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The Intersection of Orientalism and Music: A Post-colonial Critique of Alfred Lemaire's "March of Salâm-e Shâhi"

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Abstract

This article analyzes "March of Salâm-e Shâhi," composed by Alfred Jean-Baptiste Lemaire a music instructor at Dar al-Funoun during the Qajar era through the lens of Edward Said's post-colonial critique and Michel Foucault's discourse of Orientalism. The central inquiry explores how this march not only reflects Orientalist discourse but also serves as an instrument for imposing a Western musical system and challenging Iranian musical identity. The research posits that the influence of Western music through this work, rather than leading to an "evolution," was a form of forced "calquing" (imitation) that adversely impacted the authentic aesthetics of Iranian music, particularly concerning microtones and territorial archetypes. Within this framework, the concept of "Temperament" is examined not merely as a physical phenomenon but as a metaphor for the overlapping or imposition of musical and cultural discourses. The findings suggest that "March of Salâm-e Shâhi" transcends its role as a musical composition to become a symbol of the "Orientalizing" process and the exercise of Western cultural hegemony within a colonial and post-colonial context. This process has led to fundamental shifts in the perception and structure of Iranian music, posing profound challenges to its musical identity. The detailed analysis is conducted through an examination of the work's musical structure, referencing authoritative sources from prominent Iranian musicologists, including Dr. Hormoz Farhat, Dr. Mohammad-Taqi Massoudieh, Dr. Dariush Safvat, Dariush Talai, Dr. Mohsen Hajarian, and Dr. Sasan Fatemi.

Keywords: Jean-Baptiste Lemaire, Orientalism, Post-colonialism, Qajar Music, Modal System, Microtones, Temperament, Cultural Hegemony.

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In what ways does Jean-Baptiste Lemaire's "March of Salâm-e Shâhi" transcend its role as a military composition to function as a discursive instrument within the frameworks of Orientalism and post-colonial hegemony, and how did the imposition of Western Equal Temperament in this work impact the transformation of the modal identity and microtonal aesthetics of authentic Iranian music?

Extended Abstract

This research analyzes "March of Salâm-e Shâhi," composed by Alfred Jean-Baptiste Lemaire during the Qajar era, through Edward Said's post-colonialism and Michel Foucault's discourse analysis. As the Qajar period marked the onset of Iranian modernization, the introduction of European musical systems via Dar al-Funoun transformed the local sonic landscape. This study argues that Lemaire's march is a profound site of cultural encounter where Western "knowledge-power" structures were imposed upon Iranian musical identity. Drawing on Said's "Orientalism", the study examines how the march functions as a Western representation of the "Other." Despite its title, the work strictly adheres to European military forms (A-B-A) and Western tonal harmony (C-minor), utilizing standard I-IV-V-I progressions. This "superficial Orientalization" produced a constructed image of the East within Western categories, effectively marginalizing authentic Iranian archetypes. Furthermore, utilizing Foucault's "discourse," the paper analyzes how this work facilitated the "normalization" of Western aesthetics, redefining musical "truth" in Iran through European orchestration. A central critique involves the inorganic imposition of Western tonality. By referencing established scholarship, the study demonstrates that this process led to the devaluation of the Iranian modal system and the erasure of microtones, which are essential to the "Radif" and the spiritual identity of Persian music. The study further identifies "Equal Temperament" as a metaphor for discursive hegemony. It argues that this transition was not merely technical but an ideological tool for "homogenizing" the East, eliminating natural intervals to fit a Western universalist paradigm. The findings conclude that "March of Salâm-e Shâhi" serves as a historical document of cultural colonialism. It reflects a process where Western hegemony reshaped Iranian musical perception, creating enduring challenges for indigenous authenticity. Ultimately, this research emphasizes the necessity of critically re-evaluating such phenomena to safeguard Iranian musical heritage against the legacies of Orientalist discourse.

Utilizing a critical framework rooted in "Edward Said's Orientalism" and "Michel Foucault's Discursive Theory", this research deconstructs Alfred Jean-Baptiste Lemaire's "March of Salâm-e Shâhi" from the Qajar era. By challenging the "evolutionary" hypothesis, the article characterizes this composition as a manifestation of "imposed "calquing" (imitation)" and an instrument for exercising "Western cultural hegemony". The findings demonstrate that the imposition of the tonal system and the concept of "Equal Temperament", far from being a mere technical shift, serves as a metaphor for the homogenization of Oriental identity and the marginalization of authentic Iranian modal systems and microtonal aesthetics. Ultimately, this march is identified not as a cultural bridge, but as a document of stereotypical Oriental representation and the confrontation between indigenous aesthetics and Western discursive power.

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