

Occident Meets Orient  
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*This concert is dedicated to Stephen Mazujian and Walter Bauer.*

**Program Notes**

This recital explores societal attitudes and misconceptions about life in Eastern cultures through Western classical and popular music of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Fascinated by the East, composers of traditional Western romanticism, operetta, musical theater, and popular dance-inspired tunes participated in a trend we now call “Orientalism”: the construction of a mythic Eastern stereotype through music, visual art, poetry, and other cultural texts. Although Orientalist works can be approached from a multiplicity of perspectives, collectively they reflect an ambivalence toward the Eastern Other, a mix of fascination and fear more indicative of Western values than of Eastern realities. Orientalist artworks, which reflect and produce that ambivalence, are an expression of the Western imagination as projected onto a chimeric East.

European societies have always had to reckon with their Eastern neighbors, but the rise of colonialism in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries led to a flourishing of Orientalist thought, driven by increased contact between the West and its Others, improved travel technologies, and a collective need to rationalize colonial power. Audiences and consumers of art shared in this project; the Eastern fantasy remains a powerful box office draw to this day. 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-century composers responded and contributed to the phenomenon of Orientalism by engaging with Orientalist poetry and supplementing their music with devices that suggested an exotic flavor.

The Ottoman Empire, long Europe’s closest neighbor, provided some of the earliest material for musical appropriation, though folk musics from North Africa, the Far East, Latin America, and even close-to-home Hungarian and Roma cultures became fodder for Western composers’ imaginations. Accordingly, the pieces in this recital contain a hodgepodge of “Eastern” signifiers: drone notes, minor keys, sensuous chromaticism, florid ornamentation, repetitive rhythms, parallel intervals of a fourth or fifth, and quasi-exotic scales containing the interval of an augmented second. Still other pieces treat Eastern themes or settings within an entirely Western musical language. All of them, for better or worse, reference the Orient as a foil for the Occident, defining Western culture piecemeal by pointing to what it is not.

## GOD IS THE ORIENT; GOD IS THE OCCIDENT

Western thinkers have viewed the One God of Islam alternately as a symbol of pre-modern devotion, a threat to the Christian faith, and a potential figure for unity and reconciliation.

“Talismane” Robert Schumann (1810-1856); text, J. W. von Goethe (1749-1832)

Schumann culled the poetry of “Talismane” from Goethe’s *West-östlicher Divan*. Inspired by the work of the 14<sup>th</sup>-century Persian litterateur Hafez, whose poetry appeared in German translation in 1813-14, Goethe’s collection emphasizes dialogue between East and West and treats universal themes of the human experience. Schumann included this song in the 1840 set *Myrthen*, a wedding gift to his beloved, Clara Wieck. The powerful, martial refrain, interrupted by brief episodes of turmoil, reminds us of the ubiquity of God’s presence.

“Le repos en Égypte” Ottorino Respighi (1879-1936); Albert Samain (1858-1900)

Respighi, known primarily as an orchestral composer, penned numerous songs with great expressive variety. In keeping with his penchant for sumptuous Eastern settings in opera, Respighi selected an exotic text of the French Symbolist Albert Samain for this, one of his *Sei Lyriche* of 1912. The poem depicts a scene from Mary, Joseph, and Jesus’ flight to Egypt, placing the familiar Christian deity in the exotic and ethereal realm of sky, smoke, and Sphynx. The sparse texture and lonely, fantasy-like figures in the piano evoke the timeless expanse of the Egyptian desert.

“Allah” George W. Chadwick (1854-1931); H. W. Longfellow (1807-1882)

Chadwick, an influential Bostonian composer, frequently incorporated American folk idioms into his orchestral and stage works, as well as his 128 songs. This setting of Longfellow’s devotional poem emphasizes the simplicity of faith through a pentatonic melody, tonal harmonies, and reposeful accompaniment.

“O messenger de Dieu...Baigne d’eau mes mains” Jules Massenet (1842-1912)  
Act 3, scene 1 from *Thaïs* L. Gallet after A. France (1844-1924)

Massenet set France’s *Thaïs* in 1894, adding the present scene in 1897. France’s novel, controversial for its anti-clerical stance and thinly veiled eroticism, centers on the conflict between gendered-feminine Eastern sensuality, embodied in the courtesan, Thaïs, and gendered-masculine Western asceticism, represented by the Coptic Christian monk, Athanaël. In the opera, Athanaël successfully brings Thaïs into the fold of Christian piety, but in the process, must face his own carnal desire for her.

At the beginning of Act 3, Thaïs and Athanaël are travelling across the Egyptian desert to Thaïs’s new convent home. After a hard journey, Athanaël takes pity on Thaïs’s physical suffering and stops at an oasis to fetch her water. Our selection opens with a reminiscence of Thaïs’ famous *Meditation*, in which she embraced the Christian faith; then, in a lyrical arioso, she expresses platonic love for her spiritual guide. In the following duet, Thaïs and Athanaël reflect on the renewing power of water. For Thaïs, the water symbolizes spiritual revival, while for Athanaël, it is an awakening of desire. Massenet creates an atmosphere of religious eroticism through a pulsing open-fifth drone overlaid by sumptuous, lyrical vocal writing.

## SULTANS & SERAGLIOS

The mythic Eastern harem offers the Westerner a glimpse into what one music historian describes as “a mysterious and inaccessible component of Eastern sexuality and violence”: behind the secretive walls of the seraglio lie imagined sexual delights and brutal power structures. In many Orientalist works, the harem represents the moral decay of the East, a spectacle both threatening and tantalizing.

### “I Seraillets Have” Carl Nielsen (1865-1931); J. P. Jacobsen (1847-1885)

Nielsen, a prominent Danish composer, is primarily known for his six symphonies, but also contributed greatly to traditional Danish song. For “I Seraillets Have,” one of his Five Songs, Op. 4 of 1891, he selected the poetry of professional botanist and late Romantic poet Jens Peter Jacobsen, whose work Arnold Schoenberg would later set in his 1911 *Gurre-Lieder*. Nielsen sets Jacobsen’s suggestive imagery of flowers and towers within a Romantic musical framework, adding ornamental figuration, melodic chromaticism, and murmuring rhythms for exotic color.

### “Adieux de l’Hôtesse Arabe” Georges Bizet (1838-1875); Victor Hugo (1802-1885)

Bizet published this 1867 song in the *Vingt Mélodies* of 1873. Best known for his exotic operas *Carmen* and *The Pearl Fishers*, Bizet travelled little outside of Paris during his brief career. Well-known for his use of dance rhythms and chromaticism to mark the “dissonant Other,” Bizet uses exotic signifiers to depict the eroticism, earthiness, and insatiability of Hugo’s alluring Arab women: ever-present pulsing rhythms in the piano, the harmonic minor and Dorian scales, and extremes of register which draw attention to the female voice.

### “Harem Life” Irving Berlin (1888-1989)

Berlin, the Russian-born songwriter who penned beloved American classics such as “Blue Skies,” “God Bless America,” and “White Christmas” for stage and film, began his career as a song-plugger and composer on New York’s Tin Pan Alley. He wrote the risqué “Harem Life” in 1919. Berlin did not read music and was a poor pianist, reportedly playing only in the key of F-sharp major; he would dictate his hits to arrangers, who would add harmonies and figuration. The arranger of the present version is Jerron Jorgensen, a Teaching Fellow at the Hartt School and an ASU alumnus in Vocal Performance.

### “Rebecca (Came Back from Mecca)” H. Ruby (1885-1974); B. Kalmar (1884-1947)

Kalmar and Ruby were a successful songwriting duo on Tin Pan Alley, Broadway, and Hollywood Boulevard. Among other comic and novelty songs, they published “Rebecca” in 1921. The song capitalizes on the musical trends of the time—foxtrot and jazz—while incorporating exotic ornaments, scales, and drones. The lyrics, which tell the story of a good American girl gone bad after a trip to (ironically) the holy city of Mecca, are a veritable bonanza of Eastern stereotypes. Topical references include Theda Bara, a silent film actress known as “The Vamp” for her femme fatale roles and risqué costumes.

“Beshebara”

Thomas Hughes; C. P. McDonald

Hughes published “Beshebara” in 1922 under Pennsylvania’s Vandersloot Music Publishing Company, a firm whose songwriters also included Stephen Foster. The song was composed for the annual ball of the Advertising Club of New York City, entitled *A Night in the Orient*. In popular East-meets-West fashion, Hughes blends textual references to Eastern stereotypes, exotic scales, and dactylic rhythms with American ragtime-inspired syncopations.

“Suppose, I say, suppose”

Arthur Sullivan (1842-1900)

Act 2 duet from *The Rose of Persia*

Basil Hood (1864-1917)

*The Rose of Persia, or The Story-Teller and the Slave* (1899) was one of Sullivan’s late operettas, written without his longtime collaborator, W. S. Gilbert. Like the famous *Mikado*, this operetta features an imagined Eastern setting that offered freedom from the moral codes of the West, even as it enabled a critique of Victorian society. Set in Persia (modern-day Iran), *The Rose* is a zany tale of mistaken identities, mind-altering drugs, a false sultan, and men with hundreds of wives (some of them, naturally, overbearing).

In this Act 2 duet, the Sultana, who in Act 1 secretly ventured out of the palace to explore the outside world, tests the waters with her husband, the Sultan. Worried that her hijinks might be discovered, she asks him what he would do if, hypothetically, she snuck out. His barbaric answer speaks for itself.

## **DESERT ROMANCE**

The imagined East, with its timelessness and sensuality, has provided poets and composers alike an ideal setting for romance.

“Suleika und Hatem”

Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel (1805-1847); Goethe

Hensel drew the text of this 1825 duet from the Book of Suleika in Goethe’s *West-östlicher Divan*. The Suleika poems focus on the passion between two idealized figures, the title characters of this piece. Goethe was infatuated with Marianne von Willemer at the time he wrote his Suleika poems, and her imprint is ardently felt in his verse. Hensel published this song, written in a standard Romantic idiom, in her brother Felix’s Op. 8 song collection of 1827. Although he enabled a few clandestine publications, Felix discouraged his sister from publishing openly, out of concern for her modesty and the family name.

“Suleika”

Franz Schubert (1797-1828); Goethe/ M. von Willemer (1784-1860)

Schubert wrote this, the first of two Suleika songs, in 1821. It was published in 1822 as no. 1 of the Opus 14 Lieder. Although a part of Goethe’s *Divan*, it is widely agreed that the poem, “Was bedeutet dei Bewegung?”, was composed by Marianne von Willemer, Goethe’s muse. In the first section of the song, Schubert depicts the East wind with restless eighth notes and an unsettled harmonic-minor accompanimental figure. With the passionate Suleika confident that the wind brings tidings of her beloved, Schubert shifts to the major mode and calms the texture, a firm pedal tone underlying Suleika’s closing meditation.

“Komm, Liebchen, komm!”

Hugo Wolf (1860-1903); Goethe

Wolf published this 1889 Hatem song in his *Gedichte von J. W. von Goethe*, an 1890 collection of 51 Lieder. In Goethe’s poem, Hatem celebrates the delicate touch of the beloved, counting himself luckier than Abbas, the great 17<sup>th</sup>-century Shah of Iran, Alexander, the Macedonian conqueror, and the Ottoman Emperor. Constant eighth notes in the piano signify Hatem’s passion for Suleika, and a one-bar melodic motive unites the voice and piano in dialogue to underscore their partnership. The substantial piano postlude, typical of Wolf, is a brief fantasy on the main motive and confirms the equality of the performing forces.

“El Zegrí”

Isidoro Hernández (1847?-1888)

Spanish composer Isidoro Hernández published this “melodia árabe” as No. 4 of his song collection, *Echoes from the Harem* (1874). Hernández, who had an abiding interest in the Spanish folk heritage and Moorish influences of the Iberian Peninsula, penned this text in the voice of Muhammed El Zegrí, a famous Spanish Moor who proudly resisted Catholic conversion in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. El Zegrí refers to his beloved as a “houri,” a reference to the beautiful companions of the faithful in paradise. Written in the *moresco* style, the song features a bolero rhythm and vocal and piano flourishes typical of the Spanish *cante jondo*.

“Les roses d’Ispahan”

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924); Leconte de Lisle (1818-1894)

Fauré, the master of the Romantic French *mélodie*, wrote this song in 1884. It was published as No. 4 of his Opus 39 songs (1885), as well as in the second of Fauré’s three major song collections (1897). One of the few songs that Fauré later arranged for voice and orchestra, this lyrical setting features a gently murmuring accompanimental figure and proto-Impressionistic harmonic planing. Typical of Parnassian and Symbolist poetry, Leconte de Lisle’s text suggestively links images of nature, especially flora, to the female body.

“The Return”

Granville Bantock (1868-1946); H. von Schweizer (1868-1961)

Bantock was a prolific British composer in most genres; his close friends included Gustav Holst, Edward Elgar, and Jean Sibelius. He engaged with Eastern topics, in part, because he trained for the Indian civil service before turning fully to music. This passionate duet from Bantock’s *Songs of Arabia* (ca. 1898), on a poem by Bantock’s wife, Helena von Schweizer, is a martial and warlike declaration of love. It features ubiquitous 2-against-3 cross-rhythms and culminates in a heated *accelerando*.

## **CARAVANS AND CAMELS**

The desert, a place of illusion, peace, and danger, has long inspired Orientalist artists to dream of boundless possibilities. Lonely, barren, and waiting to be conquered, the desert is the canvas onto which the West projects its wildest fantasies.

“La fuite” Alphonse Duvernoy (1842-1907); Théophile Gautier (1811-1872)

“La fuite,” one of pianist-composer Alphonse Duvernoy’s *Six Mélodies*, is based on a heated dialogue by Théophile Gautier, best known in music for *Les nuits d’été*. In the song, Kadidja works to persuade her lover, Ahmed, that he must run away with her. Throughout their dialogue, galloping triplets in the piano create an atmosphere of anxiety and excitement. Kadidja’s soaring, impassioned pleas contrast with Ahmed’s rational, declamatory objections; as the song progresses, however, he begins to echo her lyrical refrain: “Let us flee! Let us flee!”

“Desertana” Paul Biese (d. 1925) and F. Henri Klickmann (1885-1966)  
Harold G. “Jack” Frost (1893-1959)

This song, “An Oriental Song and Fox-Trot” of 1920, brought together Paul Biese, a Chicago bandleader and tenor saxophonist, and Henri Klickmann, a trombonist and songwriter. Both men flourished in the age of popular American blues, ragtime, and jazz. The song’s opening “quasi tom-tom” rhythmic drone and B-flat minor tonality give way to a cheery foxtrot, complete with dactylic rhythms and jazzy, chromatic melodic intervals—a mixture of sonorities signifying both Eastern and American Others.

“Sahara (We’ll Soon Be Dry Like You)” Jean Schwartz (1878-1956); Alfred Bryan

Budapest-born songwriter Jean Schwartz teamed up with prolific lyricist Alfred Bryan, who had a knack for Orientalist themes, to create “Sahara” in 1919. The song is a topical send-up of American Prohibition, which was approved with the Eighteenth Amendment in January 1919 and was to take effect in January 1920. Perhaps this recital’s most overt example of Western satire projected onto a quasi-Eastern setting, the song references an assortment of non-contemporaneous North African and Middle Eastern figures including Cleopatra, Ramses I, and Omar Khayyam, a Persian philosopher (none of whom lived “seven thousand years ago,” as the lyrics claim). Other, more esoteric references include *fakirs*, a subset of ascetic Sufi Muslims.

“Blue Heaven and You and I” Sigmund Romberg (1887-1951)  
from *The Desert Song* O. Harbach (1873-1963), O. Hammerstein II (1895-1960)

Tin Pan Alley composer and Hungarian immigrant Sigmund Romberg collaborated with Otto Harbach and Oscar Hammerstein on the operetta *The Desert Song* in 1926. Inspired by contemporary headlines, the operetta follows a romance in the midst of the Riff Wars, a popular 1925 uprising against French colonial rule in Morocco. In this song, the masked rebel, the “Red Shadow,” sings to his French beloved, Margot, who is engaged to another man. Romberg, well-versed in Viennese popular music as a result of his tutelage at the Theater an den Wien, sets this simple love song as a lyrical, sentimental waltz.