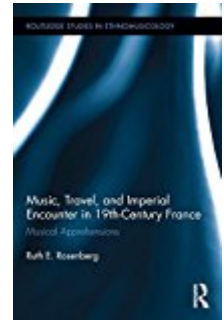


Ruth E. Rosenberg. *Music, Travel, and Imperial Encounter in 19th-Century France: Musical Apprehensions.* New York: Routledge, 2015. xii + 222 pp. \$148.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-138-77799-6.



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Ruth Rosenberg's book, *Music, Travel, and Imperial Encounter in 19th-Century France*, explores music, broadly defined, in the interstitial spaces of travel and imperialism in nineteenth-century France and its overseas interests. Rosenberg performs a close reading of musical encounters in French travel writing, organizing her material into case studies grouped by time period and region. She provides glimpses of how music, increased travel, and imperialism intersected in France and beyond in the course of the nineteenth century, and reveals the importance of sound, music, and listening, thus prompting the reader to shift their emphasis from the visual to the aural and musical dimensions of travel literature.

While the last part of the book's title might suggest that Rosenberg focuses solely on encounters within nineteenth-century France, much of it examines musical encounters outside mainland France: in Egypt during the Napoleonic campaign

and brief conquest; in the United States and Canada, or what Rosenberg refers to as France's "lost empire"; and in Corsica, an island mostly under French control during the 1800s despite the population's resistance and brief occupation by British troops. These examples reveal the diversity and far-reaching influences of French music throughout the world during the nineteenth century.

The book is divided into two parts: "Apprehending Other Worlds: Musical Journeys in New and Old Empires" and "Apprehending France: The Meaning of Folksong Within and Without." These titles point to a central concept examined throughout her study: musical apprehensions. The concept of "apprehension," she claims, offers a "helpfully elastic device for looking at travel and music." It provides a "framework for charting the patterns that emerge from a range of representational and rhetorical strategies at work in French travelers' writings about music" (p. 11). The concept of apprehension includes notions of perceiving, understanding, acquisition, seizing, fear, and anxiety, notions that often characterize the colo-

nial moment. Expanding on this idea of apprehension, it might also be interesting to expand this concept to include the apprehension and anxiety possibly experienced by the travelers Rosenberg discusses in the book. Traveling during the nineteenth century required great courage, given the precariousness of sea travel, the uncertainty of a new place, encounters with new illnesses, and the frequent lack of necessary resources. What Rosenberg calls “apprehension,” the linked desires to see, understand, acquire, and/or seize new objects, people, and places in distant locations, possible adversity notwithstanding, spurred the writing and publication of travel narratives and boosted their sales, as less courageous readers chose armchair travel, reading a book instead of physically traveling to the new space.

The first case study, presented in chapter 1, explores the life and work of the singer and writer Guillaume Villoteau during Napoleon’s Egyptian campaign of 1798–1801 and his contribution to the subsequent twenty-three-volume *Description de l’Égypte* (1809–22). Rosenberg highlights Napoleon’s expectations for Villoteau’s participation in the campaign, expectations that were not shared by the singer. She writes that Napoleon, believing in the “power of popular *chansons* and hymns to reinforce a sense of civic loyalty and fraternity,” hoped the musician would perform, and rouse the other participants on the campaign to sing, republican hymns (p. 27). However, Villoteau fancied himself more a savant than a singer and, on more than one occasion, denied Napoleon’s requests to perform. Consequently, Villoteau’s contributions to the *Description* established him primarily as an “authoritative ‘hearing man’” relying on firsthand observation, and they draw attention to the methods he deployed in “collecting and representing musical knowledge” (pp. 35, 45). As a “hearing man,” Villoteau would have been especially aware of the sounds around him in Cairo and throughout the expedition. Rosenberg cites sounds such as the “cries and threats of the women of the neighborhood” and

the muezzins’ calls to prayer, briefly noting the unique nature of the sense of hearing and the ear, a sense that is “always defenseless to unwanted and unexpected stimulus,” unlike sight and the organ of the eye, which can be closed or turned away (pp. 51–52). This concluding idea, while not new to the field of music and sound studies, could certainly be pursued further. How, for example, did the soundscape of Cairo alter Villoteau’s listening experience and how did the aural and visual coincide to create a new or different experience for the singer? In other words, if Villoteau was experiencing the sights, smells, tastes, and sounds of Cairo simultaneously, how did this full sensory experience influence his writings in the *Description* and what sounds and sights did the Napoleonic campaign add to or change in this land and soundscape? Questions such as these are difficult to answer and possibly a matter of conjecture, but consideration of how sounds interact with other sensory experiences could have further enriched the study.

The second chapter moves on to France’s “lost empire,” former French territories in North America. Rosenberg focuses on two publications by French authors who explored the United States and Canada during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: Vicomte François-René de Chateaubriand’s *Voyage en Amérique* (1827) and Alexis de Tocqueville’s *Quinze jours au désert* (1860). The musical apprehensions evident in these works are linked to colonial loss, in that music served to “mitigate the idea of France’s colonial failure” and “permitted a kind of historical disorientation and political rupture,” thus allowing these authors to “evoke their own sense of displacement and nostalgia” for pre-Revolution France (p. 75). We read an account of a “savage ball” witnessed by Chateaubriand in New York State and Tocqueville’s encounter with an “old French air” sung in a Michigan forest. The two case studies reveal stereotypes of the Other, juxtaposing city versus country, silent American frontier versus noisy European metropolis. One the-

matic that Rosenberg does not touch on is Tocqueville's use of the word "desert" to describe North America. In his travelogue, Tocqueville describes this desert as a "budding solitude, delicious, fragrant, magnificent dwelling, living palace, built for man but not yet explored." [1] Tocqueville's use of the term "desert" extends Rosenberg's concept of musical apprehension—as travel to a desert, framed as a journey to an undiscovered and unsettled region—seems to require particular courage and preparation. Furthermore, it illustrates the author's and publisher's interest in marketing and selling their travel narratives to readers, projecting the image of a foreign and potentially more exotic locale. The term "desert" creates further distance between the lived experienced of readers in Paris and the regions to which Tocqueville traveled, fashioning France's "lost empire" as more fully Other.

Part 2 is divided into two chapters. The first looks at French provincial folksong. Germany and England had already begun to collect folk stories and songs when France followed in the mid-nineteenth century. Scholars and collectors traveled to Brittany and Provence to collect *chansons populaires* and *poésies*, believing that these regions had preserved the most pristine and pure forms of French poetry and song that were particularly well suited to serve as a "direct means of discovering national history" (p. 112). Rosenberg concentrates on the Fortoul project, an 1852 endeavor to collect folksong and poetry spearheaded by Hippolyte Fortoul under the auspices of Napoleon III. It was never completed but resulted in the transcription and translation of numerous songs. Many of these transcriptions were later published in various compilations, such as Charles-Edmond-Henri de Coussemaker's *Chants populaires des flamands de France* of 1856.

According to Rosenberg, the term *populaire* carries associations with "French epic poetry of the Middle Ages as well as oral literature that had come from, and belonged to, the masses—in par-

ticular the unlettered lower and rural classes" (p. 110). *Populaire* connoted naïveté, purity, tradition, and a kind of authenticity that modern literature lacked. The musical apprehensions brought to the fore in folksong collection include anxiety that these forms might be lost or disappear, hence the need to transform them into written artifacts that became symbols of national genius. This notion of genius, a concept that comes up more than a few times in Rosenberg's study, could be explored further. One wonders how the idea of national genius expressed through *chansons populaires* compares to the genius of French composers of Western art music. In addition, what are the tensions inherent in folksong collections that bear the names of their collectors and transcribers but omit those of the people who created and performed the songs? Rosenberg notes that folksongs were thought to be more authentic if they were anonymous and spontaneous, further promoting the erasure of the performer or creator. In the case of the Fortoul project, it is not the people who produced the folk music itself who emerge as the authors of the national genius, but rather the French government and its interlocutors: Napoleon III, Fortoul, and the likes of Coussemaker.

The final chapter journeys to Corsica, a region that has not received a great deal of attention from music scholars. Here Rosenberg examines the tradition of funeral laments, known as *voceri*, that were sung by women until around the late nineteenth century. She draws attention not only to the stereotyping of Corsica in the French imagination, but also to common tropes presenting islands as a locus of fantasy, with the connotations of utopian paradise, isolation, danger, and untamed nature. *Voceri* were sung only at the funerals of individuals murdered in the context of a vendetta (the blood feuding for which the island was notorious). Thus, the laments encapsulate multiple forms of Otherness and, consequently, express a variety of apprehensions; the anxiety over the female voice, tensions over France's con-

trol of the island, fear of the island's high murder rate and perceived violence, and anxiety over the island's practice of revenge that went against the precepts of the Catholic Church. While Rosenberg does explore the stereotype of the violent Other, connecting the practice of *voceri* with France's perception of Corsica, she could have probed the topic of violence more thoroughly. Rosenberg focuses on the portrayal of Corsica in the novel *Colomba* and the travelogue *Notes d'un voyage en Corse*, for instance, both published in 1840 by the writer and folklorist Prosper Mérimée. One might examine, then, how the genre of travel writing itself and the portrayal of Corsica and the practitioners of *voceri* by French writers are also acts of violence, presenting and further propagating Corsica as Other and thus justifying the need for France to exert greater control over the island. Indeed, these writers present a one-sided view of Corsica, examining the voices of *voceri*, but never really allowing them to speak. Rosenberg notes how orality became associated with illiterate populations, particularly the lower classes and women. The focus on the practice of *voceri*, an oral form sung by women, thus helped to relegate Corsica to the oral sphere. French travel writers (in this case, the male author Mérimée) took control of Corsican culture, not only by transcribing *voceri*, but also by presenting a highly charged image of the island and its inhabitants for popular consumption.

The book concludes with this final case study. For all the valuable and original insights that Rosenberg presents in her rich monograph, it deserves a more conclusive ending that discusses the intersections of the four case studies and formulates, in a more programmatic fashion, how we can think about the nexus between music, travel, and imperialism. Perhaps the author was constrained by considerations of space. Even so, Rosenberg presents a meaningful and significant contribution to scholarship in this field and makes a strong case that much is to be gained

from further exploration along the lines she has begun to pursue in this book.

Note

[1]. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Quinze jours au désert and Voyage en Sicili* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1904), 54.

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