

H-France Review Vol. 6 (April 2006), No. 35

Annegret Fauser, *Musical Encounters at the 1889 Paris World's Fair*. Eastman Studies in Music. Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2005. 416 pp. \$75.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 1-580-4618-59.

Review by Tamara Levitz, University of California, Los Angeles.

I am sure many readers of H-France will know this feeling. You have just read a book that cares about history. All the footnotes are meticulous, the translations impeccable, the layout spectacular, the historical information accurate, the interpretations critical and thought-provoking. Although you have been asked to review this book, you find yourself spending time rereading it rather than writing the review. You dwell on certain sections, spend afternoons pursuing the secondary literature listed in the footnotes, miss your subway stop because you are thinking about a certain argument, spend evenings staring at the pictures, or find yourself reading the book again, even though you know the deadline for your review is looming dangerously near. When you're done, you position the book on your shelf where you can see it, just in case you want to check that bit of information, reread an argument so subtle it wakes you up at night, or look at the pictures one more time. You feel a *frisson* of satisfaction in knowing this historical study now exists, and gratitude towards its talented author, for her prodigious historical gifts, patience, and dedication to the discipline.

Annegret Fauser's new book provoked exactly this response in me. It is an excellent historical study, and exemplary in its method and care of execution. (The University of Rochester Press should be commended for its part in the extraordinary quality of this production.) Fauser also addresses a timely topic, of deep importance to the historical study of musical modernism: what kinds of music, she asks, were performed at the 1889 Paris World's Fair? This event has remained somewhat legendary in the history of music, remembered largely for the performances of Javanese, Romanian, and Russian music that influenced classic modernists like Claude Debussy, Eric Satie, and Maurice Ravel, respectively.^[1] Fauser takes the fair out of the realm of legend, however, and of the limited intellectual domain of proven material musical influence on composers of Western art music. She considers performance at the fair as an historical event in its own right, and source of information on the Third Republic's nascent listening strategies and their role in the construction of national and imperial French musical identities. She brings to life a very broad range of musical experiences related to the 1889 World Fair, documenting them for the first time and offering convincing interpretations of their representational and historical significance. Her "thick history" (p. 312) thus combines the very best of historical reconstruction and critical interpretation.

Although world fairs and colonial exhibitions have been the subject of considerable critical attention in the fields of art history and architecture, they have received minimal consideration in musicology.^[2] The few articles of recent years focus on the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago; as far as I know, no book-length musicological study of the French fairs exists.^[3] Fauser thus makes a significant contribution here, offering musicologists a method, foundation and reference work for further research in this area. She draws on an utterly impressive knowledge of the current literature in multiple disciplines from women's studies, history, and literature to postcolonialism. And she is exquisitely knowledgeable about current and past research on French nineteenth-century music, dialoguing constantly in her footnotes with admired scholars such as Katherine Ellis, Steven Huebner, Jann Pasler, and others. Her erudition and flexible intellectual stance created enormous trust in me as a reader; I felt in good hands, able to sit back and enjoy with confidence what Fauser had to teach me. I was not disappointed in any of my expectations.

Before I discuss the contents of Fauser's book, I would like to dwell for a moment on her methodology, which alone makes her work of considerable interest to scholars outside musicology. Fauser reconstructs musical events at the 1889 Fair primarily on the basis of contemporaneous accounts, using newspaper and journal reviews as her principle source. She is very sensitive to the political leanings of the various journals she uses, and careful to position quotations so that we understand their original social and cultural context. Her acute understanding of the French language, and sensitivity to its parodic or ironic qualities, also allows her to make brilliant analyses in several instances (for example, pp. 84–85). The reception-based historical method she applies here is familiar to musicologists who work on France, and characteristic of many studies of nineteenth-century French music in particular.

But Fauser's goal is not merely to describe what critics and journalists in 1889 said about the world's fair. Rather, she aims to recreate its acoustical presence, by going on a treasure hunt for the adjectives, verbs, and nouns in existing reports that give clues to aural experience. In her first chapter, Fauser lets us know that she has pursued this acoustic effect knowingly, by following Reinhard Strohm's call to develop historical methods that go beyond the "silent historical document," recreating sounds imaginatively in the minds of contemporary readers (pp. 7–8).^[4] Her approach to the Exposition as a "soundscape" providing "acoustic signifiers" distinguishes her book from other studies of world fairs, which tend to focus on the visual and spectatorial, as she carefully notes (p. 11). This is, rather, a "sonic history" (a word Fauser borrows from Strohm, cited above).

I found Fauser's method extremely convincing. I think she has figured out one of the few means by which a music historian can recreate the sounds of a modern era before sound recording. As we read the reviews and commentaries Fauser has selected from over a century ago, we hear what people at the time heard, shaping our ears to adjust to their late nineteenth-century, Parisian listening customs. I as a reader felt as if Fauser was guiding me acoustically through the fairgrounds, allowing me to hear its layers of sounds, and letting them resonate in my ears for days on end as the source of my historical and critical contemplation. To be able to create such a sonic effect through the written word is quite an achievement.

Fauser divides her sonic history of the 1889 World's Fair into very clear parts. After a brief but pointed introduction, she devotes three chapters, about a third of her book, to French music performed in Paris during or at the fair. She recognizes that the concentrated national objectives and explicitly promotional nature of the world fair offers her a unique opportunity for examining the construction of French identity in music (p. 19, etc.). In chapter one, she describes in detail the "French canon" established by the fair's *Commission des Auditions Musicales* in the contemporary and historical concerts they organized that summer, and the aesthetic response and debate it encouraged. She makes the fascinating point that organizers identified the French sound not only with selected historical compositions but also with a specific means of mechanical reproduction, i.e., the French pianos, which were exhibited at the fair as well. She also explains how an instrument like the harpsichord could become a national symbol (p. 33), and how early music in general functioned as a "novelty" defined by sonic difference and thus associated with the "exotic within" (p. 42).^[5] Her discussion of the retrospective of revolutionary *Opéras comiques* at the fair is revelatory and beautifully framed. In this chapter she does important archeological work, reconstructing programs (provided in the excellent appendices), explaining the details of French operatic and musical politics as they related to national identity and the centennial objectives of the 1889 fair (which commemorated the revolution of 1789), and offering details on concerts by foreign nations such as Russia and the United States. She concludes that the *Exposition Universelle*'s official organizers mainly sought to appropriate the French musical past for the Third Republic (p. 59).

In chapters two and three, Fauser considers in detail individual productions organized by leading Parisian institutions such as the *Théâtre de l'Opéra* and the *Théâtre-de-l'Opéra-Comique*, thereby

contributing to our understanding of the social and cultural consequences of the fair for the city of Paris and its cultural tourists (pp. 60-61). She focuses on Massanet's *Esclarmonde*, which, curiously enough, remains the least resounding piece in her book. Fauser focuses on the medieval sources of its libretto, and how contemporary critics read them within the context of debates on *Wagnérisme* and French national identity in music. In this section, I felt as if she was positioning me like a visitor to the 1889 fair, who, as she explains, understood the general repertoire performed during the Parisian season as a kind of "neutral level," the background against which to define the musical difference of concerts of early, exotic, or other musics (p. 56). *Esclarmonde* functions in her book to a certain degree as such a "given", wrapped in the warm context of familiarity known only to its 1889 listeners, who debated and discussed its historical political or aesthetic merits, but kept it somewhat silent in their conscience as a piece of music. I liked this angle, because it impressed on me even more dramatically how disconnected and divided in their critical reception the contexts of the opera house and fair must have been. Fauser adapts a similar model for her marvelous reconstruction in chapter three of Augusta Home's *Ode triomphale*, which was performed in the Palais de l'Industrie on 5 September 1889. This entire chapter consists of one glorious historical revelation after another about this relatively unknown event; it provided me with more than one moment of sheer historical pleasure.

The center of Fauser's book, two significant chapters, is devoted to "exotic" music performed at the world fair. Fauser maintains her method of close readings from a French perspective here, allowing us to experience musical difference as Parisian visitors to the fair may have in 1889. This approach gives us profound insight into French attitudes towards musical alterity at the time. Fauser is also careful to frame colonial subjects fairly, and to bring non-Western music at the fair more fully into our consciousness than ever before. I appreciated her criticism of rigid Other-Self binarisms (pp. 13, 221) and of entrenched cultural stereotypes that (I think) continue to plague musicology. And yet in spite of her caution, I still felt more could be done to clarify the colonial relations of power, and to give colonial others a stronger voice in this section. I wanted even more critique of the word "exoticism" and other adjectives used to describe non-Europeans, even more sensitivity to dancing bodies, more exploration of Vietnamese, Egyptian, and other non-Western research on the subject, and more detailed analysis of the exquisite photography.^[6] In future editions, I could imagine a framing discussion of French colonial politics and activity in the Far East and North Africa at this time. Without this, we don't always understand why certain peoples are present at the fair, and how the French may have related to them in terms of colonial history and structures of power. Why, for example, did Egyptian and Sudanese musicians perform in Paris in 1889 (even in the same café), given they were not specifically French colonies (the latter country being the subject of much colonial contention at this very time)? Why were Egyptians described as "Middle Eastern" (pp. 221ff.) rather than "Near Eastern" or "North African," and which terms were preferred by the French? And why did critics like Julien Tiersot group together "*nègres*" in such blatant disregard for country of origin, associating Canaques from New Caledonia with the Senegalese (pp. 249-50)? Fauser does address these questions, and yet I still didn't gain complete clarity about them. Although she works very hard (and succeeds!) in moving beyond abstract notions of the Other by giving names, content, aesthetic meaning, and history to the performances from the colonies, they still retain a tiny bit of the "outsider" status they must have had for the French in 1889.

Fauser beautifully frames and contextualizes the French reception of that "exotic" music, exploring its meaning from multiple perspectives, and reminding us of its forgotten horizons of expectation. As she eloquently notes, the French reception of non-Western music was shaped by "the embodiment of Western music through musical and cultural practice whether on the part of listeners or of professional musicians."^[7] She describes the roots of racist attitudes towards non-Western music in French nineteenth-century musicology (in which she cleverly distinguishes an anthropological and ethnographical strand, p. 154). She then provides extensive discussion of direct impressions of visitors to the fair (the bulk of her work), before offering commentary on ethnographic transcriptions and Debussy's artistic mirrorings. She also addresses repeatedly the tricky notion of "authenticity" that

motivated the reception of both French and “exotic” works. Her reconstructions of the *Théâtre Annamite* and its possible influence on Debussy’s *Pelléas et Mélisande* is completely spellbinding (pp. 183–206), and demonstrates the distance she has traveled from existing studies on the fair in musicology, which rarely address issues of theatrical performance, performativity, or musical presence in this way. Fauser ends this chapter with one of the many statements in her book that stopped me dead in my tracks because of its critical acuity, and which are too numerous to list in full in this review. What if Debussy’s reception of Vietnamese theater laid the foundation, Fauser asks, for the “abstract rather than picturesque engagement with alterity” (p. 206)? This is an extremely interesting thought, and one that could surely be the basis of a second monograph on the subject.

Fauser ends her book with a chapter on music technology at the fair, which included “telephone operas” and Edison’s phonographs. I might have expected her to lose steam here, given the magnitude of her historical achievement in previous chapters. But Fauser maintains her high level of consistency, not only providing information on technological advances introduced at the fair, but also couching her arguments yet again in fascinating critical frameworks (by asking us to think about the visual impact of the new technology of telephone operas on pp. 288–89, for example). This chapter not only rounds out her sonic history of the fair beautifully, but also gives scholars of radio and sound production much food for thought.

I hope I have given a small sense in this review of the rich contents and insight of Fauser’s study. I have not focused on a central thesis, ideological claim, or philosophical point of view because I don’t think that is what this book is about. Instead, Fauser offers a “thick history” in every sense, rich in individual arguments, plurality of points of view, and layers of information and analysis. This is a truly wonderful book, which may cause something of a minor revolution in how we understand nineteenth-century French music and listening cultures.

NOTES

[1] Literature pertaining to these aspects of the Exposition includes: Jürgen Arndt, *Der Einfluß der javanischen Gamelan-Musik auf Kompositionen von Claude Debussy* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1993); Marvyn Cooke, “The East in the West: Evocations of the Gamelan in Western Music,” in *The Exotic in Western Music*, ed. Jonathan Bellman (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 258–80; Roy Howet, “Debussy and the Orient,” in *Recovering the Orient: Artists, Scholars, Appropriations*, eds. Andrew Gerstle and Anthony Milner (London: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1995); Richard Mueller, “Javanese Influence on Debussy’s Fantasie and Beyond,” *Nineteenth-Century Music* 10 (Autumn 1986–87): 157–86; Jens Peter Reiche, “Die theoretischen Grundlagen javanischer Gamelan-Musik und ihre Bedeutung für Claude Debussy,” *Zeitschrift für Musiktheorie* 3 (1972): 5–15. Fauser lists this bibliography and more in her subsection on Debussy (p. 198f.) Commentary on Satie’s and Ravel’s experience of the fair is scattered throughout the standard biographies of these composers. H-France Bibliographies (<http://www.h-france.net/bibliographies.html>) includes an amazing bibliography of world fairs among its on-line resources: Alexander C. T. Geppert, Jean Coffey and Tammy Lau, “International Exhibitions, Expositions Universelles and World’s Fairs, 1851–1951: A Bibliography,” in *Wolkenkuckucksheim: Internationale Zeitschrift für Theorie und Wissenschaft der Architektur* (2000), <http://www.tu-cottbus.de/BTU/Fak2/TheoArch/Wolke/eng/Bibliography/ExpoBibliography.htm>.

[2] Among the many interesting books of recent decades outside of musicology, I would mention Zeynep Çelik, *Displaying the Orient: Architecture and Islam at Nineteenth-Century World’s Fairs* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992); Paul Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas: The*

Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions and the World's Fairs, 1851-1939 (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 1988); Peter Henry Hoffenberg, *An Empire on Display: English, Indian and Australian Exhibitions from the Crystal Palace to the Great War* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001); Sylviane Leprun, *Le Théâtre des Colonies: Scénographie, acteurs et discours de l'imaginaire dans les expositions, 1855-1937* (Paris: Éditions l'Harmattan, 1986); Timothy Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Patricia Morton, *Hybrid Modernities: Architecture and Representation at the 1931 Colonial Exposition, Paris* (Boston: MIT Press, 2000); Robert Rydell and Nancy Gwinn, eds., *Fair Representations: World's Fairs and the Modern World, European Contributions to American Studies 27* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1994); Rosalind H. Williams, *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); and Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard, and Gilles Boëtsch, eds., *Zoos humains XIXe et XXe siècles: De la vénus hottentote aux reality shows* (Paris: Découverte, 2002). Many of these books discuss British rather than French exhibitions.

[3] See Kiri Miller, "Americanism musically: Nation, Evolution, and Public Education at the Columbian Exposition, 1893," *19th-Century Music* 27, no. 2 (Fall 2003): 137-55. Although they are not directly about world fairs, I would also mention here Veit Erlmann's *Music, Modernity, and the Global Imagination: South Africa and the West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); and Jann Pasler's "The Utility of Musical Instruments in the Racial and Colonial Agendas of Late Nineteenth-Century France," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 129 (2004): 24-76.

[4] Fauser cites as her sources for this idea: Reinhard Strohm, *Music in Late Medieval Bruges*, revised edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 1-9; Fiona Kisby, "Introduction: Urban History, Musicology and the Cities and Towns in Renaissance Europe," *Music and Musicians in Renaissance Cities and Towns*, ed. Fiona Kisby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 1-13; and Tim Carter, "The Sound of Silence: Models for an Urban Musicology," *Urban History* 29 (2002): 8-18.

[5] Fauser refers here to Kay Kaufman Shelemay, "Toward an Ethnomusicology of the Early Music Movement," *Ethnomusicology* 45 (2001):1-29.

[6] On the subject of analyzing photographs in an ethnographic or colonialist context, see *African Arts* 24, no. 4, special issue on "Historical Photographs of Africa" (1991); Julie Brown, *Making Culture Visible: Photography and its display at Industrial Fairs, International Exhibitions and Institutional Exhibitions in the United States 1847-1900* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Steve Feld, "Ethnomusicology and Visual Communication," *Ethnomusicology* 20, no. 2 (May 1976): 293-325; Christraud M. Geary, "Photographs as Materials for African History: Some Methodological Considerations," *History in Africa* 13 (1986): 89-116; Paul S. Landau and Deborah D. Kaspin, eds., *Images and Empires: Visuality in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); and Anne Maxwell, *Colonial Photography and Exhibitions: Representations of the 'Native' and the making of European Identities* (London: Leicester University Press, 1999).

[7] Fauser uses the term "embodiment" in reference to Christian Kaden, *Des Lebens wilder Kreis: Musik im Zivilisationsprozeß* (Kassel: Bärenreiter-Verlag, 1993).

Copyright © 2006 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution of individual reviews for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the H-France website. The Society for French Historical Studies reserves the right to withdraw the license for redistribution/republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. Neither bulk redistribution/republication in electronic form of more than five percent of the contents of H-France Review nor re-publication of any amount in print form will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France. The views posted on H-France Review are not necessarily the views of the Society for French Historical Studies.

ISSN 1553-9172