# Romantic Exoticism

## The Music of Elsewhere in the Nineteenth Century

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Abstract

Western art music has drawn on many sources. One of these is non-western music, which can be integrated into European classical music tradition in the form of exoticism. This paper will highlight musical elements used by composers seeking to create exoticism, examine selected works, and note common elements of western music that have exotic roots. In the nineteenth century, there were three general trends in exoticism. The first, non-musical exoticism, utilizes conventional western music alongside extra-musical exotic elements. Romantic exoticism portrays distant lands using musical elements, drawing these from the audience's perceptions of the music represented. Realistic exoticism attempts to portray another music tradition as accurately as possible. Of the three, the major trend in exoticism in the nineteenth century was Romantic Exoticism.

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The Music of Elsewhere in the Nineteenth Century

## Introduction

Western art music, in common with many other musical traditions, has a transportive quality, the ability to conduct the listener beyond the concert hall into another world. Perhaps the era most interested in the emotive and transportive powers of music was the nineteenth century, which saw the Romantic and Impressionist schools, with such great composers as Debussy and Richard Strauss using their powers to create images of nature, Wagner experimenting with emotional expression, Berlioz evoking the otherworldly rites of witches, and opera composers portraying far-off lands in the *Mikado, Samson et Dalila,* and a host of other works. Evoking distance in music is termed Exoticism.

Defining exoticism more narrowly than "evoking distance" is a daunting task. Aspects of it can be found in every art and many of the sciences. It grows from the volatile term "Orientalism," the subject of much debate in recent years. The concept has existed since a feeling of "otherness" became noticeable to mankind: the word "exoticism" is first noted in 1837, but the similar "exoticness" is found as early as the 1600s.[1] The dictionary defines exoticism as "exotic character...esp. a foreign idiom or expression."[2] A slight change in timbre, an altered harmony, or a texture shift can bring the listener around the world. Depending on which features of music an audience

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1. Oxford English Dictionary, "exotic, adj. and n," *OED Online,* Oxford University Press, (2012), http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/66403 (accessed February 01, 2013).

2. Oxford English Dictionary, "exoticism, n," *OED Online,* Oxford University Press, (2012), http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/66406 (accessed February 01, 2013).

perceives to be its own and which it perceives to be foreign, the aspects which make music exotic can differ widely; therefore any exact definition must be subjective. Bellman gives a good description of musical exoticism: "the characteristic and easily recognized musical gestures from the alien culture are assimilated into a more familiar style...exoticism is a matter of...making the notes do something different from what they usually do."[3] Taylor renders musical exoticism as "manifestations of an awareness of racial, ethnic, and cultural Others captured in sound."[4] In music, exoticism is best defined as the evocation of distance – be it social, ideological geographical, temporal, or any combination of these. The reasons composers use exoticism are manifold, but evoking distance implies that the composer is able to communicate with the listener a sense of distance. The need for communication limits composers when creating something new; the idiom must remain comprehensible, otherwise communication does not occur. Furthermore, for exoticism to be present the audience must perceive the music as somehow distinct from their own; if they do not, the music may be interesting, complicated, or unusual, but it is not exotic. The constant changes in music and subsequent attenuation of the ear to new sounds is both the mechanism by which exotic music ceases to be exotic and the reason context can determine whether the music is exotic or not. This leads to a final definition of exoticism: the evocation of distance to create a sound perceived by the listener as belonging to another music tradition.

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3. Jonathan Bellman, *The Exotic in Western Music,* ed. Jonathan Bellman (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), ix.

4. Timothy D. Taylor, *Beyond Exoticism: Western Music and the World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 2.

In general, there are three ways composers can convey distance in music. The first is to establish the setting through the use of extra-musical elements such as a program in non-dramatic music or libretto, costumes, and sets in dramatic works. Extra-musical exoticism may incorporate some "exotic" elements but does not use any location specific musical markers to establish the setting, instead relying on western forms and melodic elements. A second method of exotic expression is through romantic exoticism, which relies on the perceptions of the audience about a particular place for its inspiration. Romantic exoticism borrows selectively from non-Western music to make its sound believable, but in general the composition conforms to the expressions of the Western culture. The final type of exoticism is realistic exoticism, in which most of the musical gestures[5] and extra-musical features are borrowed. The composers pays as much attention as possible to an accurate portrayal of the donor culture. Of the three, the major trend in exoticism in the nineteenth century was romantic exoticism.

## Overview

### Scope

This paper will discuss and provide examples of these three major trends in exoticism. This study will generally confine itself to art music of the nineteenth century, although some mention will be made of earlier music to provide a framework for

5. "Gesture" refers to specific musical elements – such as a melodic turn or rhythmic motif – which identifies a place. The term is borrowed from operatic dance, where gestures of a particular place are added to the ballet of such characters as Carmen. "Element" is a more general term referring to a structural feature, such as a scale or form. A gesture might be the use of an augmented second in a melodic line, while an element would be the use of a Verbunkos Minor scale (see fig. 2) to create the melody.

discussion and of more modern music to give an idea of the long-range effects of the incorporation of exotic elements into mainstream art music.

It is important to bear in mind that not all intercultural transference is exoticism. Sometimes, the mere presence of another culture can influence music without a particular emphasis on distance. The Murriny Patha of the Australian outback are a good example: their musical forms began to take shape under the influence of Western hymn forms and the early vinyl records of western music.[6] No exoticism exists in this case because the objective is not to create a foreign music; they still regard the music as their own.

The nineteenth century contains a broad range of music. This study will concern itself with the Romantic and Impressionist schools of music to the exclusion of popular music, classicism, and expressionism. This paper will review selected romantic compositions to illustrate the three types of exotic music in the nineteenth century.

## History of Exoticism

**Attraction for exoticism.** Perhaps the most obvious question to anyone researching exoticism is why an artist seeks to use foreign elements in his art. Do western idioms fall short in some way? Bellman points out that in some cases communication using everyday language falls short, leading composers to use unusual music to make foreign or strange concepts more palatable. He writes, “The exotic equation is a balance of the familiar and unfamiliar: just enough ‘there’ to spice the ‘here’ but remain

6. Linda Barwick, “Musical Form and Style in Murriny Patha Djanba Songs at Wadeye (Northern Territory, Australia),” in *Analytical and Cross Cultural Studies in World Music,* ed. Michael Tenzer and John Roeder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 349.

comprehensible in making the point."[7] Composers venture into other musics to create an impact that only the foreign can; the transition into another music allows our minds to move beyond the scope of our prosaic lives and into new frames of reference.

There are a few main reasons composers use exoticism in their music. The first is the audience's desire for novel experiences. The foreign has always had an allure; somehow it seems more utopian, more exhilarating, or more appealing than our own way of life. A second reason is the creation of spectacle. In the Parisian Opera tradition, grandeur was all-important in drawing a crowd. What better way to dazzle an audience than with the bold colors and exotic patterns of the east?[8] Processions, palaces, and dances provide fascinating spectacle for any audience, and led to the immense popularity of exotic operas in the nineteenth century.

A third reason to use exoticism is to make social statements in an acceptable way. Operas often portray the noble savage or, depending on the political climate of the day, might portray a foreign power in a particular light. In 1658 English composer William Devanant produced a music drama about the plight of the natives in Peru under Spanish rule[9] during a rare time of peace between England and Spain, apparently in an effort to inspire the British people to oust the Spaniards from their position as leaders in New

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7. Bellman, *Exotic,* xii.

8. In this paper, "East" generally refers to anything that is not the "West;" any place construed as an "other" by Western composers. Certainly Russia is farther east than Turkey, yet the music of Turkey is a part of the east while the music of Russia may be considered western. This is an ideological division more than a geographic one. Even European nations that were heavily influenced by Islam such as Spain and Greece were an "other" and therefore oriental.

9. Miriam K. Whaples, "Early Exoticism Revisited," in *The Exotic in Western Music,* ed. Jonathan Bellman (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 9.

World exploration. The portrayal of denizens of different cultures also sent messages. While non-Europeans were often portrayed as lazy, immoral, or slovenly, as in many of the rescue operas, other composers including Liszt and Brahms treated non-western cultures as dignified and free spirited, something the rigid upper class should emulate.

Finally, exoticism allows for experimentation with the possibilities of the orchestra. Many instruments, including most of the percussion battery, had their origins in art music in exotic compositions. In the words of one commentator, "[exotic subjects] furnish a legitimate reason for all those variegated effects obtainable in the modern orchestra" and allows experimentation with the tone color options available.[10] From drones to heterophonic lines, many effects which no longer evoke a particular place in our minds were explored first in exotic music as representative of particular areas.

**Exoticism in other fields.** The effects of exoticism were by no means limited to music; they influenced every field from textiles to architecture. Some commentators have viewed the use of the foreign in art largely as a tool of imperialism. Exoticism is one of several terms used to describe the use of foreign elements in art, but a nearly equally prevalent and often synonymous term is orientalism. The term has been out of vogue recently, largely due to the work of Edward Said, a late twentieth century historian. In *Orientalism*, Said correctly points out that the East is perceived by the West as an "other" – and generally as an inferior other. Historically, artists were exposed to "others" first through exploration, then through colonization and imperialism. He sums up the attitudes and mechanisms of the west's view of the orient:

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10. D. C. Parker, "Exoticism in Music in Retrospect," *The Musical Quarterly* 3, no. 1(1917), http://www.jstor.org/stable/738010 (accessed January 12, 2013), 136, 160.

> [Orientalism] is a *distribution* of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts; it is an *elaboration* not only of a basic geographical distinction (the world is made up of two unequal halves, Orient and Occident) but also of a whole series of "interests" which, by such means as scholarly discovery, philological reconstruction, psychological analysis, landscape and sociological description, it not only creates but also maintains; it *is* rather than expresses, a certain *will* or *intention* to understand, in some cases control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world; it is, above all, a discourse that is by no means in direct, corresponding relationship with political power in the raw, but rather is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power, shaped to a degree by the exchange with power political (as with colonial or imperial establishment), power intellectual (as with reigning sciences like comparative linguistics or anatomy, or any of the modern policy sciences), power cultural (as with orthodoxies and canons of taste, texts, values), power moral (as with ideas about what "we" do and what "they" cannot do or understand as "we" do).[11]

An overview of the exotic in non-musical arts will help the reader have a better grasp of the scope of foreign influence in western culture; however, the reader will be left to make his own judgment of the moral rectitude of exoticism art. The only caution the author has for the reader, as MacKenzie points out in the preface to his book on orientalism, is to remember that what art means to us today is not necessarily what it meant to the artists, the original audience, or the donor cultures of the era.[12] Whatever modern scruples may exist about the morality of the portrayal of the east in the western mind, the fact remains that many of the works created under an imperialist, ethnocentric, and often supremacist mindset remain popular. The fascination of the unfamiliar continues to draw modern viewers as it did those of previous centuries.

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11. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books [Random House], 1979), 12.

12. John M. MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory, and the Arts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), xviii.

Perhaps the most prominent use of exoticism is in the graphic arts. Many nineteenth century artists created exotic masterworks; famous examples are Delacroix's *Lion Hunt,* Jacob Jacobs' *Landscape in Egypt,* or a number of Gauguin's works. MacKenzie notes that the demand for exotic art even created a western-style school of art in the Ottoman Empire: Hamdy Bey is the best-remembered artist of this school.[13]

Architecture too felt the pull of the East. Greek architecture has been in vogue for thousands of years, and the spired minarets of Ottoman buildings also became popular in Europe for a time. Pagodas and extensive gardens represented of China. The Kew gardens in England especially show the whimsical influence of the east. Some of the fascination with the east may have come from the stereotype of the languid foreigner; it is interesting to note that the rooms and buildings most influenced by oriental styles were those used for leisure or relaxation.[14]

Exotic literature continues to provide a medium for interesting tales. Stories of Scotland, Egypt, China, and especially works in the vein of *Arabian Nights* provide an opportunity to make a story more interesting through its unfamiliarity. Poets wrote of the homelands and their travels, and factual and fanciful accounts of explorations such as *Gulliver's Travels* were widely read during the 1800s. Later works, such as Kipling's *Jungle Book* and even the works of authors such as Poe or Bradbury, fascinate the reader with tales of far-off places, real and fictional, past and future.

Exoticism also influenced the sciences. Eastern philosophy and mystical theology became popular in the 1800s. The experiences of European imperialism and experiments

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13. Ibid., 48.

14. Ibid., 77.

with different systems of government caused changes in political science as well. Even Lyell's *Principles of Geology* references the religion of the ancient Egyptians and sacred text *Institutes of Hindoo Law or the Ordinances of Menu* from India.[15] The influence of the East was felt in nearly every aspect of European culture, as importation, imperialism, and study all allowed cultures to interact in new ways.

**Musical exoticism.** In western music, the influence of the east was heard throughout all eras. In the Middle Ages and Renaissance, emulation of the Greeks, Arabs, Moors, Gypsies, and Turks was prevalent. Also common was the *pastorale* form with its folksong-like settings. Since national styles (and nations, for that matter) were not yet developed, courts also shared music to expand their own repertoire, musically evoking distance, albeit not great distances. As exploration of the non-European world began to accelerate, interest began to grow in the cultures of the new areas discovered.

Exoticism extends far back to the Middle Ages. Whaples gives a very early example of exoticism in dance and drama, although any possible musical content has been lost. The ill-fated prank of King Charles VI and his courtiers in 1393 ended in the accidental death of four of the six pranksters, who burned in their pitch-soaked costumes after attending a party dressed as savages and singing songs of “the Saracens” (at the time, a generic term for any Muslim people).[16] In the mind of the commentators of the era, dressing as an exotic figure was apparently not unusual. Masques, elaborate court

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15. Charles Lyell, *Principles of Geology* (London: John Murray, 1832) in the Google Books online library, http://www.books.google.com/books?id=mmIOAAAAQAAJ (accessed February 3, 2013), 6-8.

16. Miriam K. Whaples, *Exoticism in Dramatic Music, 1600-1800* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1978), 13-14.

shows with drama and music in England throughout the 1500s included Turks, Moors, and Barbarians as characters; however, in most cases no notation remains to give an idea of what the music may have sounded like until the time of Lully in the seventeenth century.[17] Descriptions such as "with Turkish instruments" imply that at least some attempt was made to represent the styles of the countries under consideration. The *Oxford Companion to Music* suggests that the Heinrich Isaac's *La la ho ho* is a fifteenth century example of exoticism.[18]

Though the Baroque era is generally considered to predate Europe's fascination with exoticism, it did in fact have its share of exotic music. Theoretically the doctrine of the affections did not make use of exoticism: instead it focused on conventional elements to allow musical development and portrayal of a single emotion. In practice this was not always the case.[19] As mentioned above, Devanant's music drama was set in Peru, and other dramas based on the expeditions of the great explorers were produced. French *Ballet de Cour* (dramatic courtly dance) from the early 1600s depicts native Americans, Africans, and Turks.[20] Even the earliest of the French "operas" used foreign elements. The Mogul emperor, Indians (both native American and Asian), Black Africans, Corsairs, Egyptians, and Bohemians all appear before 1670. Lully himself, in one notable example, played guitar to the accompaniment of castanets and nakkers (kettledrums of Arabian

17. Whaples, *Early,* 6.

18. Jeffrey Dean, "Exoticism" in *The Oxford Companion to Music,* ed. Allison Latham, in *Oxford Music Online* database, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e2373 (accessed February 3, 2013).

19. Whaples, *Music,* 8

20. Ibid., 17

origin). Handel's works set in the Middle East, such as *Belshazzar*, use many diverse stereotypes of exotic men to enhance the plot.[21] Sarti, a French opera composer, used Russian and Greek-styled music to move beyond the rules of counterpoint during the Rococo.[22]

In the Classical era, exotic music was used to legitimize breaking the rules of "proper" contrapuntal music. The interest in ancient and foreign music can be seen in Rosseau's *Dictionnare du Musique,* which includes examples of ancient Greek, current Turkish, Swiss, Canadian (First Nations), and Chinese songs.[23] J. C. Bach used a native American as a character in his cantata *Lyrishes Genahlde*, albeit with the distinctly non-American name "Saïde."[24]

Exoticism is still used to provide composers with fresh inspiration; for example, the minimalists used techniques derived from other cultures to expand their vocabulary. Many film scores today also use a combination of western and eastern music to engage viewers – perhaps *The King and I* is a good early example, or even scenes in the *Star Wars* films.[25] The *Lord of the Rings* also used much foreign-sounding music; the ominous Moria scene is scored with a Polynesian choir and rugby team known for its traditional

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21. Ralph P. Locke, "Exoticism," in *Grove Music Online,* in *Oxford Music Online* database, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/45644 (accessed February 3, 2013).

22. Whaples, *Music,* 6, 21-23.

23. J. J. Rosseau, *A Complete Dictionary of Music,* trans. William Waring (Dublin: J. Murray and Luke White: 1779), 264-266.

24. Whaples, *Music,* 19.

25. The music of the Ewoks and Gungans come to mind; these are driven by primitivism and influenced by the music of Africa.

war dance.[26] This trend will continue into the foreseeable future, as pop bands, art music composers, and other musicians seek to engage audiences with new material.

It is also interesting to note that exoticism is not limited to the West. In ancient China, the influence and allure of foreign music were especially felt among the upper classes. The *huqin* (barbarian lute), associated with private, sensual enjoyment, sharply contrasted the "proper" art music of the era which was played for self-cultivation and in increase virtue.[27] The Turks too felt the pull of other cultures – even the West. In 1826 the sultan disbanded the too-powerful Janissary forces and executed their members, including their musicians. The reorganization of the Turkish military and subsequent creation of new martial music relied on Italian composers who created a new Turkish style based on the European ideas of Turkish music.[28] The modernization of militaries across the orient following debacles at the hands of the west often included western-style brass band music.

## Nineteenth-Century Exoticism

In the nineteenth century, the west's attitude toward the east shifted. As the relationship between Europe and her colonies changed from being structured around necessity and trade to more formal imperialist governments, the portrayal of the native people of the protectorates and colonies also changed. The shift from "Noble Savage" to "inferior race" happened suddenly as a result of new scientific thought with far-reaching

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26. Locke, 303.

27. Fredrick Lau, *Music in China: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 45.

28. Whaples, *Music,* 81.

effect, impacting both music and drama. Most important for this paper, increasing European involvement in her far-flung colonies was accompanied by a rise in the concert-going public's knowledge about specific cultures, including musical knowledge. To maintain their credibility, composers began to look at the actual music of the cultures being portrayed, albeit always with an ear towards audience expectations.

**The Scientific Basis for Imperialism**

The advances in science occurred simultaneously with crisis in European governmental structure. The later years of the eighteenth century were tumultuous both internally and externally. In 1812, England's final attempt to retake her recalcitrant American colonies failed and her Canadian colonies were threatened. The sudden loss of such a huge landmass caused colonial powers to review their attitudes toward the colonies. At the same time, Lyell published his *Principles of Geology* in the 1830s, popularizing the principal of uniformity, which states that "all past changes on the globe had been brought about by the slow agency of existing causes....a geologist...rejects cosmological [Theistic/catastrophic] causes."[29] Darwin took this principle along with other inspiration and applied it to biology, crafting his theory of evolution. This theory would shape the portrayal of races in the arts for centuries to come.

During the earlier centuries of exploration, differences in culture had been seen as functions of difference in habitat. Italy and Spain's sunny, warm climate was correlated with relaxed, positive personalities. On the other hand, the cold, dark, dreary climate of north Germany was thought to inculcate her people with dark, melancholic, brooding dispositions. The tropical islands with their apparently perfect weather were populated by

29. Lyell, 72-3.

naked, lazy, and carefree savages. European culture was recognized as more advanced than that of the rest of the world, but this was more because of climate than any intrinsic characteristic. Over and over, the native is shown to be noble, or at least capable of learning nobility, when placed in the proper environment. With the *Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man*, Europeans became not merely the lucky beneficiaries of a culture created by climate, but rather a more advanced race, intrinsically superior to the rest of the world's peoples.[30] Racial differences became increasingly important, because more developed races were more fit and more prepared to survive. This line of thought, when coupled with advances in the new field of genetics, culminated in the eugenics movements of the early 1900s in America and Europe. The superiority of the Caucasian west gave the nations of Europe a responsibility to properly lead the world and guide its continuing evolution for the benefit of all of mankind. This attitude found its apogee in the massive expanse of colonies and protectorates.

**The Cultural Impact of Imperialism**

The changing attitudes and increasing involvement of European nations in ever-growing spheres of influence led to an increased public interest in the world of "primitives." The middle class, previously only vaguely aware of the cultures of the colonies, began to become more knowledgeable about specific parts of the world. This led to more specificity in exotic music: whereas in the seventeenth century exotic music was fairly homogenous, by the nineteenth century, composers were writing music for Spain differently than that for China or Turkey because the audience had expectations of how those places sounded. Books of folksongs, studies of foreign music, and the ability

30. Taylor, 76-7.

of composers to interact with members of other cultures changed the way exoticism was realized in music.

**Composers**

Virtually every great composer of the nineteenth century made some foray into exoticism, but each had a particular style, resources, and inspiration. A few highlighted composers will be discussed here.

Franz Liszt, a Hungarian virtuoso pianist and composer, is known for his dazzling displays of technique. Sabaneev makes the argument that these displays are exotic – derived from his Hungarian roots and inspired by infatuation with wild gypsy music (see *Fig.1*). In any case, certainly his unusual scales[31] and emulation of gypsy folk music provide a number of examples of exotic works.

Johannes Brahms, the paragon of north German Protestant music, was not above evoking sensual images in his works, using sources such as gypsy music and folk song in his *Hungarian Dances.* He collaborated with Hungarian-Jewish violinists to learn about Hungarian style[32] and imbibed the *style hongroise* along with other great romantic composers. While the *Hungarian Dances* are probably his most famous exotic works, other compositions also use exoticism, including several *Variations* and chamber works.[33]

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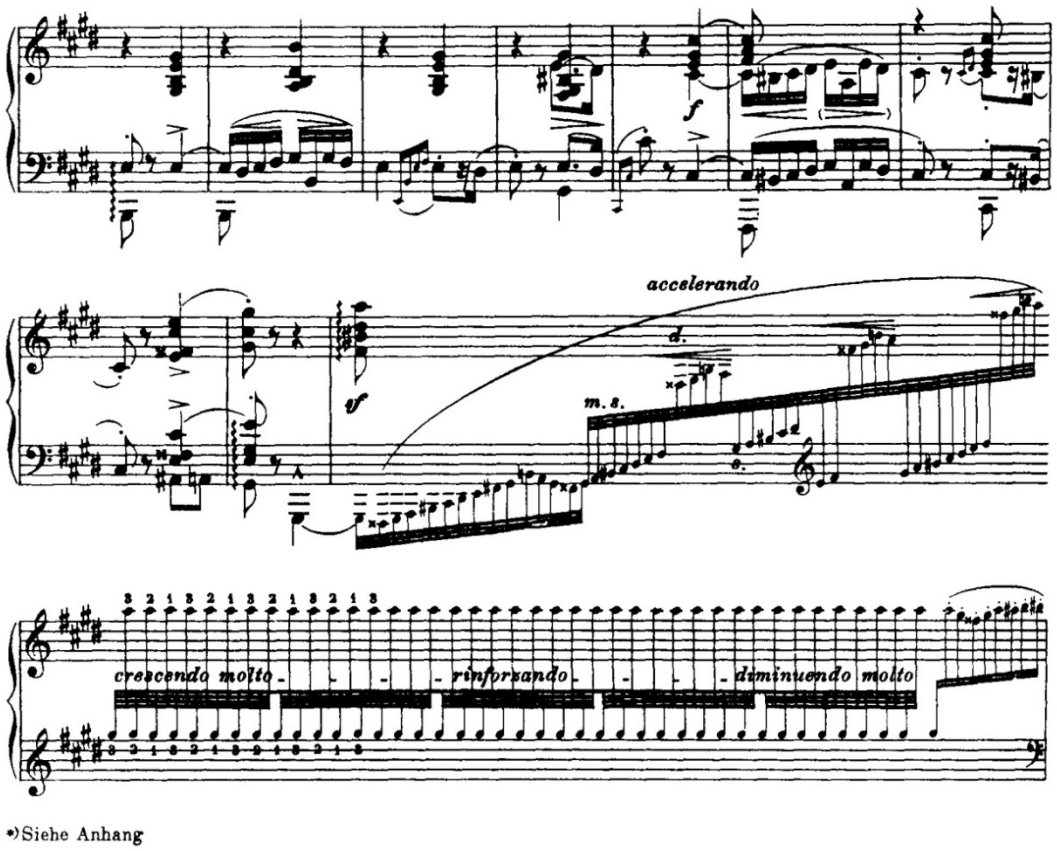
31. Leonid Sabaneev and S. W. Pring, "Liszt in Russian Music," *The Musical Times* 77, no. 1122 (1932), www.jstor.org/stable/920420 (accessed January 31, 2013), 689-690.

32. Maria Balacon, *Style Hongroise Features in Brahm's Hungarian Dances: A Musical Construction of a Fictionalized Gypsy Other* (Cincinnati, OH: University of Cincinnati, 2005), http://rave.ohiolink.edu/etdc/view?acc_num=ucin1123166536 (accessed February 4, 2013), 36.

33. Balacon, 37-8.

Figure 1. Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsody 4*.[34]




Grieg, a prominent Norwegian composer, has a style so distinct from other European art music of the era that his nationalism has become a sort of personal trademark. His music beautifully displays the mystique and power of Norse legend. Still, he did engage in some exoticism beyond the glaciers and fjords of his country – the famous "Morning Mood" from Peer Gynt is set in Morocco.[35]

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34. Franz Liszt, *Hungarian Rhapsodies for Piano 2 Hands in Two Volumes,* vol. 1 (Melville, Belwin Mills, [n.d.]), 40. Note the virtuosic, unaccompanied, chromatic, violin-like solo.

35. Daimon Wei Cheung Chan, *Norwegian Identity in Music: Norweigianness is the New Loud: Awakening Norwegian Musical Identity in a Globalised Era* (Oslo, Norway: University of Oslo: 2012), http://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-31937 (accessed February 4, 2013), 72.

Chopin, a famous Polish composer, created exotic works simply by writing and performing his own nationalist style in Paris. His forms, drones, and flourishes derive from Polish sources, but in the context of Paris these evoke a faraway locale, providing a classical example of autoexoticism, which will be discussed later.

Rossini is well known for his exotic works. *The Barber of Seville* uses exotic music and is set in Spain, and his other operas are wide-ranging. Yves Defrance points out that Rossini, Chopin, and several other composers breathe fresh air into the Parisian music world, providing interest through their own national styles.[36]

The Russian composers also engaged in florid exoticism: Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture* uses the *Marseillaise* as a leitmotif for France, and Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov wrote several exotic pieces, including the opera *Sadko* and the orchestral works *Scheherazade* and the *Cappricio Espagnol.* This brief look at a few major composers and the fascination they had with various nations will provide some idea of the pervasiveness of exotic styles. We will now turn our attention to some key features of exotic music.

**Exotic Elements**

**Musical features.** Perhaps the most noticeable musical feature in any exotic music is the scale used. Gypsy scales (a natural minor scale with a raised fourth, see *Figure 2*) are extremely important to the style hongroise, and augmented seconds are prominent in many exotic passages. The whole tone scale of East Asia would have a great effect on the composers of the late romantic and impressionist school and the pentatonic scale was used to evoke virtually any musically primitive setting, local or distant.

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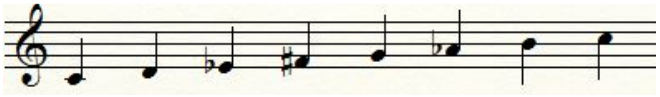
36. Yves Defrance, "Exoticisme et Esthetique Musicale en France: approche Socio-historique," *Cahiers de Musiques Traditionnelles,* 7, Esthetiques, (1994) http://www.jstor.org/stable/4024021(accessed January 31, 2013), 193.

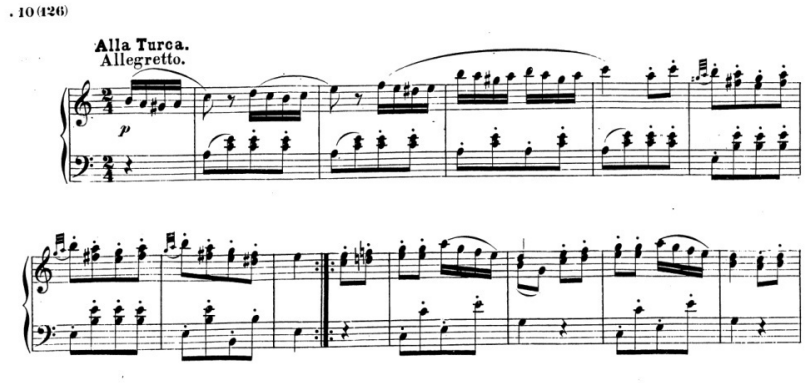
Chromatic tones can also be inserted into scales to flavor the music. Finally, church modes were used to great effect in emulating ancient times.

Figure 2. Gypsy Scale (*Verbunkos* Minor).



Rhythm is another important and easily noticeable feature of exotic music. The "limping" asymmetrical or syncopated meters and repeating rhythmic patterns of Turkey and the Levant (see an example from Mozart below) and the percussion-driven rhythms of Arabian and African music all provide interest. Composers also widely used gestures associated with Scotland and Hungary. Specific examples representing particular nations will be addressed later.

Figure 3. Section of Mozart's *Alla Turca.*[37]




37. Wolfgang Mozart, *Piano Sonata in A Major K331*, Movement 3 "Alla Turca," In *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozarts Werke, Serie XX: Sonaten und Phantasien fur das Pianoforte*, (Leipzig: Brietkopf und Hartel, 1878), in the IMSLP database, http://imslp.org/wiki/File:PMLP01846-Mozart_Werke_Breitkopf_Serie_20_KV331.pdf (accessed March 2, 2013). Note the repeating rhythmic motif in the bass (long long short short long) and chromatic melody. Locke studies this piece in more detail (*Exoticism*, 123-6).

The use of harmony in exotic music is an interesting study. Generally, the harmonic texture follows that of the era, but the scales used can complicate chord choices by creating internal dissonances. Many composers also used the drone or parallel intervals to vary their harmonic settings and provide a more rustic feel. In much exotic music, the harmony becomes subservient to the florid melody or is omitted altogether, leading many composers to write highly decorated homophonic and heterophonic passages.

Among the musical elements of nineteenth century exoticism were a number of forms that lent an exotic air to the music. Among these is the slow march, pioneered by Lully and used by Mozart, Rameau, and later composers, even to the present. While not apparently derived from any particular source, it was used in music to represent music from the Middle East to South America.[38] Generally, the forms themselves were not borrowed from a particular culture, but became a part of the stock gestures of exoticism.

From this list of musical features affected by exoticism, it should be clear that composers used exoticism in virtually every element of their work. It should be noted, however, that "rather than being a one-sided description of Otherness or a voyage to a far land, exoticism ... is a dramatic technique to create contrast and colour."[39] Exoticism does not generally mean that all aspects are borrowed or implemented at one time; rather, enough elements are used to color the music and to give it a foreign tint.

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38. Whaples, *Music,* 101-3.

39. Herve Lacombe and Peter Glidden, "The Writing of Exoticism in the Libretti of the Opera Comique 1825-1862," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 11, no. 2 (July 1999), http://www.jstor.org/stable/823716 (accessed January 12, 2013), 140.

Among the instruments used to evoke distance were members of every section of the orchestra. Much of the percussion battery was introduced to provide "Turkish" music, using cymbals, nakkers and triangles,[40] in addition to tambourines (already introduced to Europe by gypsies). Castanets, gongs, and other instruments were also added to portray music from other parts of the world. In the twentieth century, many of these instruments became standard parts of the orchestra. The Hungarian cymbalom, the harp, and a number of woodwind and string techniques all were used to add tone color. Brass instruments were called upon to emulate fanfares, especially from the Middle East. The entire orchestra was introduced to rhythms, color combinations, and special effects as composers sought to give listeners a tour of the world.

**Plot features.** Many plot elements in exotic dramas became standard features of opera. Lacombe discusses how exoticism was used in opera: "There are three dimensions of an opera touched by the theme of exoticism: (1) the visual spectacle (costumes, stage sets, production); (2) the libretto (not only the plot but also its characters and literary form); and (3) the music. Dance – a crucial element of this repertory – participates in all three dimensions."[41] Generally a number of features of exotic opera were utilized. Dances were especially popular, giving the opportunity to show off both musical and costuming skills. Another interesting feature was the use of an exotic aria. In Strauss II's *Die Fledermaus,* one aria entitled "Voices of my Homeland" is based on an Hungarian Czardas.

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40. Whaples, *Music,* 92-93. Whaples argues from several good sources that the triangle is not a Turkish instrument at all; however, she does not supply an alternate theory of its origin.

41. Lacombe, 135-6. Other studies focus more on (2) and (3)

Even with its intention of providing new material and unusual effects, exoticism includes stock elements. Spanish plays, for instance, often included a courting song beneath a balcony. This became a stock feature, so commonplace that it was used for comic relief in some settings. In fact, such features as dreams and garden settings became so recognizable that they were parodied in non-exotic operas.[42]

Another common plot feature was the abduction or rescue drama, in which a damsel is kidnapped by a foreign potentate, who extends his magnanimous hand to her lover after a long and heroic journey.[43] Another is the use of foreign dances only marginally related to the plot line to add interest. These insertions were quite common in early romantic opera. Often, composers used exoticism for comic relief or just to create interest. Cultural faux pas, an attempt to blend customs, or a role reversal all provided a new perspective and can provide moments of comedy within an opera.[44] Rituals, ceremonies, and exotic (veiled) beautiful women also added interest.[45]

**Exotic Sources**

There were many real and imagined elements borrowed from specific cultures. Some of these originated in nationalism, as in the case of Poland and Hungary; others in the descriptions by travelers. A few of the major features of each of these sources are detailed below.

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42. Lacombe, 153-4.

43. Whaples, *Music,* 51-54.

44. Lacombe 143.

45. Ralph P. Locke, *Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 196.

Many of the sources of exotic music were not too far from Europe itself. Subcultures within the core of Europe provided exotic themes, such as the Gypsies, Basques, and Irish, and fringe countries asserted themselves in the literature and music of the time. Following is a very brief list of stylistic elements related to various countries. Much of what follows is based on Ralph P. Locke's extensive surveys in *Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections.*[46] Scotland was often represented through emulation of her famous bagpipe marches, using drones, dotted rhythms, and pentatonic melodies. Russia, with its modal melodies and liturgical chant tradition provided inspiration for both nationalist Russian composers and for Europeans setting works in the East. Spain had a strong allure, especially for French composers: Bizet's *Carmen* and various *Don* operas, as well as instrumental works from a number of composers provide a large body of material. Elements of Spanish music include instruments such as castanets, vocal cadenzas, emulation of guitars, and Spanish dance forms, such as fandangos. The V-bVI alternation is also common.[47]

Another European source of exoticism was Hungary. This source is somewhat more complicated, as “Hungarian” music is not, in fact, Magyar[48] music, but rather gypsy music. The proliferation of gypsy musicians throughout Europe spread the fascination with *style hongroise* but also influenced exoticism purporting to be from other countries,

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46. Locke's study (*Musical*) also includes some ideas on the sources of these features.

47. Locke, *Musical,* 127.

48. Magyars are the dominant ethnic group in Hungary. The gypsies are Roma, probably of Indian origin. Detailed ethnographic and genetic studies are inconclusive on where the Roma came from or when they arrived in Europe.

especially Spain.[49] Further complicating music for Hungarians is that the gypsies performing the music frequently were not the sources of the airs they performed; in a fascinating twist, upper class Magyars wrote stylized "gypsy" music they were above performing and taught gypsy street musicians to play their songs.[50] In any case, specific elements of gypsy music became recognized as *style hongroise*, exotic elements that are characteristic of many of the Hungarian dances and other gypsy-inspired literature. These include *hellgato* style,[51] a free-metered variation on a previous theme. Pizzicato string solos, drones, non-functional harmony, the addition of augmented seconds in a scale,[52] and a freedom of key are also common in style hongroise. The violin and middle woodwinds are emphasized, and fast rhythms interrupted by a pair of sustained tones are common (as seen in *Figure 4)*. Another rhythmic feature shared with Turkish music (from which it may derive) is the characteristic short-long-short accompaniment found especially in Brahm's Hungarian Dances, also seen in *Figure 4.*

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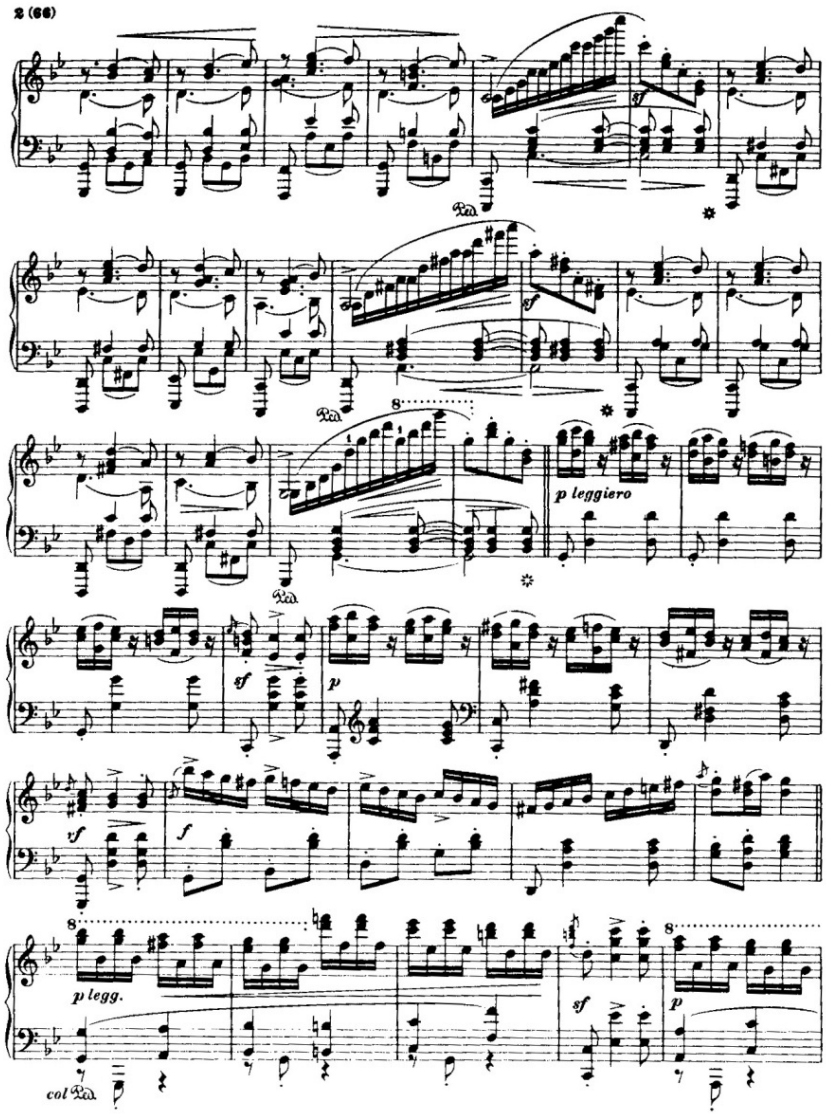
49. Gypsy music also became a part of authentic Spanish music. For a detailed study of this, see Peter Manuel's study "Flamenco in Focus," listed in the bibliography.

50. Bella Bartok, "Gypsy Music or Hungarian Music?" *The Musical Quarterly* 33 no. 2, (1947) http://www.jstor.org/stable/739152 (accessed February 4, 2013), 240-242.

51. For further explanation of Hellgato style, see John Bellman's article, "Toward a Lexicon for Style Hongroise," cited in the bibliography.

52. In fact, the famous "gypsy scale" (*Fig. 2,* page 22) is no more common in gypsy music than any other scale; its connotations were created through its use in exoticism.

Figure 4. Brahms' *Ungarische Tanze 1*.[53]




Another source of exotic sounds was America. While the whole New World was interesting as a source of a variety of Native Cultures, the United States itself also offered

53. Johannes Brahms, *Studies and Various Piano Pieces* (Melville: Belwin Mills, 1970), 66. Especially note the bass figure (short long short), one of Brahms' common Hungarian features. This is even more prominent in the four–hand version of the piece. Also note the fast passages interrupted by a pair of sforzando longer notes in the liggerio section.

composers some interesting material. Mahler's *10th Symphony* was based on the sounds he heard in America,[54] as were Debussy's *Golliwog's Cakewalk* and Gottschalk's *Le Banjo.* Pentatonic melodies, slow drum rhythms, wide appoggiaturas,[55] and animistic innocence or nature-celebratory themes all represented new world natives. Dvorak's *New World Symphony,* although not using any obvious direct quotations from American works, includes a movement on *The Song of Hiawatha* and another movement is based on the dance of the Pau-Puk-Keewis.[56] Another source of inspiration and plot elements were the slave communities. One of Dvorak's compositions based on the spirituals he heard actually was set to a text and became the (pseudo) Spiritual *Goin' Home.* Other composers including Debussy wrote in cakewalk form, a rhythmic dance derived from the American Indians by slaves and quickly spreading and morphing into ragtime. Jazz and other American popular music were especially influential in the nineteen hundreds in both America and Europe with its complex rhythms and unusual instrument sounds.

Another group of sources for exoticism was the areas bordering Europe. North Africa, the Levant, and Turkey, similar in the European mind both musically and thematically, were the source for several operas. Locke gives a substantial description of Turkish music as emulated in Europe, or *alla Turca* style. These include simple key signatures, harmonic stasis with root position chords, sudden modulation, extreme

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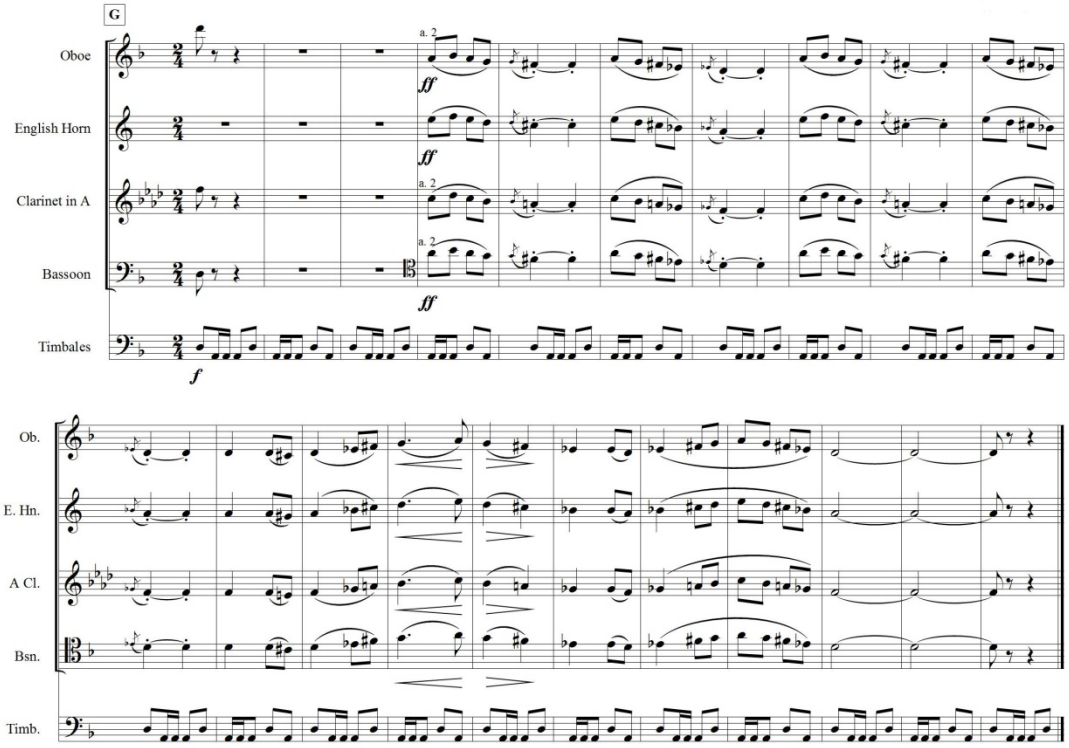
54. Alex Ross, *The Rest is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux: 2007), 30-31.

55. John Clapham, "Dvorak and the American Indian," *The Musical Quarterly* 107, no. 1484, (1966), http://www.jstor.org/stable/953317 (accessed February 3, 2013), 864.

56. Clapham, 865.

metrical accentuation, repeated rhythmic patterns, brief but florid ornamentation, and descending scale passages.[57] Israel, the setting for Biblical-themed stories such as Saint-Saens *Samson et Dalila* (see fig. 5) and a number of other works, shared with North Africa and Turkey simple, narrow, chromatic melodies with constant variation in rhythm,[58] often using oboes and high woodwinds.

Figure 5. Condensed woodwind and percussion score from *Samson et Dalila*.[59]




57. Locke, *Musical,* 118-120.

58. Ibid., 219-20.

59. Camille Saint-Saens, *Samson et Dalila*, "Act III: G (Baccahanale)," (Paris: Durand & Cie, n.d.), In the IMDB database, http://imslp.org/wiki/Special:Reverse Lookup/25922 (accessed March 23, 2013). Extractions by the author from original score. Note the tight homophonic and chromatic melody (also doubled by strings and higher woodwinds in later sections). The timbale rhythmic ostinato, doubled by string bass, emulates Arab drums.

A final group of sources was the Far East. China and Japan were characterized by gongs, pentatonic scales, heterophony,[60] and unaccompanied solo passages. The area also provided themes and poems. India was portrayed through snake-charmer passages and melodic slides. Other parts of the Far East, such as the Pacific islands and Ceylon (part of modern day Sri Lanka), provided elaborate temple ceremonies and processions.

**Extra-musical Exoticism**

Extra-musical exoticism uses extra-musical elements to establish the setting of the work. The exotic elements are most frequently non-musical, especially in operas from before 1800. When the music is exotic in some way, the gestures are usually dissociated from the setting. It is important to note that what in one era may be a recognizable location marker – such as the Landler form in the Alps or a Bolero form in Spain – may be absorbed into general cosmopolitan style by later generations of audiences.[61] Because this music is usually not highly exotic, works in this category are generally music dramas and operas rather than purely instrumental works. The reasons for not pursuing veracity in musical content often were based on a lack of knowledge among the audience members. In many early cases, authentic music was simply unavailable or would have been unrecognizable. The music was fully engaging and successful without expressing a specific location.

Attitudes toward authentic music when it was presented were often negative. One traveler to China in the late 1700s published an extensive survey of his travels. About

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60. Locke, *Musical,* 58.

61. Ibid., 59; Rodney Stenning Edgecomb, "The Nineteenth Century Landler: Some Thoughts," *The Musical Times* 147, no. 1897, (Winter 2006), http://www.jstor.org/stable/25434423 (accessed February 4, 2013), 70.

music, he said: “If this Harmony invented by *Fo hi* [first Emperor of China] was no better than the present [music in China], it does not seem likely to have any great effect on the mind: the Chinese indeed say that the music of *Fo hi* was quite divine, but if so, it is a treasure irrecoverably lost.”[62] Liszt found some gypsy pieces a bit too “daring” for his taste,[63] and Berlioz, for all his experimentation, described Chinese music as “dogs yawning or cats coughing up a fish bone” and humorously compared an ensemble's instruments to “instruments of torture.”[64] While this view was certainly not monolithic, it was prevalent enough that most people were only exposed to authentic international music during festivals such as the world's fair.

Common elements of extra-musical exoticism include brightly colored costumes, sometimes quite fanciful and with little bearing on the plot, but nonetheless eye-catching. Sets could easily become exotic; the Chinese garden was a favorite setting. Plot elements, as discussed above, were used extensively. Rescue operas and exploration operas were especially popular.

Because these works are generally not as musically interesting as works in the romantic exoticism category, there has not been much study on extra-musical exoticism. While especially prevalent in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in the nineteenth century most works had at least some exotic music to set the mood; below follow

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62. Jean Baptiste Du Halde, *The General History of China, Vol. 1,* trans. R. Brooks, (London: J. Watts, 1741), in the Google Books online library, http://www.books.google.com/books?id=XQQ2AAAAMAAJ (accessed February 4, 2013), 271.

63. Locke, *Musical,* 144.

64. Ibid., 132.

selected famous movements or passages of works that display extra-musical exoticism. Georges Bizet's *The Pearl Fishers* is set in Ceylon, but its famous "Temple Duet" has nothing Indian about it – the "Indian" sounding music was invented by Bizet himself using western chord progressions in unusual ways.[65] Locke also describes Massenet's *Le roi de Lahore*, in which the third act is not even meant to be exotic, and uses the distinctly European saxophone to set the ethereal mood.[66] Even the famous *Madame Butterfly* uses Japanese music only sporadically, in Locke's view, instead relying on other elements to establish the scene.[67] As discussed above, Grieg's *Morning Mood* would also be an example of extra-musical exoticism because the location cannot be identified without the use of the program.

It is important to note in extra-musical exoticism that the inauthenticity of the works does not make them less valuable. Although not discussed here, most of the early proto-operas with exotic themes fall into this category and helped to establish the interest, plot elements, and themes that would be used in the centuries to come. Further, the works which did not make use of musical exoticism often were interesting in other ways.

**Romantic Exoticism**

Romantic exoticism is exoticism that uses musical elements to convey a particular place, relying on selective borrowing to achieve a balanced exotic-western blend. Its goal is believability, but the musical content is determined by audience expectations of what

65. Ibid., 197.

66. Ibid., 197.

67. Ibid., 213.

the music should sound like, rather than attempting to emulate the actual music of the place represented.

Selective borrowing can take many forms. Generally only a few elements (scale, rhythm, harmony, or form) are borrowed and stylized, emphasizing the differences between the elements while at the same time using other elements from western music. It is very difficult to identify specific techniques romantic composers used in choosing elements. *On the Track*, a textbook for creating music for movies, has elucidated the processes used by modern film score composers through a number of interviews, which at least sheds some light on the choices composers make in creating exotic works. While perhaps not identical, an understanding of the process as used today can at least give a framework to understand how composers choose material.

In *On the Track,* Karlin and Wright give two primary reasons to use exotic music in a film: "(1) to suggest the film's locale, and (2) to characterize the people in the story and to express the overall dramatic theme."[68] This is achieved through the incorporation of foreign elements into the music; however, as several composers found, using the music of the cultures directly is often ineffective, placing most film scores in the romantic exoticism category. In the words of one filmmaker, "do it with just a touch of accent to color it—to give it a sense of the locale without caricaturing it. And that was pretty much the decision about the score: to do it in a neutral idiom and use colorations—accents."[69]

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68. Fred Karlin and Rayburn Wright, *On the Track: a Guide to Contemporary Film Scoring,* (New York: Routledge, 2004), in the *EBSCOhost eBook Collection,* http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=116346&site=ehost-live&scope=site (accessed February 2, 2013), 133.

69. Ibid., 136

Modern composers use the same tools available to earlier generations: scales, harmonies, instrumentation, rhythm, forms, and special effects. Gerald Fried, a composer for National Geographic documentaries and several dramatic films, found when doing research

> the genuine music of Hong Kong is such an embarrassing imitation of Western sounds that I had to write my own 'authentic' music...Once again, the real authentic music of these particular [American] Indians was so primitive, it would have sounded like I was mocking them. The drum just goes bomk, bomk, bomk, on some kind of flabby drum that sounded like a piece of parchment. The pentatonic scale of these Indians sounded so Asian I didn't dare use it.[70]

Fried found that it was necessary to make the music sound more exotic than it actually was to produce the sound he wanted. In order to achieve a balance, composers in the nineteenth century, as today, choose a few elements and use them to create their music.

Other musicians found that specific stylistic elements lent themselves handily to their compositions. Authentic instruments playing folk-like melodies are a common feature, or, as one composer found, it is possible to evoke an instrument without sounding trite by using a similar one, such as using panpipes to allude to a shakuhaci (Japanese flute). When scoring a Japanese movie, Bill Conti used a specific scale to unite the work, and used various Japanese and other instruments to give the work color.[71]

Examples of romantic exoticism in the 1800s include many of the great operas, including Bizet's *Carmen,* as well as Liszt's *Capriccio Espagnol,* Brahm's *Hungarian Rhapsodies*, Dvorak's *New World Symphony,* and several of Rimsky-Korsakov's works. Because romantic exoticism requires the audience to have a minimal functional

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70. Ibid., 138-9.

71. Ibid., 135.

knowledge of the music associated with different countries, it was not until the 1800s that romantic exoticism could become prevalent.

**Realistic Exoticism**

Realistic exoticism is exoticism in which most of the musical gestures and extra-musical features are borrowed with as much attention paid to an accurate portrayal of the donor culture as possible. Although not common during the nineteenth century, realistic exoticism did and does occur through a variety of contexts. All realistic exoticism is based in holistic borrowing of musical elements: rather than choosing a few elements of a music vocabulary, the majority of the musical elements are borrowed. The donor culture (the one being portrayed) is emphasized over the host culture, but the music remains a part of the western art music tradition.

There are three primary types of realistic exoticism. The first is autoexoticism, or the process whereby an artist emphasizes the distinctive features of his own culture to differentiate himself from the music of the area. A good illustration of this is Manuel de Falla's attempt to create a new distinctively Spanish music in the early 1900s by avoiding the elements composers had attributed to Spanish music, drawing on Flamenco music for new elements representative of Spain.[72] Autoexotic composers become more exotic in their own distinctive styles through exposure to another (usually majority) culture. Chopin's Polish works, Liszt's Hungarian works, and Grieg's Norwegian works were made more distinctive by their cosmopolitan exposure. Autoexoticism differs from

72. James Parakilas, “How Spain Got a Soul,” in *The Exotic in Western Music,* ed. Jonathan Bellman (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 192.

nationalism in that it is forged by single composers who are writing primarily for a non-nationalist market.

The second type of realistic exoticism is replication. Some composers simply render an exotic style for a western ensemble or attempt to write a piece fully immersed in another musical style. This occurred during the development of international style 1700s, but also during the nineteenth century. One example is Debussy's *Golliwog's Cakewalk,* which borrows form, rhythm, and melody from an African American form, adding Western harmonic elements to the music. Another good example is a set of transcriptions for piano of the music of the Paris exposition of 1889, which contains thirteen pieces for the amateur pianist portraying music performed during the exposition.[73] Many composers, including Liszt, Brahms, and the later Ravel and Bartok collected, transcribed, and created derivative works from folksongs, many of which fall into this category. This type of exoticism is limited in its accuracy by the understanding of the transcriber or composer. The complaint that music involving intervals smaller than a half step were out of tune did not prevent the publication of Arabic and Javanese tunes.

The third type of realistic exoticism is importation. Importation occurs when music is perceived by the audience as exotic, when in fact it is the venue or location making it exotic. An example would be a performance of a Russian nationalist piece by a Russian composer performed in Boston, or a Villa-Lobos work performed in France. Whenever the evocation of distance is clear to the audience, the composer wrote the piece

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73. Louis Benedictus, *Musiques Bizzare a la Exposition,* (Paris: G. Hartmann, 1889), in the IMSLP online database, http://imslp.org/wiki/Les_musiques_bizarres_%C3%A0_l%27exposition_(Benedictus,_Louis) (accessed February 4, 2013).

firmly based in the style of a musical culture other than that of the audience, and the piece was not exotic to the original audience, importation occurs. Virtually any obviously national work can be presented in a foreign environment and fall into this category.

## Conclusions

There are ways to use foreign music other than exoticism. World music, fusion, minimalism, and other classical traditions all draw on the exotic for inspiration. Musical exoticism is evocation of distance to create a sound perceived by the listener as belonging to an external music tradition. The prevalence of exoticism in creating and upholding stereotypes and its power to perpetuate ideas about other cultures makes it a worthwhile study. Herein were given a brief history of exoticism, an overview of the effect of the orient on the arts, a summary of exotic characteristics and features in music, and an original system of classifying exotic works into three broad categories. Extra-musical exoticism is a type of exoticism in which a particular place is represented through extra-musical elements; if the music alone is given, the place is not identifiable. Romantic exoticism takes elements from specific musical traditions, but is guided in its selections by audience expectations about the music of the place represented. Realistic exoticism takes most of its musical elements from another culture, but the underlying use and tradition of the music remains that of Western art music.

Of these three categories, the most prominent by far in the nineteenth century was romantic exoticism. As the concert-going west learned details about the east, the haze prevalent in the seventeen hundreds cleared. Countries and traditions became distinguishable, especially in the musical arts. Guided by audience expectations, composers borrowed elements from various cultures to transport listeners to new lands

and add interest to their works. The exotic process continues in the art music of today, but it has largely been overshadowed by the more popular medium of film, which continues to portray far off lands with varying degrees of realism.

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