

Chapter 3

ORIENTALISM AS REPRESENTED IN THE SELECTED PIANO WORKS OF CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS

In today's American society, it is less conventional to connect the term Orientalism with regions such as North Africa and the Middle East³⁷, although such Orientalism was more prominent in France during the Romantic period until the end of 19th Century.³⁸ This chapter reiterates the phenomenon of French Orientalism that connotes the Middle East and Africa through surveying selected piano music by a French Romantic composer, Camille Saint-Saëns.³⁹

Camille Saint-Saëns' works, however, are more accessible in the U.S. One of his oriental works that have been performed United States is his Fifth Piano Concerto (1896), nicknamed "The Egyptian."⁴⁰ Although Saint-Saëns is known to be "the most conservative of the Orientalist composers of the French school,"⁴¹ in his time, his second movement includes clear representations of Oriental elements.

³⁷Tian Ying, interviewed by author, Coral Gables, FL, April 14, 2011.

³⁸Locke, 146-156.

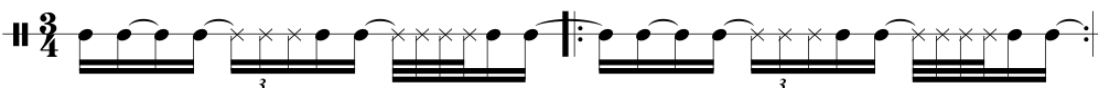
³⁹According to Locke's account, Félicien-César David (1810 - 1876) is known to be the first French composer to incorporate melodies of North African and Middle East directly into his self-published piano works, *Brises d'Orient* and *Mélodies orientales*. However, the scores to his music are not available anywhere in the United States for further analysis.

⁴⁰Barbara Heninger, "Program Note: Saint-Saëns Piano Concerto No. 5," Redwoods Symphony Orchestra Website, http://www.barbwired.com/barbweb/programs/saintsaens_piano5.html (accessed April 14, 2011); Hugh Wolff, conductor, Stephen Hough, pianist, "Piano Concerto in F major, Op. 103 ("Egyptian")" by Camille Saint-Saëns, the Kennedy Center, Washington D.C., April 24-24, 2008.

⁴¹Locke, 152.

The second movement of the *Egyptian* concerto is in a three-section rhapsodic form. The first section starts with a rhythmic orchestral accompaniment, utilizing horizontal hemiola with alternating duplets and triplets.

Example 1.1 The Rhythmic Pattern for Orchestral in Saint-Saëns Piano Concerto No. 5, Op. 103, mvt 2, mm.1-12



This rhythmic figure could be interpreted as a reflection of the composer’s excitement during a boat trip on Nile River.⁴² The orchestra continues the same rhythmic figure for four measures and the piano makes an entry at the second beat of m. 5. The piano starts out with a forceful unison A-pitch in both hands, preceded by an ascending three-and-a-half octave pattern that combines the lower half of the A Double Harmonic (or “Arabic”) scale⁴³ and the upper half of the natural minor scale. This rising A-tonality scale (Example 1.2) represents an “undulating movement of a steamboat going down the Nile River.”⁴⁴

⁴²Seng Wong Yoos, an author of a dissertation “Camille Saint-Saëns’ Piano Concert No. 5 in F-Major, Op. 103: An Analytical Study of Form, Composition Techniques and a Performance Perspective,” confirms Saint-Saëns’s visits to Egypt in 1891 and 1896. The composer went onto a boat trip on Nile River in one of his visits, and composed the aforementioned concerto in Egypt for his second visit in 1896.

⁴³In this D.M.A. essay, I decided to place quotation mark for the word “Arabic” when it refers to Double Harmonic Major scales to show that it is within the Western notation of the Arabic scale, which may be different from the actual pitches used by performers of Arabic music.

⁴⁴Seung Woo Yoo, “Camille Saint-Saëns’ Piano Concerto No. 5 in F-Major, Op 103: An Analytical Study of Form, Compositional Techniques, and a Performance Perspective,” (DMA thesis, University of North Texas, 2004), 8.

Example 1.2 Saint-Saëns, Piano Concert No. 5, Op. 103, mvt 2, mm. 5-6

The image displays a musical score for Saint-Saëns' Piano Concert No. 5, Op. 103, movement 2, measures 5-6. The score is written for piano and is in 3/4 time with a key signature of one flat (B-flat major). It consists of two systems of music. The first system shows the piano part with a triplet in the right hand and a triplet in the left hand. The second system shows the piano part with a triplet in the right hand and a triplet in the left hand. The score includes dynamic markings such as 'ff' and 'p', and articulation markings such as 'acc' and 'trill'.

In contrast to the valiant first section (m. 1-62), the second section (m. 63-183) is calmer and sweeter. This section is inspired by a Nubian love song that Saint-Saëns heard while he was on a similar boat trip on the Nile River in Egypt.⁴⁵

⁴⁵Seung Woo Yoo, 7-8.

Example 1.3. Saint-Saëns, Piano Concert No. 5, Op. 103, mvt 2, mm. 67-76

The image displays two systems of musical notation for Saint-Saëns's Piano Concert No. 5, Op. 103, movement 2, measures 67-76. The music is in G major and 2/4 time. The first system (measures 67-76) shows a piano part with a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The piano part is marked *mf*. The second system (measures 77-82) shows a piano part with a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The piano part is marked *pp*. The piano part is marked *mf* in the first system and *pp* in the second system.

The “Nubian Melody” section (m. 63 - 183) is less chromatic than the first section, kept in the tonality of G-major with emphasis on the dominant-to-dominant relationship. Due to its diatonically written accompaniment, the section may not evoke anything exotic for today’s audience. Yet, this section could be also considered Orientalism simply because it was inspired by the native music of Egypt, one of the

Orient regions.⁴⁶

In the third section (m. 184-220), Saint-Saëns combines an exotic scale with gesture-based oriental elements.

Example 1.4 Saint-Saëns, Piano Concert No. 5, Op. 103, mvt 2, mm. 184-195

The image shows two systems of musical notation for piano. Each system consists of three staves. The top staff is in treble clef, the middle in bass clef, and the bottom in treble clef. The key signature is F# major (three sharps) and the time signature is 2/4. The top staff contains a pentatonic melody with eighth-note repetitions. The middle staff contains a melody with eighth-note repetitions. The bottom staff contains a melody with eighth-note repetitions.

On the piano, the pentatonic melody on the left hand (m.184-) is juxtaposed against the eighth-note repetitions that represent croaking frogs, while the violins mimic the chirping of crickets with repeating high C-sharp pitch on the muted strings.⁴⁷

⁴⁶Ralph P. Locke. "Orientalism." In *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40604> (accessed July 14, 2010).

⁴⁷Seung Woo Yoo, 8.

When the pentatonic melody comes to a sudden stop with *fermata* rest at m. 220, the preceding interlude forecasts the darker mood through accented *appoggiaturas* (F-sharp on the 1st beat of m. 221-223), ascending chromatic passages (the last half of m. 221-222) and a thicker harmonic texture.

Example 1.5 Saint-Saëns, Piano Concert No. 5, Op. 103, mvt 2, mm. 221-224

The musical score is presented in two systems. System 1, labeled '1', contains the piano part. It begins in 3/4 time with a tempo marking of 'Andante'. The right hand plays a pentatonic melody with a sharp on the first beat, marked with 'sf' and an accent sign. The left hand plays a chromatic accompaniment, also marked with 'sf' and an accent sign. At measure 223, the tempo changes to 'Piu mosso'. System 2, labeled '2', contains the orchestra part. It features a tremolo accompaniment in the right hand and a chromatic accompaniment in the left hand, marked with 'mf' and 'p' dynamics. The score concludes with a 'ppp' dynamic marking and a fermata rest.

At measure 221, the meter is back from duplets to triplets. Abundant *sforzando* and accent signs are marked to lead into to the percussive *cadenza*. The tremolo that starts at m. 224 in the orchestra parts set up for a toccata-like *cadenza* to come on the piano part.

At m. 225, the piano part improvisatorially hammers around the half-Arabic, half-natural minor scale that was initially presented in m. 5-6.

Example 1.6 Saint-Saëns, Piano Concert No. 5, Op. 103, mvt 2, mm. 225–229

The musical score is presented in five systems. The first system (mm. 225-227) features a treble clef staff with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a bass clef staff with a few notes. The second system (mm. 228-229) features a treble clef staff with a forte (*sf*) dynamic, a crescendo (*cresc.*), and a decrescendo (*dim.*), and a bass clef staff with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The third system (mm. 230-231) features a treble clef staff with a forte (*sf*) dynamic and a decrescendo (*dim.*), and a bass clef staff with a pianissimo (*pp*) dynamic. The fourth system (mm. 232-233) features a treble clef staff with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a pianissimo (*pp*) dynamic, and a bass clef staff with a pianissimo (*pp*) dynamic. The fifth system (mm. 234-235) continues the piano (*p*) and pianissimo (*pp*) dynamics in both staves.

After the multiple wandering key strikes within the middle register comes to a temporary stop at m. 230, the music continues with percussive actions, but this time,

Saint-Saëns includes unconventional overtones that are reminiscent of an Indonesian *gamelan* ensemble.⁴⁸

Example 1.7 Saint-Saëns, Piano Concert No. 5, Op. 103, mvt 2, mm. 230

At m. 230, the last measure of the *toccata* section in the *cadenza*, each melody is set to form major triad chords, resulting in a continuous parallel against the melody.

More functional chord progressions start in m. 231, which is the last of ten measures in the *cadenza* section. Here, the piano part finally departs from parallelism. The chord progression of the first four measures (mm. 231-234) is a mixture of plagal cadence in the first half and the submediant relationship in the last half (B-flat Major to F-Major, then to D-major chords) with a tagged D “Arabic” scale at the end.

⁴⁸Seung Woo Yoo, 15.

Example 1.8 Saint-Saëns, Piano Concert No 5, Op. 103, mvt 2, mm. 233

The exact same chord progression repeats between mm. 235- 238. The *cadenza* section concludes with another three-chord sequence, which could be considered an alternate plagal cadence.

Example 1.9 Saint-Saëns, Piano Concert No 5, Op. 103, mvt 2, mm. 239-241

Above is the note-by-note transcription of mm. 239-241 in the piano part. The D bass note of the first chord and the A bass note of the last chord definitely outlines the Subdominant-to-Tonic relationship of a plagal cadence. The chord in the middle could be considered as a transitory point between the first and the last chords that are in the subdominant-to-tonic relation due to its bass line. The following reduction may help understand the harmonic movement between mm. 239-241.

Example 1.10 Reduction of Saint-Saëns Piano Concert No 5, Op. 103, mvt 2,
mm. 239-241

The first chord of m. 1 in the reduction represents the chord in m. 239 in music, and the first chord in m. 2 of the reduction represents the chord in m. 241. The third beat of m. 1 in the reduction is the same chord as the one in m. 240 of the music. Notice that the resolution from B-flat to A (the soprano line) and the resolution from D to C-sharp (the tenor line) will result in an A augmented triad at the third beat of m. 1, although it is non-functional in the context of harmonic progression. As a result, the chord introduced in m. 240 should be considered a transitory event between the subdominant function of m. 239 to the tonic function of m. 241.

To summarize, the compositional elements of Orientalism used in the second movement of Saint-Saëns' *Egyptian* Concerto are: plagal cadences, parallel fifths, pentatonic scales, "Arabic" scale and a hybrid scale that combines the lower half of the "Arabic" scale and the upper half of a natural minor scale.

An "Arabic" scale is also known as a Double Harmonic Major scale. There is also the minor scale counterpart to Double Harmonic Major, which goes by multiple names

such as: Double Harmonic Minor scale, “Spansh Gypsy”⁴⁹ scale, Gypsy Minor scale or Hungarian Minor scale. Both “Arabic” and “Spanish Gypsy” scales contains an augmented interval between sixth and seventh degrees of the scale. Other augmented intervals are found in the second and third scale degrees of the Arabic scale and between the third and the fourth of the Spanish Gypsy scale.⁵⁰ (See Example 1.11)

Example 1.11 “Arabic” Scale (Above) vs. “Spanish Gypsy” Scale (Below)



The work is entitled *Africa, Fantasie* for Piano and Orchestra, Op. 89 (1891), composed in the same year when the composer traveled to Egypt, is an excellent example of how the “Spanish Gypsy” scale can be found in yet another African-inspired work for piano and orchestra by Saint-Saëns.⁵¹ The recurring motive of the A-section is based on a G “Spanish Gypsy” scale.

⁴⁹In this D.M.A. essay, I will put “Spanish Gypsy” under the quotation marks for the same reason I place “Arabic” scale in the quotation marks. This is to pay respect to the Gypsy musicians, who may not sing in the exact pitches that was outlined in our Western notational system.

⁵⁰Troy Stetina, *The Ultimate Scale Book* (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard Corporation, 1999), 59.

⁵¹Seng Wong Yoos, 8.

Example 1.12 “Spanish Gypsy” Scale in G Tonality



Example 1.13 Saint-Saëns, *Africa*, Fantasy for Piano and Orchestra, Op. 89,
Principal Motive of the A-Section from Orchestral Reduction, mm. 2-4

Within the A-section (m. 1-77), Saint-Saëns inserted a virtuosic cadenza (m. 39-42) based on D-tonality scale that combines the lower half of an “Arabic” scale and the upper half of a D natural minor scale.

Example 1.14 Saint-Saëns, *Africa*, Fantasy for Piano and Orchestra, Op. 89, m. 40

This Half-“Arabic”/Half Natural-Minor scale degree is also used in the Concerto No. 5 in an A-tonality (See Example 1.2). Saint-Saëns seems to resort to this scale when elaborating Dominant Seventh (V7) tonalities with certain exoticism, which explains why the seventh scale degree is flattened.

Another Oriental-evoking piece by Saint-Saëns is *Caprice Arabe*, Op. 96 for Two Pianos (1884). The composition begins with an A-major Chord in first inversion alone in the first piano (m.1-2), followed by the second piano confirming the tonality with an A-bass note. The first section (m.1 – m. 21) generally stays in A-major, although the composer plays occasional tricks by inserting A-minor chords in the left-hand part of the first piano (m. 6 and m. 10).⁵²

The consistency of this composition lies in the use of the Lydian mode, another exotic scale capable of evoking Orientalism.⁵³ The Lydian mode originally derived from Gregorian chants,⁵⁴ and projects a mythic quality. It may be best associated with a whole tone scale for having the first four scale degrees in common.

Example 1.15 Lydian Scale (Above) vs. Whole Tone Scale (Below) in C-tonality



⁵²The shifts between A-Major chord and A-Minor chord are not obvious, as the composer spells out the A-minor chord as B-sharp, E and A.

⁵³Locke, 214.

⁵⁴Harold S. Powers. "Lydian." In *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/17245> (accessed April 26, 2011).

Lydian is the primary mode and tonality for the first section (m.1-21), and the subtle harmonic undulation is achieved by keeping the A-tonality while changing its mode from A-Lydian to an A “Spanish Gypsy” scale.

Example 1.16 Saint-Saëns, *Caprice Arabe* for Two Pianos, Op. 96, m. 5-9

The musical score shows two piano parts. The first piano part (labeled '1') is in the treble clef and features a melodic line starting in measure 5 with a 'grazioso' marking. The second piano part (labeled '2') is in the bass clef and provides harmonic support with chords and a bass line. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The time signature is 6/8.

The motive is four measures in length, entering the first melody in the first melody in the middle of m. 5. Then, immediately in m. 6, C-sharp, a non-chord tone of the Lydian mode, is introduced to signal the change in mode to an A “Spanish Gypsy” scale, even though the Lydian mode immediately returns in m. 9. The relationship between m. 7 and m. 8 could be considered upward tertian relationship based on its quality (I-iii), although the E dominant note in the bass line in the second piano may suggest m. 8 is another process of building tension. The opening passage of *Caprice Arabe* demonstrates a way to build a subtle tension. In a more simplistic tonal composition, the leading tone of the V-chord serves as a tension builder.

Similarly, Saint-Saëns' *Caprice Arabe* keeps the same tonality while changing the modes creating a certain tension followed by relaxation achieved in returning to the original mode. It is a witty yet effective in adding flavor to the musical content.