

Review

Music and the Exotic from the Renaissance to Mozart, by Ralph P. Locke. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. 472 pp.

As Ralph P. Locke reminds us early on in this ambitious and highly informative account, the inhabitants and customs of foreign lands have fascinated the Western imagination at least since the time of Herodotus. When it comes to the challenge of describing and understanding the ways in which this fascination left its mark on the Western musical imagination, certainly no one has been more committed or resourceful than Professor Locke himself. The current volume is his second comprehensive engagement with this vast topic and constitutes, in the author's words, a "prequel" to his 2009 publication, *Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Whereas Locke's earlier volume surveyed the history of the phenomenon from the early eighteenth century to the present, the current study traces the cultural encounter between the West and the Rest in general terms from its beginnings, with the ancient Greeks and the church fathers. With respect, specifically, to its expression in Western music, the survey begins in about 1500, by considering the depiction and characterization of the exotic Other in the songs and dances of the Renaissance—a consequence, as Locke points out, on the one hand, of the increasing, and increasingly fraught, engagement between Europe and the Muslim world, and, on the other, of the encounters experienced during the Age of Exploration.

Locke's account continues through the ensuing three centuries, concluding with a fresh consideration of the well-known portrayals of the exotic Others in the operas of Mozart; he revisits along the way works by Handel, Rameau, and Gluck—topics briefly addressed in the earlier volume but treated here in considerably greater depth.

The book's thirteen chapters are organized into four Parts: the two chapters of Part I set forth the "methodological considerations" and "paradigms" informing the author's approach. Part II (chapters 3 and 4) reviews prose and visual representations of the exotic, dating from Ancient Greece and Rome, and early Christianity.

Part III turns to the testimony of musical sources: Chapter 5 considers the new texts often added to pre-existing, familiar popular songs that characterize an array of exotic types and stereotypes ranging from Muslim tyrants and harems to drunken foreigners and violent Native Americans. Chapter 6 describes the musical styles of instrumental dances that may reflect the idiom of an array of national types. In addition to the standard national dances familiar from the baroque suite (allemande, sarabande, gigue), the chapter discusses the *moresca*, *siciliana*, *chaconne*, *fandango*, *polacca*, the Hungarian *verbunkos*, along with various European folk dances, not only describing their musical style but pursuing their presumed national origins and conjecturing about their possible cultural implications.

The seven chapters of Part IV constitute over half the volume. They take up, in turn, courtly ballets (Chapter 7); "distinctive Italian developments," such as the *intermedi*, *balli*, and secular vocal pieces (Chapter 8); oratorio and religious genres (Chapter 9); early opera and partly sung stage works (Chapter 10); French and Italian serious opera—as represented above all by Lully and Handel, respectively (Chapter 11); eighteenth-century comic opera (Chapter 12); and, finally (Chapter 13), the "obsession with the Middle East from Parisian Fairs to Mozart."

This summary of the table of contents alone should suffice to hint at the richness, variety, and provocative potential of the material encompassed in this volume.

Central to Locke's approach is his insistence, as in his earlier book, that to understand fully the extent and character of the exotic in Western music it is necessary to consider not only works in which exotic elements inhabit and color the musical style but, equally important, works that deal with exotic subject matter—in their narratives, personifications, geographical settings, costumes, etc.—even if the musical style contains no obvious exotic elements. He refers to these two procedural “paradigms” as “Exotic Style Only” and “All the Music in Full Context,” respectively. The second paradigm enormously expands the scope of the inquiry, since innumerable stage works and song texts, especially those created during the three-hundred-year time span covered in this book, describe exotic characters or places with no obviously exotic touches evident in the music itself. One need only think, in this regard, of Handel's *Giulio Cesare*. Locke dubs this phenomenon “exotic characterization without exotic style,” and emphasizes that the “concept ... is central to the present book—especially in operas and dramatic oratorios.”

Often enough, Locke's discussion depends entirely on textual and visual evidence: written musical sources either having disappeared, or, owing to a largely improvisational tradition, never having existed in the first place. Indeed, it is telling that the volume contains just twenty-one musical examples, as compared to over fifty illustrations of costumed performers and stage sets.

It is not surprising that any present-day consideration of a topic such as the exotic in Western music inevitably enters sensitive, discomfiting political terrain. Is it possible for a modern commentator to maintain a dispassionate stance when describing and contemplating obviously negative depictions of the behavior, religious beliefs, and mores of dark-skinned inhabitants of non-Western cultures? Locke does not avoid this predicament—if that is what it is. Indeed, the book in large measure provides what some might call a “politically correct” critique of the Western treatment of other cultures. He does not hesitate to present negative or unflattering characterizations of non-Western Others—that we enlightened moderns readily understand and condemn as outrageous racist stereotypes—in scare quotes or prefixed with such qualifying adjectives as “supposed,” or “presumed,”—whether it be the violence and sexual lust attributed variously to Muslims, Native Americans, and sub-Saharan men, the excessive greed of Jews, the criminality of “gypsies,” or the supernatural powers and seductiveness of exotic women.

On the other hand, Locke is more willing than many others to acknowledge that the West's obsession with the Other was oftentimes fueled not by fear or a sense of moral superiority but by a simple attraction to the unfamiliar. He recognizes both “the perceived attractiveness and danger of the exotic Other,” and remarks on the “fear of and fascination with Turks and pirates.” He argues further that “the more we learn about [works with exotic themes] and their context, the richer and more complex our response to them may become,” and suggests that “an era [is] not always helpfully judged by modern-day cultural values.” He adds: “In particular, the struggle between Europe and the Ottoman Empire ... was hardly a simple case of Western bully and ignorant, unarmed Easterner. To the contrary ...” Locke readily calls attention to works that celebrate the virtues of admirable rulers of foreign lands, who are held up as models of enlightened virtue from whom “We” can learn valuable moral lessons. Such models are the Aztec ruler Montezuma, as depicted in the

libretto penned by the Prussian monarch Frederick the Great and set to music by C.H. Graun or, considerably more familiar, Mozart's Sarastro.

Overall, however, Locke is clearly uncomfortable with and unhesitating in his criticism of the prevailing attitude of moral and cultural superiority that has historically informed the treatment of the exotic Other in Western musical genres.

Regarding matters of musical style, the author, as indicated earlier, is constrained by the paucity of notated sources. On occasion, irregular meters and phrase lengths, angular melodies, drone basses, along with pipes, drums, gongs, or bagpipes were deployed to suggest the exotic.

Locke suggests, however, that the “*alla turca* style was perhaps the first internationally recognized style for portraying a non-Western region through musical means alone,”—a style that only made its appearance in the eighteenth century, that is, late in the three-hundred-year period encompassed in this study. He calls attention to not only the use of drums, triangles, cymbals, and loud and/or shrill wind instruments associated with the Turkish, or “Janissary” style, but also some of its melodic idiosyncrasies such as mechanical turn figures and sequences, and the unconventional use of the raised fourth degree.

Locke also points out the musical Turkish mannerisms employed by Lully more than a century before Mozart in the “Turkish” scene from his *comédie-ballet, Le bourgeois gentilhomme* (1670), namely, emphatically repeated pitches, and the prominent use of chords on the sixth degree. He also reports, though, that effectively the same elements appear sixty-five years later—in Rameau's *Les Indes galantes* (1735/6), this time, however, to depict the Incas of Peru.

Along with its thoughtful discussion of a vast array of consequential issues, the book is a treasure trove of fascinating, or simply entertaining, information. Locke suggests, for example, that, in the wake of the Ottoman conquest of Byzantium in 1453, “it is surely no accident that beginning in the 1460s or so, the ‘L’homme armé’ song [whose text advocated a new Crusade,] was used as the basis for some forty polyphonic Mass settings” by Busnoys, Du Fay, and others. The present reviewer was unaware that Monteverdi had heard an “‘Arab who had just come from Turkey’ play what was—to judge from his description—a small ‘oud, ... whose ‘chords [*armonie*] came out with a tremolo motion which gave a very pleasing effect. I have heard nothing more novel that was to my liking.’” Just as intriguing are Locke's reports that, in 1725, Rameau witnessed two members of the Natchez tribe from Louisiana perform in Paris, and that Frederic the Great reportedly engaged Turkish musicians to introduce “true Turkish music” into his regimental bands.

It remains only to emphasize that this book is so rich in material and so wide-ranging that it is impossible to do it justice in a brief review. Encyclopedic in scope, it offers thoughtful, insightful reflections on one of the most important cultural developments in the history of Western music. At the same time, it manages to be admirably clearly and engagingly written. Quite an achievement!

ROBERT L. MARSHALL
Brandeis University