

THE SOUND OF INDIA IN MAURICE DELAGE'S *QUATRE POÈMES HINDOUS*

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SUMMARY. French composer and pianist Maurice Delage wrote several significant works inspired by his personal contact with the Orient. His travels to India inspired Delage to use innovative sound effects in his compositions, as well as to require his performers to adapt their vocal or instrumental technique to obtain the sound desired by the composer. His representation of the Orient is not a mere evocation of the Other, as is the case with most orientalist works, rather it reflects the composer's desire to endow Western music with the purity, strength, and vivid colors which he discovered and admired in Indian music. The present paper presents the historical and artistic background which inspired and influenced Delage, the relationship between France and India in the early 20th century and reveals the composer's idealistic point of view regarding India, its culture, and its music. The analysis focuses on the *mélodie* cycle *Quatre poèmes hindous*, composed between 1912 and 1913, striving to reveal the Indian influences in the work of Delage and the way orientalism is represented in French music from the first decades of the 20th century.

Keywords: orientalism, France, India, 20th century, Maurice Delage

Introduction

Although his works are lesser-known than those of his contemporaries, composer Maurice Delage (1879–1961) is an important figure of the French school of music composition. His contributions are extremely significant, particularly regarding the evolution of French musical orientalism. Delage sought for new means of expression, and his travels to India and Japan provided him with sonorities which he assimilated in his works. His direct

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contact with Indian classical music inspired Delage to transcend the barriers and constraints which he believed were imposed by Western music. Delage's sonorous ideal was influenced by the tuning system, rhythmic improvisations, and rich timbres of Indian music, which he endeavored to recreate in his own compositions.

Delage composed several works inspired by the fascinating music and culture of India, among which the following: *Quatre poèmes hindous* (1912) — for voice and instrumental ensemble, *Ragamalika, chant tamoul* (1914) — for voice and piano, or the *Trois chants de la jungle* (1934) — for voice and instrumental ensemble, and the symphonic poem *Les Bâtisseurs de ponts* (1913), these latter two inspired by Rudyard Kipling's works.

Delage's representations of the Orient reflect the way India was perceived in the late 19th century and early 20th century France, but at the same time the composer evokes an almost ideal image of India. One of his main attempts is to preserve the essential attributes of Indian music, therefore instead of altering the features of the borrowed musical fragments Delage will chose to adapt his own Occidental means of expression to create authentic sounds and a genuine image of India. At the same time, the composer aims to remove any element which might alter the purity of the Classical Indian music he sought to incorporate in his works.

During the 19th century French composers could represent the Orient in their works employing certain techniques, such as the use of particular musical patterns or fragments borrowed (and reproduced with more or less precision) from the traditional music of the regions they had contact with, a technique referred to by Jean-Pierre Bartoli as "*la technique de l'emprunt adapté*": "*la technique de l'emprunt adapté résulte d'une collecte plus ou moins fidèle de matériaux mélodiques ou rythmiques effectivement entendus par le compositeur et restitués de façon évidemment et fatalement approximative dans le système scalaire de la musique occidentale.*"² In this case, the composer would adapt the borrowed musical material in such a manner that it could fit within the confines of a work constructed according to the rules of Occidental music composition.

Another means of reconstructing orientalism is using a specific musical expression soaked with Oriental influences. In this case the composer will use certain melodies, musical intervals, rhythms, or timbres associated in the conscience of the Western listener with the distinct sound of oriental music. Bartoli names this manner of constructing the musical discourse "*la re-création*

² Bartoli, Jean-Pierre. 1997. *L'orientalisme dans la musique française du XIXe siècle : la ponctuation, la seconde augmentée et l'apparition de la modalité dans les procédures exotiques*. *Revue belge de Musicologie / Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Muziekwetenschap* (1997), Vol. 51 (p. 137–170), p.142.

pseudo-authentique", and states that this type of approach is closely related to the technique described previously: "*Elle consiste en effet à inventer des mélodies, des rythmes et des timbres qui vont être «ponctués» par les auditeurs comme typiquement orientaux, parce qu'elles sont fondées sur les recettes de «l'emprunt adapté» décrites à l'instant.*"³

In his works Maurice Delage employs musical fragments, rhythmic patterns or melodies borrowed from or inspired by Indian music, however what distinguishes his approach to orientalism from that of his forerunners is the way Delage uses melody, rhythms, harmony, and timbres in order to obtain a new and unique musical language. Although he aims for exact reproductions of the sonorities he had encountered, nonetheless his works are more than exact imitations of Indian music: they offer the composer the possibility to explore new sounds, timbres, and forms.

India Through the Eyes of France

France was already acquainted with India and its culture due to the French colonies which comprised several settlements on the Indian subcontinent. These regions were acquired by the French through the commercial enterprise known as the French East India Company, founded in 1664 as response to the commercial activities of the British and Dutch East India Companies. The French settlements in India were made up of geographically remote regions and included cities on the southeast coast of India such as Pondicherry, Karaikal or Chandernagor in Bengal, among others. The dispute between France and England regarding the control of these areas was almost continuous throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, and although in 1850 Britain took control over India, the French settlements remained a part of French India until 1954, when these regions were incorporated into the new-founded Indian Republic.

Even though the Middle East and Northern Africa were more familiar and tangible destinations for the French, India was also fascinating, remaining mysterious and unknown for the French artists and scholars, mainly due to the geographical distance which separated it from Europe. Various French works from the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century serve as proofs for the French contact with Indian culture, philosophy, and music. The first French Indologist, Abraham Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron (1731–1805) published four *Upanishads* in his *Recherches sur l'Indie* in 1786. Anquetil-Duperron translated fifty *Upanishads* into French and Latin, yet his versions were not based on Sanskrit sources, but on a 17th century Persian manuscript.

³ Idem, p. 143.

Among other French accounts regarding Indian culture, the following can be mentioned: the volumes *Les Hindous* published between 1808 and 1812 in Paris by Belgian painter François Solvyns, the analyses on Hindu life made by the missionary Abbé Dubois (1765–1848), *Moeurs, institutions, et cérémonies des peuples de l'Inde* published in 1825, or François-Joseph Fétis' (1784–1871) *Histoire générale de la musique*, the 5th volume of which offers information about Indian music.

Concerning oriental studies, Raymond Schwab observes in his work *The Oriental Renaissance*, that along the British and German contributions, France was a major center of activity regarding Orientalism and Indian studies as well: “*The three principal homes of Indian studies in Europe — England, Germany, and France — held the leading position successively. The country of Wilkins and Jones started it all and withdrew at a rather early stage; (...) The center of major activity after Calcutta (...), was in Jena, Weimar, and Heidelberg, and thereafter always in Paris.*”⁴ Despite this fact, the author also stresses that during the 19th century French preoccupations regarding Indian studies were based mainly on the works of Anglo-Indian scholars, and that there were few French Indic scholars who had contact with the Indian culture. Among the French scholars who visited India the following can be mentioned: Anquetil-Duperron in 1755, Emile Senart in 1887, Foucher in 1895 and Sylvain Lévi in 1897. The important contribution of Alain Daniélou came only later, beginning with his first trip to India in 1932.

India was represented in the works of numerous French writers and artists, as well as musicians. Opera was particularly well suited for sonorous and visual evocations inspired by India, as the works of Georges Bizet (*Les pêcheurs de perles*), Léo Delibes (*Lakmé*) or Jules Massenet (*Le Roi de Lahore*) have proven. In a similar manner to other oriental or exotic representations, the portrayal of India offered composers a pretense for the use of certain timbres, such as the particular sound of the harp or flute associated with the traits embodied by India and its inhabitants, as well as the incorporation of melismatic passages or the use of drones. It is interesting to note that the use of drones can be traced back to the instrumental music of ancient Southwest Asia, from where it spread to India, Europe, and Africa.

The musical depiction of faraway or oriental places was accomplished using exotic sounds and themes and offered composers the possibility to employ an unconfined musical expression. During the 19th century the interest in musical modes increased, and composers often included modal scales in their works, along with the minor and major scales built according to the rules

⁴ Schwab, Raymond. *The Oriental Renaissance. Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680-1880*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1984. p.47.

of Occidental classical composition. The use of Arab modes could be clearly distinguished in the works of several French composers (Saint-Saëns, Bizet), while some scholars believed in the Egyptian origin of the Greek and Roman modes and aspired to evoke a genuine image of the Ancient Egypt using these modes (for example Massenet in his *Cleopâtre*), but the melodic character of the Indian *ragas* also fascinated composers. Regarding the use of the so-called Indian scales (or *ragas*) in 19th century French music, Jann Pasler refers to the observations of musicologist and composer Julien Tiersot, who claims to have identified “Hindu melodies” in the works of Massenet and Delibes: “The most thorough French study of Indian music from this period is chapter 5 of Julien Tiersot’s «Notes d’ethnologie musicale» (1905). Tiersot identifies «Hindu melodies» in *Le Roi de Lahore* and *Lakmé*, though he notes they are indistinguishable from other themes in the work.”⁵

The growing interest in primitive or ancient societies was another interesting feature of the *fin-de-siècle* artworks, as well as the creations of the early 20th century, a curiosity which paralleled the development of ethnology and ethnomusicology. During the Third French Republic (1871–1940) music was an opportunity for cultural expansion, intricately linked to the ideas of the political and cultural superiority of the West. In the latter decades of the 19th century, French musicians and theoreticians collected folk music from France and abroad, aiming to reveal the similarities and differences between Western music and the music of other peoples and regions, among which Indian music as well. Some scholars even believed that the study of various musical systems could provide much needed information regarding the origins of the races.⁶

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century India was often perceived as the fountain of civilization, while the French nationalists sought to discover a link between the Aryans of Vedic India and the French, as Jyoti Mohan observes in a study regarding the racial history of India: “*For French scholars, the common ground between India and France lay in their shared Aryan ancestry, which Norman Britain could not share. The diffusion theory of civilization, which was extremely popular at the time, held that civilization was spread through the world by the migrating Aryans, and described the migration of various streams of Aryans from the*

⁵ Pasler Jann. *Race, Orientalism, and Distinction in the Wake of the “Yellow Peril” in Western Music and its Others: Difference, Representation and Appropriation in Music*, edited by Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh, Berkeley and Los Angeles, California. University of California Press, 2000. p. 89.

⁶ For more regarding this topic see: Pasler, Jann. *Theorizing Race in Nineteenth Century France: Music as Emblem of Identity* in *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 89, No. 4 (Winter, 2006), pp. 459–504, Published by Oxford University Press, 2006.

Caucasus region to different parts of the world. The branch of Aryans who arrived in India was obviously linked to other branches that had migrated to Europe and elsewhere."⁷

Maurice Delage, *Les Apaches* and Ravel

Delage's artistic views were influenced by his direct contact with Indian culture and music, as well as by the group *Les Apaches* (or Société des Apaches), whose member he was. The group was formed in Paris at the beginning of the 20th century and its members were musicians, writers, and artists, who gathered around the prominent figures of composer Maurice Ravel, Spanish pianist Ricardo Viñes and writer Michel-Dimitri Calvocoressi. Among other members of the group the following can be mentioned: poet, painter and art theorist Tristan Klingsor, composers Florent Schmitt, Igor Stravinsky, Manuel de Falla and Déodat de Séverac, poet Léon-Paul Fargue, painter Paul Sordes, music critic Émile Vuillermoz and others. Even though his figure was associated with the group, Claude Debussy was not a member of *Les Apaches*. Debussy's works were very much appreciated by the group and had a powerful influence over their artistic ideals and works.

Former students of Gabriel Fauré, Ravel, Schmitt and Vuillermoz shared common views regarding music, and it was in the home of the latter that regular musical events and meetings were hosted beginning with the years 1901. Around 1903 the members of the group would meet on a weekly basis, at first in the studio of painter Paul Sordes, then later at a property rented by Delage himself. The artists would debate contemporary problems, or topics of great interest for their group, such as the music of Debussy and that of foreign and distant cultures, like Javanese and Vietnamese music (which inspired some of Debussy's compositional innovations), the art of Paul Cezanne or the works of Stéphane Mallarmé and the ideas which lay at the core of Symbolism.

Maurice Delage studied composition with Ravel, but apart from these studies he was a self-taught musician. The views shared with the other members of *Les Apaches* may have suited and inspired the temperament of Delage, who was a seeker of adventures and novelty in the realm of music as well. Influenced by his travels in India, Delage gradually turned his attention from the music and culture of Europe and searched for innovative sounds and means of expression in his compositions.

⁷ Mohan, Jyoti. *The Glory of Ancient India Stems from her Aryan Blood: French anthropologists 'construct' the racial history of India for the world in Modern Asian Studies* 50, 5 (2016) pp. 1576–1618, Cambridge University Press, 2016. p. 1614.

At the beginning of the 20th century preoccupations related to ethnomusicology were a source of inspiration for composers: in their search for a more exotic sound some musicians incorporated in their works melodic or harmonic constructions belonging to the music of other cultures. For example, in Ravel's *Rapsodie Espagnole* the influence of Spanish music is clearly discernible due to the composer's use of specific harmonic constructions to create a genuine and at the same time specific sound. Ravel uses elements of folk music in his vocal works as well, such as his *Deux mélodies hébraïques* or the *Cinq mélodies populaires grecques*. Synaesthesia and the effect of timbre and sound on the senses played an important role in Ravel's creation, as Preda observes: "*Stilul lui Ravel este rezultatul unei serii de influențe multidisciplinare, specifice esteticii simboliste franceze de la sfârșitul secolului al XIX-lea, astfel că sintestezia și efectele sunetului asupra a diferite simțuri exprimate prin muzică l-au intrigat și au reprezentat un scop al creației sale. (The style of Ravel is the result of a series of multidisciplinary influences, particular for the aesthetics of fin-de siècle French symbolism, thus synaesthesia and the effects of sound on the various senses expressed through music intrigued the composer and constituted one of the purposes of his creation.)*"⁸ The way Maurice Delage employs dynamics and tempo as means of coloring his discourse reveals the influence of Ravel upon his younger colleague.

Color is an extremely important element in the representation of exotic or oriental subjects. In music, color can be obtained using various timbres or through specific techniques, such as the use of dynamics and tempo in a manner which gives the impression of coloring the musical discourse. The desire for bringing forth innovative works of art is a common trait for music and painting alike in the last decades of the 19th century and early 20th century as well. Analyzing the way, the Orient is evoked in the works of French painter Jean-Joseph Benjamin-Constant (1845–1902), known especially for his works inspired by the Orient, one can observe the artist's desire to utilize innovative means of expression. The painter's approach regarding the use of certain techniques and especially colors, is distinct from the 'traditional' representations of the Orient, as Caron observes: "*Voulant se démarquer des représentations traditionnelles, le peintre prend appui sur l'orientalisme pour affirmer l'originalité de sa démarche coloriste. Rétrospectivement, lorsqu'on regarde l'importance que prend la couleur chez les peintres du tournant du XXe siècle, cette démarche prend valeur de « symptôme culturel », au sens où l'emploi Ernst*

⁸ Preda, Anca. *Maurice Ravel: stil, interpretare, structură (Maurice Ravel: style, interpretation, structure)*. Ed. Universitaria, Craiova, 2014. p. 32.

*Gombrich dans son « Histoire de l'art » (2001).*⁹ This same desire for innovation can be observed in the works of French composers. Sonorous evocations of the Orient in the 19th century were most often constructed around such concepts as 'sensuality' or 'fascination', gradually leading at the beginning of the 20th century to the use of oriental features as pretext for creating innovative forms and means of expression: *"La mélodie française évolue dans une direction analogue à celle prophétisée par le jeune Nabi, en ce sens que le thème de l'orientalisme évolue à partir d'une représentation dix-neuviémiste, basée sur le merveilleux ou sur la sensualité érotisante de la femme, en allant vers une expression où un élément orientalisant est délibérément abstrait de son contexte d'origine, et qu'ainsi libéré d'une fonction d'évocation conventionnelle il puisse nourrir des formes d'expressions tournées vers l'avant-garde."*¹⁰

The way Maurice Delage approaches Indian music and strives to integrate its specific features in his own compositions reveals a surprising attitude towards the Orient. Despite the innovative aspect of his works, which are constructed largely according to the rules of the Occidental school of composition, Delage refrains from forcibly incorporating certain elements belonging to Indian music. Instead, he will create new forms and will strive to adapt his music composition techniques, as well as the instrumental or vocal techniques of the performers (through the precise indications noted in his scores), to obtain genuine sounds and truthful evocations of India — the real India which Delage himself had seen and perceived during his travels and sojourn in that country, and not an imaginary setting used as a pretext for creating orientalist works.

An Idealized View on Indian Music

In 1912 Delage travelled to India, where he was acquainted with classical Indian music. What is fascinating in his approach to Indian music and the manner in which he uses certain Indian features in his later compositions, is the fact that Delage refrains from using the differences between Indian and French culture as means for representing alterity or addressing self-criticism, but rather desires to evoke the unaltered and authentic beauty of Indian music, as Pasler also points out: *"Using the other as a site for self-criticism is a typical*

⁹ Caron, Sylvain. *Mélodie et orientalisme : de l'évocation du merveilleux aux séductions de l'avant-garde* — *Revue Musicale OICRM*, Volume 3, numéro 1, 2016, (p. 93–114), 2016. p. 94.

¹⁰ Caron, Sylvain. *Idem*. p. 97.

*Orientalist tactic, but he does not do this to reify the differences between the two or to demonstrate the strength and relative power of Western music. Rather, Delage hopes to set the terms for his own «naïve efforts towards novelty», his search to get beyond Western constraints, perhaps to appropriate some of the power inherent in Indian music.»*¹¹

During his stay and travels in India, Delage was certainly acquainted with the two major forms of Indian classical music, respectively with Hindustani and Carnatic music. Owing to various influences, such as the Persian or Arabic, around the 12th century Indian classical music diverged to these two styles, respectively the Hindustani music of the northern regions of India, and the Carnatic music associated with southern India. While Hindustani music is rather based on improvisation and the exploration of the ragas, Carnatic music is characterized by short compositions of rhythmic intensity, in which the accompaniment plays an important role. In his work regarding the music of northern India, French Indologist Alain Daniélou mentions that despite the fact that numerous music schools in India claim to base their teachings on the same ancient treatises, the differences between the music of various regions is clearly discernible: *“Though the many schools of music in India to-day each lay claim to the same ancient treatises, there are important differences in the music of the various parts of India. Hardly any of the modes of South Indian music are exactly identical with those of North Indian.”*¹² Daniélou considers that it is not entirely correct to assume that Carnatic music represents a more ancient approach to the classical Indian music. Even though North Indian music was influenced by external factors, it preserved its original structure and its constructions still follow the descriptions of the ancient treatises, while Southern music was also systematized and reformed during the ages.¹³

The differences between Hindustani and Carnatic music are clearly discernible also in the vocal technique of the singers who perform in one of these two genres. Carnatic singers often have contralto timbre, and the songs they perform lie in the lower and middle register, while vocal performers of Hindustani music employ a much wider vocal range, exploring especially the upper middle and higher registers of the voice. In both cases the vocal line is rich in ornaments and requires great flexibility of the voice. In a letter written by Maurice Delage to the *Revue Musicale S.I.M.* from Kandy in 1912, the composer refers to the music he had listened to in Bengal and Gujerat and strives to describe the vocal technique employed by these performers: *“Mais le Bengal et surtout le Gujerat! Il faut entendre la tension voluptueuse de*

¹¹ Pasler, Jann. 2000. p.101.

¹² Daniélou, Alain. *Northern Indian Music, Volume One — Theory & Technique*. Christopher Johnson Publishers Limited, London, 1949. p.33.

¹³ Daniélou, Alain. 1949, p.34.

*certaines contraltos chantant à bouche presque fermée, sur une prosodie aiguë où traînent d'étranges sonorités nasales, des cris et des souffles, et la rudesse chaude du registre grave où le rythme bousculé et fiévreux s'apaise brusquement dans un murmure gonflé de caresses !*¹⁴

Delage was fascinated by the music he had listened to, by the timbres of these voices, and by certain technical elements employed by the vocal performers such as singing with an almost closed mouth, the use of nasal sounds and murmurs, the rendition of certain fragments within the songs in an almost declamatory manner. Regarding timbre, the composer remarked the warmth and sensuality of the lower and middle registers, as well as the roughness and warmth of the voices. Delage's desire to recreate the sonority of this music requires the performers of his songs to adjust their vocal and instrumental techniques to accomplish the composer's requests regarding timbre, tempo and other parameters of the musical discourse.

In his search for innovative means of expression, Delage turns his attention to *color*, to the timbre of the voice and of the instruments used in Indian music. He is impressed by the sound and technical possibilities of the *vīṇa*, a plucked stringed instrument mostly used in Carnatic music. An equally powerful impression was made upon the composer by the accompaniment, which he compares to the *basse continue*: "*Lorsque le musicien se sert d'un instrument polycordes, il développe le principe de la haute-contre se développant sur une basse-continue. (...) Ajoutez un Tambour que est plutôt une double Timbale produisant l'unisson de la pédale et son octave inférieure, jamais juste, presque une septième ; (...)*".¹⁵ Delage is stunned by the harmonic effects and combinations of this fascinating music, the improvisations and unexpected modulations, the scales which often seem incomplete to his hearing, accustomed as it was to the balanced and organized system of tones in the minor and major scales of the Occidental music. Indian music provided Delage with new timbres and sounds which he could employ in his own compositions, thus fulfilling his desire to express his thoughts and ideals in a thoroughly new manner.

Quatre Poèmes Hindous (1912–1913)

Best-known among Delage's works inspired by India are the *Quatre poèmes hindous*, composed between 1912–1913, and *Ragamalika* (1912–1922). Both works reflect the composer's desire to adjust his own means of

¹⁴ Delage, Maurice. *Lettre de l'Inde* (Kandy, 4 mars 1912), *Revue musicale S.I.M.*, 2^e année, no.6, 15 Juin 1912, (pp. 72–74), p. 74.

¹⁵ Delage, Maurice. 1912, p. 73.

expression to produce a genuine evocation of India. In *Ragamalika*, for example, the composer indicates that the piece should be played on a “*prepared piano*”, probably the first instance of this sort in European music, according to Pasler.¹⁶ Delage asks that the B-flat in the second line of the bass clef to be dampened by placing a cardboard under the strings of this note. Through this he desires to obtain the specific sound of the Indian drum (Tabla) and the drones in the string accompaniment.

The cycle of *mélodies*, *Quatre poèmes hindous* was written for soprano and chamber ensemble (two flutes, oboe, two clarinets, harp, and string quartet). The work can also be performed with piano accompaniment (piano reduction of the chamber ensemble accompaniment). Even though the songs are more suitable for the soprano voice (because of the tessitura), it is possible for lighter mezzo-soprano voices as well to perform them. The vocal line rather suggests the influence of Hindustani and not Carnatic music: the composer prefers the upper middle and high range of the voice, while the overall atmosphere of the work is rather delicate and ethereal, and not as sensual and tellurian as one could expect from an orientalist work.

Each of the four songs in the cycle bears the name of an important city in India or its vicinity (Lahore in Pakistan), as well as the title or the first line of the poem set to music:

- I. Madras — *Une belle...* (on the verses of Bhartrhari)
- II. Lahore — *Un sapin isolé...* (on the verses of Heinrich Heine)
- III. Bénarès — *Naissance de Bouddha* (anonymous author)
- IV. Jeypur — *Si vous pensez à elle...* (on the verses of Bhartrhari)

The unity of the cycle is provided by the first and the last songs, the structure of which is similar. Both *Une belle...* (dedicated to Maurice Ravel) and *Si vous pensez à elle...* (dedicate to Igor Stravinsky) set to music the verses of Sanskrit writer Bhartrhari, in the translation of Paul Regnaud, namely the stanzas 22 and 73 from the first part of the work translated as *Les Stances Érotiques, Morales et Religieuses de Bhartrihari* (1875). Compared to the second and the third songs of the cycle, in which the Indian influence is more vivid, the first and the last songs are less oriental in their sonority: rather the composer strives to suggest the atmosphere of the world he had encountered. He accomplishes this through the use chromatic sequences incorporated in specific rhythmic patterns, which allude to the sound of Indian music, as well as the occasional use of sustained notes or chords, which resemble the sound of drones. To assure the clarity and cohesion of his work, Delage employs a similar structure and operates with motifs which are common for both the first

¹⁶ Pasler, Jann. 2000, p.107.

and the last song. Thus, the final measures of the first song, *Une belle...*, anticipate the opening of the last one, *Si vous pensez à elle...*, while the concluding measures of the last song echo the opening of the first (E. g. 1 and 2).

E. g. 1

Maurice Delage : *Une belle...*, m.1–6 (opening)
excerpt from the piano reduction

E. g. 2

Maurice Delage : *Si vous pensez à elle...*, m. 14–19 (final measures)
excerpt from the piano reduction

The music reveals the beauty and mysticism of the stanzas written by Bhartrhari: the hidden meaning of the text is emphasized by the undulating melody which seems to be in a continuous search for tonal stability. Instead, the composer prefers to use chromaticism, thus creating the impression of floating. Despite the chromaticism, the direction of the musical discourse is most often ascending, evoking perhaps one of the ideas which lay at the core of Indian spirituality, namely the obstacles in the way of spiritual awakening. The use of the chromatic ornaments played by the flute emphasizes this dreamlike atmosphere.

Although in these two songs Delage does not employ distinct elements which could be associated with the sonority of Indian music,¹⁷ the way he strives to set these stanzas to music reflects an orientalist approach, as Pasler observes referring especially to the feminized representation of the Orient: “*These two songs are conventionally Orientalist in two ways. First, India is feminized, likened to a beautiful woman. (...) Second, in setting the last two phrases, the music breaks into a Western-style climax, the apex of the song’s vocal line. Outside of occasional moments in the cello solo of the second song, this is the only forte in the whole set. Such a moment captures the pinnacle of the composer’s emotional response to his Indian experiences, one that obviously needs Western means for its full expression.*”¹⁸

The second song of the cycle, *Lahore — Un sapin isolé...* is rich in elements inspired by Indian music. Pasler states that the opening cello solo was inspired by a performance of Imdad Khan (renown sitar and surbahar player), namely the opening section (Alap) of the Jaunpuri Todi Raga.¹⁹ It is probable that Delage transcribed the music of this performance, customizing it according to the rules of Western music composition, and later composed his own condensed version of this transcription.

In his search for innovative sounds and means of expression Delage employs unusual timbres, specific ornaments, and rhythms, as well as altered vocal or instrumental technical approaches. To obtain the desired sound, in his scores the composer offers precise indications regarding the way certain vocal or instrumental lines and passages should be performed. Thus, in the opening phrases of the instrumental accompaniment of *Un sapin isolé...* (**E. g. 3**), assigned to the cello, viola, and violin, among other instruments, he strives to recreate the sound of the sitar or surbahar.

¹⁷ The use of certain musical elements, such as specific intervals, timbres, rhythmic patterns, or the incorporation of genuine oriental tunes within a musical discourse devised according to the Western rules of music composition, to recreate a vivid and real image of the Orient was a common practice beginning with Félicien David’s *Le Désert*.

¹⁸ Pasler, Jann. 2000, p.106.

¹⁹ Idem, p. 103.

Larghetto. ♩ = 72

VIOLONS
Sourdine
ppp

ALTO
Sourdine
sur la touche
ppp

VOLONCELLE (1)
pizz.
f
vibrato molto (sin' al' segno arco)
p
mp
f = p
f = mp

(1) accord le pizz. en glissant le même doigt de la M.G. Attaquer la Corde fortement de la M.D.
Jouer les notes écrites qui, sur les Cordes 3 et 4, sonneront 1/2 ton au-dessous.

vions
pp

Alt.
p

velle
mp
f
mp
sempre p
poco
poco
2^e C.
1^{re} C.
f

**Maurice Delage : *Une sapin isolé...*,
excerpt from the orchestral score, m. 1–9**

Delage instructs the cellist to use the glissandi and adapt his technique with the purpose of attaining a more truthful sound. However, at the same time, these precise indications strive to balance the desired outcome with the possibilities of the Western instruments and technical capabilities of the performers. The composer specifies that the same finger of the left hand

should slide between the notes, while the right hand should attack the chord firmly — this produces a sound which closely resembles that of the sitar. The use of ornaments, along with the gentle sliding from one note to the other create a continuous sound, an effect like the one produced by the resonating drone strings on the sitar.

Although Delage strives to attain genuine sounds which can evoke the image of India, Heinrich Heine's poem embodies a metaphorical representation of the Orient: a fir tree, isolated in a realm of ice and snow, dreams of a lonely palm tree in the Orient. This image contains the Occidental point of view regarding the Orient. The vocal line reflects the dreamy atmosphere of the poem, but at the same time the composer strives to emphasize the difference between the icy world of the fir tree on the one hand, and the arid solitude of the palm tree on the other. The first stanza refers to the fir tree, while the second evokes its reverie of the distant and mysterious palm tree. The composer uses triplets in the first stanza as well, however the way he employs this rhythmic formula in the second stanza, as an ornament on the second syllable of the word *désolé* (**E. g. 4** — m. 32), contributes to a discreet and delicate evocation of the Orient.

In the concluding section of the song the voice performs a long vocalize on the vowel "a" (measures 43–62), which contains numerous elements inspired by the vocal performances Delage was acquainted with in India. The composer clearly indicates which fragments of the vocalize should be performed with open mouth, and where the mouth should be closed. There are certain fragments in which the opening of the mouth is gradually modified from an open cavity to a closed one (**E. g. 5**). These recommendations aim to recreate the specific sound of the Indian singers, whose voices often have a nasal quality. The composer employs certain ornaments and rhythmic patterns, as well as *staccatos* in the upper range, which are reminiscent of the improvisatory and highly ornamental Indian vocal music. The vocal line also alludes to the flexibility and impressive range of Indian singers (especially those that perform Hindustani music): the vocalize covers a vast vocal range, from D in the central octave to the high A, and the ornaments written in the high range, as well as the compound interval leaps from the lower to the high register (octave and tenth leaps) demand perfect balance and control of the voice.

Although in his letter from Kandy he writes about the contralto voices he had listened to, the vocal line employed by Delage throughout the cycle evokes rather the performances of Hindustani singers.

The image displays a musical score for Maurice Delage's piece "Une sapin isolé...". It consists of two systems of music. The first system features a vocal line in the upper staff and a piano accompaniment in the lower staff. The vocal line includes the lyrics: "d'un palmier qui là-bas dans l'O-ri-ent loïn-tain se dé-". The piano accompaniment includes a *poco* marking and several trill ornaments marked with an asterisk and the letter 'A'. The second system continues the vocal line with the lyrics: "- so-le, so-li-taire et ta-ci-tur-ne, sur la pen-te de son rocher brâ-". The piano accompaniment continues with various musical notations, including triplets and dynamic markings like *p*.

**Maurice Delage : *Une sapin isolé...*,
excerpt from the piano reduction, m. 29–35**

Notwithstanding the fact that he requests the performers to adjust their instrumental or vocal techniques to obtain the desired sound, Delage strives to create balance between the desired outcome and the skills of the Western performers. Therefore, he adapts the transcriptions he incorporated in his songs: he modifies the tempo to a slower one (the instrumental introduction of *Une sapin isolé...*), while the rhythmic pattern of the vocal and instrumental lines alike is converted to suit the potential of the Western performers. The effect of micro-tonal intervals, much admired by the composer, is often obtained in his works because of the operated adaptations.

The image shows a musical score for a vocal and piano piece. It consists of four systems of music. The first system shows the vocal line starting with a *pp* dynamic and a *poco* tempo marking, with the instruction "bouche ouverte" and "mezza voce". The second system shows the piano accompaniment starting with a *ppp* dynamic and the instruction "sans nuances jusqu'à la fin". The third system shows the vocal line with a *mf* dynamic and the instruction "fermer peu à peu la bouche". The fourth system shows the piano accompaniment with a *pp* dynamic. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

Maurice Delage : *Une sapin isolé...*,
 excerpt from the piano reduction, m. 55–58

The third song of the cycle, *Bénarès — Naissance de Bouddha*, dedicated to Florent Schmitt, sets to music the verses of an anonymous poet. The poem evokes the preparations made by the gods and the entire nature on the eve of the birth of Buddha. Among the four songs of the cycle, the tempo of *Naissance de Bouddha* is the most alert, *Allegretto*, thus suggesting the sensational nature of this spiritual event. The eagerness of the gods, described in the poem (“*un grand bruit de nuages*”, “*Les Dieux, agitant leurs éventails et leurs vêtements...*”), suggested by this alert tempo, is further emphasized using triplets, as well as the frequent changes in meter (a trait which can be observed in the other songs as well): there is a constant shift between the 5/4 and the 3/4 meters, which creates the impression of anxiousness. Only towards the final part of the song does the tempo slow down (*Un peu plus lent*), emphasizing the solemnity of the moment in the presence of the full moon. The melody seems to be concealed by the complex weaving of chromatic notes employed by the composer.

Despite the fact that the sonority of this song seems to resemble Indian music in a less perceptible manner, Pasler believes that the song *Naissance de Bouddha* was also inspired from another work performed by Imdad Khan: Delage transcribes the borrowed fragment for English horn, while the ostinato of the cello resembles the accompanying strings of sitar and surbahar.²⁰ It is interesting to observe the manner in which Delage plays with thematic material borrowed from or inspired by Indian music: the innovations regarding sound and technique are provided with the clear frame of Western music and its rules of composition. Delage manages to attain his much-desired innovative musical language, while at the same time preserving the authenticity of Indian music due to his adaptations of Western music and means of expression to the distinctive features of the music which inspired him.

Conclusions

The evolution of French musical orientalism and exoticism was divided into distinct directions in the early 20th century. One of these was represented by the works of composers associated with the Schola Cantorum de Paris, among whom Albert Roussel is a prominent figure with his works inspired by India and the Orient. The works of Maurice Delage represent an opposite course, for Delage strived in his works to preserve the authenticity and genuine beauty of Indian music.

The incorporation of borrowed fragments or transcriptions in his own compositions was not a mere pretext for the elaboration of an avant-garde musical language, although the composer desired to transcend the barriers of Western music composition, but rather represents Delage's desire to endow Western music with the complexity and strength which characterize Indian culture and music.

Musical syntax seems to be less important for Delage, who prefers timbral richness over the clear construction of his works. Owing to the technological advances of the early 20th century, the composer was able to return frequently to the musical sources which inspired him, by listening to recordings of Indian music performances. Imdad Khan, the sitar and surbahar player whose performances inspired Delage in a great deal, was among the first Indian instrumental performers ever to be recorded. The access to recordings, as well as his personal contact with Indian culture offered Delage the possibility to immerse himself in the various shades and vivid colours of Indian music. Thus, his approach towards orientalism resembles that second

²⁰ Pasler, Jann. 2000, p.106.

approach, referred to by Bartoli as “*la re-création pseudo-authentique*”²¹: the *Quatre poèmes hindous* composed by Delage seem to be saturated with the specific sound of Indian music, even in those instances when the borrowed elements are less discernible.

In the works of Maurice Delage orientalism is not a pretext for the representation of the Other: the musical depiction of India reflects the composer’s desire to evoke a certain purity of expression, which the Western art of the early 20th century was so eager to rediscover.

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²¹ Bartoli, Jean-Pierre. 1997, p. 143.

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