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Exoticism

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Exoticism

(Fr. *exotisme*; Ger. *Exotismus*; It. *esotismo*).

The evocation of a place, people or social milieu that is (or is perceived or imagined to be) profoundly different from accepted local norms in its attitudes, customs and morals. Exoticizing tendencies can be found in many musical cultures; the present article deals primarily with instances in Western art (and to a lesser extent popular) music.

The exotic locale that is evoked may be relatively nearby (e.g. a rural French village, in an opera composed for Paris) or quite distant. It is usually suggested by a descriptive title (e.g. in an instrumental work), a sung text (e.g. in a song) or sets and costumes (e.g. in an opera). These extra-musical features are often reinforced by musical features typical of, or considered appropriate to, the people or group in question. In Western music of the past few centuries, the following have been widely used to suggest an exotic locale: modes and harmonies different from the familiar major and minor (such as pentatonic and other gapped scales); bare textures (unharmonized unisons or octaves, parallel 4ths or 5ths, drones and static harmonies and – in pieces evoking the Indonesian gamelan – a texture consisting of rhythmically stratified layers); distinctive repeated rhythmic or melodic patterns (sometimes deriving from dances of the 'other' country or group); and unusual musical instruments (especially percussion) or performing techniques (e.g. pizzicato, double stops, vocal portamento). For a fuller typology of style aspects that have been used in exotic portrayals, see Locke, *Musical Exoticism*, 2009, Fig. 3.1, pp. 51–4. Studies of musical exoticism that have focused solely or primarily on such unusual stylistic features are said by Locke to employ the 'Exotic Style Only' Paradigm. Locke argues the merits of a more inclusive approach: the 'All the Music in Full Context' Paradigm – see Locke, 'Broader', 2007, or Locke, *Musical Exoticism*, 2009, pp. 10–11, 59–65

Western art music, after flirting occasionally with the exotic during the Middle Ages and Renaissance, began cultivating it actively in the 16th to early 18th centuries, for example in *musettes* and other rustic peasant dances (François Couperin), polonaises (Bach and Telemann), 'Turkish' and 'Hungarian' dances (in Hungarian lutebooks; *see* **STYLE HONGROIS**) and scenes featuring singing and dancing 'Chinese' people or New World 'savages' (the latter in Rameau's *Les Indes galantes*, 1735). Despite the title and other extra-musical signals, many of these are musically indistinguishable from non-exotic compositions of the day. It has been recently demonstrated (Locke, *Musical Exoticism*, 2009, and Locke, 'Alien Adventures', 2009) that Baroque-era portrayals of Eastern potentates – e.g. the title characters in Handel's *Belshazzar*, *Tamerlano*, *Serse* and *Poro* – incorporate traits widely assigned at the time to powerful males in the Middle East and India, such as overweening pride or unprincipled womanizing. These portrayals are reinforced by an artful application of musical procedures that are not, however, meant in any way to invoke the musical practices of the region. Other 18th-century works evoking distant regions do use distinctive, even startling features, often concocted by the composer and having little to do with the cultures depicted (see Whaples, in Bellman, 1998). The late 18th century produced a flourishing of Turkish pieces (*see* **TURCA**, **ALLA**) based on Europeans' distant recollections of **JANISSARY MUSIC** or on published accounts of it.

In the early 19th century, perhaps as a result of the success of this 'Turkish' vogue or through the writings of Herder and other early folklorists, exotic dialects began to proliferate in Western music. The burgeoning interest in the exotic was related to a more general interest in bringing 'local colour' of all kinds into music (see Becker, 1976) or in exploiting 'characteristic styles' (nowadays sometimes called musical *topoi* or 'topics', e.g. pastoral, martial or 'ancient' traits; see Ratner, 1980). The growing interest in the musically exotic is also related to the trends of **PROGRAMME MUSIC** and musical **NATIONALISM** and to various non-musical phenomena from around the same time: paintings (e.g. of pensive Italian shepherd boys, or of naked women in Middle Eastern harems), poems (Goethe and Marianne von Willemer's *West-östlicher Divan*, 1819, and Victor Hugo's *Les orientales*, 1829) and clothing and furniture imitating Chinese, Japanese, ancient Egyptian and other styles.

In the 19th century improved methods of transport and communications and increased colonization of the non-European world, notably by the British and French, made it possible for musicians and members of their audiences to get to know different peoples and cultures by travel (or by reading travellers' reports) and for performers from other cultures to perform in Western theatres and world's fairs: as early as 1838, dancers and musicians from India gave eight weeks of public performances in Paris (see Guest, 1986). By the 1870s numerous Europeans, including composers such as Saint-Saëns, were taking winter vacations in North Africa and the Middle East or even settling there. As a result of this increased contact, various exotic dances and musical styles had their moment of fashion, from the (purportedly) Scottish **ECOSSAISE**, Spanish **BOLERO** and Italian **TARANTELLA** to the Bohemian **POLKA**, Hungarian **CSÁRDÁS**, syncopated (African-influenced) rhythms from Louisiana and the Caribbean (as in the music of Gottschalk) and florid, drone-accompanied Middle Eastern melodic lines (as in works by Félicien David and Bizet).

The two most favoured exotic settings for western European operas and ballets throughout the 19th century and into the 20th were southern Spain, as in Bizet's *Carmen* (see Parakilas, in Bellman, 1998), and what might be called the 'greater Middle East' – extending from Morocco to Persia – as in Saint-Saëns's *Samson et Dalila* (*see* **ORIENTALISM**). Since about 1855 a recurrent international vogue for East Asia can be seen in operetta and musical comedy (Sullivan's *The Mikado*, Rodgers and Hammerstein's *The King and I*), opera (Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* and *Turandot* , Britten's *Curlew River*, Adams's *Nixon in China*, and – a fascinating case because the composer is himself Chinese – Tan Dun's English-language opera *The First Emperor*) and in symphonic music (Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*).

Still, in most of the exotic works listed above (and in many others as well), Western composers do take the opportunity to use foreign (or invented) styles as a means of expanding and refreshing their own musical language (for example, Bizet's *Les pêcheurs de perles*, with Leïla's incantation; or Verdi's *Aida*, with its music for the ancient Egyptian priests and priestesses and for night-time by the Nile). Since the late 19th century this trend has become more pronounced, especially in the work of composers of an innovatory or modernist bent. Debussy, for instance, often used non-Western styles (including echoes of Indonesian gamelan music) in such a way as to minimize their specific geographical and cultural associations. Florid melodic lines and non-tonal modes (e.g. octatonic, probably derived from works by Russian composers such as Rimsky-Korsakov) permeate his works, often giving them a timeless quality. Analogous 'submerged' borrowings are the elements of Indian music (notably rhythmic formulae, sometimes gleaned from ancient treatises) in Messiaen and Boulez and of sub-Saharan African drumming in Steve Reich (see Chou, 1971; Boulez, 1986; and Morris, 1995; Scherzinger, 2004; and Gopinath, 2004). Asian musico-theatrical traditions have sometimes been incorporated into modernist music-theatre works, such as by Partch and Britten (see Sheppard, 2000, and Granade, 2010).

Not all 20th-century exoticism has been 'submerged'. Certain works of Ravel, Eichheim, Poulenc, Cowell, McPhee, Lou Harrison, Cage and Britten use gamelan style as an explicit signal; in Britten, gamelan style can also signal homosexual desire (see Brett, 1994 and 2009, and Cooke, 1997). Light concert music (Ketèlbey's *In a Persian Market*), operetta (Lehár's *Das Land des Lächelns*, Romberg's *The Desert Song*), popular song (e.g. French *chansons coloniales*), Broadway (Rodgers and Hammerstein's *The King and I*) and film (e.g. imitations of Native American music; see Pisani, 2005, and Gorbman in Born and Hesmondhalgh, 2000) have continued to use a limited but familiar collection of exotic styles to add variety or set a scene. (Accompanists of silent-film music relied heavily on such anthologies as Rapée, 1924.) A related phenomenon was the wave of 'exotic' pop-orchestral numbers by Martin Denny and others in the 1950s and 60s (including Hawaiian, Middle Eastern, 'African safari' and other standard types) and also the occasional vocal number, for example by the singer of supposed 'Incan' music, Yma Sumac (see Juno and Vale, 1993–4, and Leydon in Hayward, 1999).

Particularly interesting examples of 'consciously multicultural' musical composition come from composers with feet in two very different cultures, and who thus may arguably treat neither as, strictly, exotic, for example Paul Ben-Haim, Ernest Bloch, Halim el-Dabh, Aminollah Hossein, Alan Hovhaness, Alexina Louie, Toshiro Mayuzumi, Fela Sowande, Kevin Volans, Chen Yi and Isang Yun (see Everett and Lau, 2004). Kevin Volans (born in South Africa to a European-derived family), Osvaldo Golijov and the aforementioned Tan Dun have been particularly active in this regard – Tan in concert music, opera, chamber music and film (including his award-winning score for Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon). The merits of the resulting stylistic mixtures in their output have been much debated (see Locke, 2009, esp. 289–98).

An almost collage-like use of non-Western sound sources within a Western context has been facilitated in recent decades by the rapid development of tape technology and electronic sampling. An early instance, the *African Sanctus* (1972) of David Fanshawe, juxtaposed taped excerpts from African field recordings and a British chorus singing Fanshawe's settings of Catholic liturgy. Analogous appropriations in recent Western popular music raise complex ethical issues of ownership and commodification (see Feld, 1994 and 1995, and Zemp, 1995). Actual or imitated non-Western musics have often been used in television advertisements to sell luxury goods and services, notably air travel to distant locations (Taylor, 2007).

The developments mentioned in the previous paragraph form only a stage in a long and complex history of appropriation and 'borrowings' within popular and other heavily commercial streams of American and European music. This process has often focussed on black Americans. In the 19th-century American minstrel show, for example, white performers in dark make-up presented highly stereotyped portrayals of slaves or former slaves through music, dance and parodistic dialect, revealing both distaste for and attraction to this 'other' group (see Lott, 1993, Cockrell, 1997, Gubar, 1997, and Mahar, 1999). In the 1920s early jazz and other repertories with black American roots (for example dances

such as the shimmy) held a particularly exotic appeal for Europeans. Since about 1950, various distinctive black American genres (including rural blues, rhythm and blues, gospel and doo-wop) and their associated performing styles have exerted a formative influence on white American and British pop-music figures, including rock and roll performers, 'blue-eyed soul' artists (Laura Nyro; Hall and Oates) and 'folk' and rock musicians (Bob Dylan, Mick Jagger, Janis Joplin, Eric Clapton, Billy Joel, Justin Timberlake, Amy Winehouse). Many of these post-1950 white musicians and their listeners have thereby hinted at an identification with black Americans, whom they apparently perceive or perceived as peculiarly vital and expressive (see Denisoff, 1971, and Marcus, 1975).

The exotic in popular music can allude to other groups. Jazz has found a favoured 'other' of its own in Caribbean and Brazilian music; sometimes the effect is exotic but superficial (as in costumed 'tropical' numbers by big bands of the 1940s), other times the result is a deeper creative synthesis (Dizzy Gillespie, Stan Getz). Geographically and stylistically more distant borrowings in the popular realm include Indian sitar playing in British and American rock songs in the 1960s (e.g. by the Beatles and the Kinks; see Bellman in Bellman, 1998) and Japanese influences in the jazz-fusion music of the 1970s group Weather Report.

Conversely, certain musical styles or genres (such as rap) that are of primarily African-American origin have been adopted wholesale, or creatively reshaped according to local tastes, by pop musicians in distant regions, from francophone Africa to the southern Pacific (see Nettl, 1985, and Lipsitz, 1994). Some pop-music critics see such non-Western borrowings as weak and undistinctive echoes of the cultural expressions of America's minority population; others, as valid, varied and vibrant (see Mitchell, 1996, and Hayward, ed., 1999).

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