topic. And in many ways it does. But the topic, now steeped in years of post-colonial theory, is conceptually resistant, and too multivalenced, too heterogeneous to be clearly and consistently any one thing. Like a hydra, it grows two more heads as each one is cut off. *Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections* is Locke's Herculean effort to control the beast; and, true to form, he does. Locke divides his exotic musical world into two parts, the first largely theoretical and the second mainly musical and analytical. Part I comprises four chapters: (1) Music, the world, and the critic; (2) Questions of value; (3) Exoticism with and without exotic style; and (4) Who is 'Us'? The national and/as exotic, and the treatment of stereotypes. Through seven chapters Part II takes us on a chronological tour through the ages, beginning with the Baroque and finishing with the present. Chapters include (5) Baroque portrayals of despots: ancient Babylon, Incan Peru; (6) A world of exotic styles, 1750–1880; (7) Exotic operas and two Spanish Gypsies; (8) Imperialism and 'the exotic Orient'; (9) Exoticism in a modernist age (c. 1890–1960); (10) Exoticism in a global age (c. 1960 to today); and (11) Epilogue: exotic works of the past, today. Respectively parts I and II provide both theoretical and analytical frameworks, linking symbiotically a wide range of cultural theories to compositional practice.

Creating a theoretical taxonomy of musical exoticism is, in many respects, Locke's easiest task. Firstly there is criticism of the overly simplistic hermeneutic 'Exotic Style Only' (ESO), the tendency to reduce the representation of Other 'in musicological discourse, to the more concrete problem of how specific items of music—transcribed tunes, characteristic scales, instrumental timbres, accompanimental drumbeat and dance rhythms—are transferred to—or distorted or freely reimagined in—a Western context' (20). To interrogate this interpretation musicologists must examine: (1) a large, aesthetically variegated set of works; (2) the reasons why exotic stylistic characteristics elicit ethical embarrassment; (3) the hegemony and aesthetic nature of post-Baroque instrumental music; and (4) analytical traditions, especially post-war ones, which separate social influence from analytical content. ESO is a broad-brush approach, which might help identify exoticism in works lacking more highly specific ethnic markers—Mozart's 'Rondo alla turca', for example, Lalo's *Symphonie espagnole* (1874) or

Debussy's *Pagodes* (1903). But ESO, by its very nature, does not generally assess exotic musical content in the context of its precise compositional culture. To do this, attitudes about exotic portrayals must first be investigated, especially those which locate musical exoticism in relation to national values and mores. This is the essence of the 'All the Music in Full Context' (AMFC) paradigm. Respectively these attitudes provide the interpretation of a culture's music, and the culture as a whole.

Within these paradigms praise or criticism of exoticism exposes domestic anthropological and nationalistic principles and prejudices. Amongst some critics praise is actually backhanded prejudice. While agreeing that non-Western music has its charm, Schenker, for example, compares 'Arabic, Japanese, and Turkish songs' to the 'babbling of a child' (30), and in so doing relegates whole musical cultures to lower stages of human and musical development. These contribute nothing to 'a more advanced art', he suggests. Boulez, similarly, praises Asian music for its systematic completeness, but not for its aesthetic content: 'The music of Asia and India is to be admired because it has reached a stage of perfection ... But otherwise the music is dead.' (30) In more serious incarnations, these views impinge upon concepts of false exoticism—stock, culturally unindividuated representations, often conflating generalized reckonings of foreignness with diffuse localized characterizations. Today such representations—perhaps precisely because of their stereotypes—attract political condemnation, but it is precisely because of this ethicized reading that the terminology of exoticism needs further definition.

In this cultural context prevailing terminology is put under the methodological microscope, with particular focus on the stylistic markers of musical material. Locke identifies five aspects, deserving to be quoted in full:

- (1) Musical exoticism is the process of evoking in or through music—whether that music is 'exotic-sounding' or not—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 ... More precisely, it is the process of evoking a place (people, social milieu) that is *perceived* as different from home by the people who created the exoticist cultural product and by the people who receive it;
- (2) Beneath the surface, the place (people, social milieu) that is being evoked may be perceived as resembling home in certain ways;
- (3) The differences and resemblances between Here and There may carry a variety of emotional charges: they may register as consoling, may trouble a listener's complacency, and so on;
- (4) Whereas the differences between Here and There were generally conscious on the part of the creator(s) of the exotic musical work and readily apparent to listeners of the day, the *resemblances* may have been relatively conscious or *quite unconscious* and readily apparent or *not readily apparent* ...;
- (5) ... the perceived differences from *and* resemblances to the home culture—are likely to fade and be replaced by others, given that listeners may now be living in new and different cultural situations and may thus bring different values and expectations to the work. (47)

Needless to say, these definitions are fraught with philosophical complications, as Locke himself freely admits. Indeed, the very process of clarification often has the reverse effect. Semiological problems such as these create are never adequately resolved, even within sections of the book referring more concretely to musical repertoire. Like Thomas Aquinas or Charles Darwin, Locke invokes a long-standing, if self-destructive, critical tradition of openly including objections to the logic of his own terminology. Inevitably, some critics will read this as a weakness, a lack of intellectual commitment and philosophical indecision. And no doubt it can be at times enormously frustrating when the reader is contradicted in previously established certainties. But therein lies the author's true intellectual honesty, and the scholarly credibility which derives from it. Locke is not bound by terminologically reified concepts, but constantly shapes and evolves his definitions to respond symbiotically to his musical material. As such the conventional philosophical binarisms of exoticism are treated critically: then/now; self/other; near/far; fact/fiction—these are systematically dismantled and reassembled in later, more music-orientated chapters of the book. The ESO paradigm, for instance, comes under fire for failing to take in broader aspects of opera and dramatic works, instead focussing narrowly on scenes and passages with music overtly influenced by non-Western styles.

The second part of *Musical Exoticism* takes us from the realm of the abstract into the concrete world of musical repertoire, chronologically from the Baroque to the present. A daringly unreconstructed, linear chronology is both helpful and unhelpful: helpful because it organizes material into easily comparable, digestible units which ultimately tell a story; unhelpful because it does so at the expense of theoretical unity. But then Locke is not concerned with theoretical unity as such. His is not a narrative rich with emplotment, but a conceptually reactive tour of exotic musical sites. Locke is a musical travel writer, time-travelling to exotic musical pasts and presents. Going back to the Baroque, Locke focuses on the peculiarity of exotic plotlines set to largely unexotic (or at least not directly exotic) music, such as Handel's *Belshazzar* (1745) and Rameau's *Les Indes galantes* (1735, revised 1736). Here the exotic resides in the essentially textual, not musical. More overtly exotic musical styles appear from the 1750s—the Turkish style (embodied in Mozart's *alla turca*) which according to Mary Hunter functions not so much as 'an imitation of an original' but rather 'as a translation of a [widely held] perception of Turkish music' (122). This and Liszt's gypsy style represent a proliferation of exotic and national musical dialects related to more general cultural trends, such as the exploitation of 'characteristic' exotic styles; increased numbers of programmatic works; expanded use of local colour in opera, plays and theatre; cheaper dissemination of published music; publication of folksong collections; and more frequent contact with music-making of distant lands.

Tracing the exotic from text (chapter 5) to music (chapter 6), Locke then focuses on their integration in nineteenth-century opera (chapter 7), with a general discussion of exotic operas and two particular works, Verdi's *Il trovatore* (1853) and Bizet's *Carmen* (1874). Here Locke is in arguably more comfortable terrain, for where earlier musical chapters seldom recall their theoretical inheritance this chapter does occasionally locate music in abstract concepts like ESO and AMFC. But, then again, this is one of the book's main challenges: to bridge theory and practice without seeming artificial. Referring to *Carmen's* both generic and localized borrowings, for example, Locke suggests that the sometimes theoretically antagonistic ESO and AMFC are now mutually or harmoniously applicable. Looking to the opera of imperialism and the exotic Orient, this methodological difficulty is only magnified because plotlines become fixed by the following paradigmatic structure:

Young, tolerant, brave, possibly naive or selfish, white-European tenor-hero intrudes (at risk of disloyalty to his own people and to colonialist ethic, with which he is identified) into mysterious, brown- or (less often) black-skinned colonised territory represented by female dancers of irresistible allure and by deeply affectionate, sensitive lyric soprano, thereby incurring wrath of brutal, intransigent priest or tribal chieftain (bass or sometimes baritone) and latter's blindly obedient chorus of male savages. (181)

While indulging, resisting or problematizing Orientalist stereotypes (especially in relation to gender), these operas, such as Puccini's *Turandot* (1924), Bizet's *Les pêcheurs de perles* (1863) or Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* (1904), more often than not defy definition by the broader generalities of AMFC, for example. In the timeless-feeling moment during the first appearance of Butterfly and her friends in Act 1, the absence of Oriental music in the face of Oriental costume and staging seems to bring the Orientalism into high relief. But in what way does this differ from earlier, Baroque models? And how can ESO and AMFC actually help interpret and negotiate that difference if they are such generously malleable theoretical constructs?

Locke's study of exoticism from the age of modernism to the present does not answer those questions directly, but does engage with the theoretical rhetoric underlying the principles of musical practice, with concepts like submerged, transcultural and overt exoticism. In a roughly twentieth-century context, exoticism was overturned by unease about empire; access to distant lands and cultural products; the quest for originality; and a rejection of realistic representation. Accordingly, 'submerged exoticism' is:

the tendency (in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries) for general musical style to incorporate distinctive scales, harmonies, orchestral colors, and other features that had previously been associated with exotic realms. (217)

Transcultural exoticism is:

composing for Western contexts—for example, a piano recital or a wind ensemble concert—a work that incorporates certain stylistic and formal conventions of another culture’s music, often a music that has a quite different context (e.g., a village celebration or religiously inflected ritual). Pieces ... [that] blend, interweave, or merge musical elements that the composer (and audience) would recognize as being ‘our own’ with those of the distant Other culture (or several distant Other cultures). (228)

Overt exoticism is more difficult to pin down, partially hybridizing both submerged and transcultural exoticisms. With this complication in mind Locke asks the rhetorical question: does this make Debussy’s *Pagodes* exotic, for example, in the sense of portraying Indonesia generally, not merely imitating the gamelan (236)? And by extension do East and West merge indistinguishably in the exoticism of our global age, in its myriad compositional techniques, in works of Eastern composers, Soviet and Israeli music, and jazz?

As he says, the answer lies not in responding to the question directly but in interpreting the ‘ramifications of this question’ itself (236). Indeed, this is the basic profundity of Locke’s book: it asks questions about questions. It would be easy to criticize *Musical Exoticism* for all its ostensible theoretical inconsistencies, its seemingly elliptical reasoning and its ultimately inconclusive terminologies, but this would be to miss the point entirely. The topic of musical exoticism is by its very nature connotative, not denotative. It is about the meaning of musical language, not the language itself, and it evades definition as it is more concretely defined. Locke confesses as much when he concludes his epilogue:

How to combine all of this into a theoretically sound critique and appreciation of musical and other art works evoking the Other remains a challenge, and one worth tackling from many different angles. (327)

Normally, successful books clarify knowledge, but *Musical Exoticism* creates many more questions than it answers—so many questions that perhaps my opening statement is untrue. Exoticism does become less exotic the more we study it—but only as quantifiable knowledge pure and simple. As thought embodied in music it is much more complex, and even more exotic. So perhaps the more we study musical exoticism the more exotic it actually becomes. These are the contradictions Locke openly embraces in what is a major, if admittedly messy, contribution to musicological scholarship.

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