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The Music Criticism of Gaston Knosp: From Newspaper Journalism in Tonkin to Comparative Musicology (1898-1912)

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When he began to write for French-language newspapers soon after his arrival in Tonkin (North Vietnam) on 11 May 1898, Gaston Knosp was the only critic who signed his reviews with his own name. The most important colleague writing for *Le Courrier d'Haiphong*, *L'Indépendance tonkinoise*, and *L'Avenir du Tonkin* preferred the anonymity and Parisian associations of “Un Monsieur de l'Orchestre”, a pseudonym long popular at *Le Figaro*. Others went by “Un Fauteuil d'Orchestre”, “Strapontin”, “Le Manteau d'Arlequin”, “Le Monsieur du Coin”, and humorous names such as “Morphée” and “Ma-Biche”. Some simply left their reviews unsigned. An inexperienced newcomer of age 24, Knosp perhaps wanted to signal his relationship to his father, Henri (born in 1840), a successful architect, builder, civil engineer, and entrepreneur in Haiphong and Hanoi since 1890. Henri owned a plantation, was naturalized there as a French citizen in 1891,¹ wrote for the *L'Indépendance tonkinoise*, and had been editor of *Le Tonkin* (1892).² In 1896, Henri's architectural design won the competition for a major new theater in Hanoi, to be the largest in the Far East.³ Gaston, a young, aspiring music professional who had studied at the Paris Conservatoire (including composition with Massenet), may also have felt particularly qualified. In any case, in publishing in the newspaper of the port town of Haiphong, a day's journey down the river from Hanoi, he had nothing

My deepest thanks to M. and Mme Morant-Knosp for their generous access to family archives (hereafter Morant-Knosp) and to Léo Houziaux and Valérie Dufour for their kind assistance and encouragement. Thanks also to the staff of the Bibliothèque du Conservatoire, Brussels (BC), for access to Knosp's unpublished scores, to the Centre des Archives d'Outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence (CAOM), for permission to consult original manuscripts, and to Hoang Anh for her assistance at the Centre des Archives Nationales I, Hanoi, Vietnam (CANI).

¹ “Naturalisation”, *L'Indépendance tonkinoise*, 23 May 1891.

² According to J. HOUZIAUX, *Un musicien belge méconnu, Gaston Knosp (1874-1942)* (Tilff, 1970), p. 28, Henri's brother Ferdinand, who had studied agriculture, joined him in Tonkin in February 1897. *L'Indépendance tonkinoise*, 28 January 1897, notes his arrival.

³ *Le Ménestrel*, 26 November 1899, p. 383 and *Le Monde artistique*, 3 December 1899. In May 1900 the city rejected Knosp's proposal, refusing to pay the estimated cost, and, according to his memoir of 20 October 1900, Henri Knosp sued to recover his expenses (CANI, 5800 and 21571). Another competition was opened on 29 March 1901.

to lose and possibly much to gain in terms of building a name for himself. Moreover, in Paris, while most music critics used pen-names, many composers (e.g. Reyer, Dukas, Bruneau) did not. Music criticism, thus, was part of Gaston Knosp's early self-construction. As his contributions evolved from newspaper journalism to music ethnography, he won international distinction as the first Francophone comparative musicologist.

Cosmopolitan Westerner in French Indochina

Gaston's earliest years prepared him for a transnational identity. He was born in Milan in 1874; his mother, Philomène Zonne, was briefly married to the Belgian Henri Knosp, entrepreneur working in Italy.⁴ Henri was also an amateur musician who had studied piano at the Paris Conservatoire with François Bazin.⁵ When the marriage fell apart and Henri remarried, Gaston followed the new couple to Antwerp, then Brussels (1876-80). Before Henri left for Indochina, the family also lived in Nancy (1880-82) and Marseille (1882-84), after which Henri and his second wife separated and the family moved near Zurich (1884-88). Because his uncle Ferdinand resided nearby, the Knosps moved to Vienna (1888-94), where in 1893 Gaston met Massenet. The composer encouraged Gaston to come work with him in Paris where, in 1894-98, Gaston also studied harmony with Lavignac and counterpoint with Gédalge. According to his biographer, Joseph Houziaux, Massenet picked up on Gaston's cosmopolitanism and pointed to what would be Gaston's greatest musical strength: "C'est étonnant que vous êtes italien et viennois tout ensemble! Mélodie, mélodie, elle ne vous coûte guère".⁶ From all this moving around, Houziaux observes, "l'irrégularité de son éducation familiale, ou si l'on veut, l'absence d'éducation, développera en lui un individualisme, une indiscipline de l'esprit qui le tirera hors des sentiers battus et déclenchera son originalité foncière."⁷

By 1898, Tonkin had become a cosmopolitan society in which Gaston quickly became well-connected, thanks to his father. As part of the protectorat of Indochine, a French quarter was built with boulevards, a cathedral, a hotel *grand luxe*, and cafes. In 1889 a group of doctors, pharmacists, and judges started an amateur orchestra, the Société philharmonique, soon receiving a small annual subsidy. In 1894 this orchestra began construction of a theater. Henri Knosp was a member and,

⁴ According to a letter of 12 August 1941 from Knosp to J. Houziaux, L. HOUZIAUX ("Un musicien belge en Extrême-Orient, Gaston Knosp (1874-1942)", *Bulletin de la Société liégeoise de musicologie*, April 1987, n. 5) points out that Gaston's father was possibly Gargantini, from an illustrious Milanese family. Indeed, in that letter Knosp notes that, not only was he born in Milan, "dans les papiers des Gargantini, mon nom se retrouve. Vous connaissez les vers de Musset: 'Ma vie a son secret'." Of course, nothing proves that this was the case.

⁵ HOUZIAUX, *Un musicien belge*, p. 8.

⁶ *Id.*, p. 24.

⁷ *Id.*, p. 32.

in 1894, was elected their conductor.⁸ In addition he was president of the Union musicale, also founded in 1889, for whom he played piano.⁹ Around the same time, small lyrical and dramatic companies coming from Saigon or France began to ask for municipal support to perform opéra-comique, operetta, comedy, and vaudeville. When, like Saigon, the cities of Hanoi and Haiphong decided to hire a director annually to assemble a theater company in France and bring it to Tonkin for a six-month season, they agreed this would only be possible if its performances alternated monthly between the two cities. In fall 1889, the Belgian entrepreneur A. de Greef and M. Caisso, at the time based in Surabaya, Java, were the first to receive a travel subsidy plus 10,000 francs from the Gouverneur Général for their company of fifteen performers, some from Java, some from France. The cities would cover rental of the theater and lighting.¹⁰

In 1895-96 Mme Debry, director of one such company, began to bring works that had never been done in Hanoi, including *Faust*, *Mireille*, *Lakmé*, and even new works: *Les 28 Jours de Clairette* (Paris, 1892), *Werther* (Paris, 1893) and *La Vivandière* (Paris, 1895). They were inevitably cut and performed by reduced forces, but to do them she secured funding for twenty-eight performers.¹¹ These increased the quality of the repertoire as well as their prestige. As theater receipts grew,¹² so did municipal subsidies and singers' salaries. By 1898-99, the subsidy covered twenty-four singers (fifteen soloists, nine chorists; twelve women, twelve men) plus seven musicians from France (conductor-violinist, rehearsal pianist, violin solo, second violin-assistant conductor, flute, cello, double bass), an administrator/régisseur, and a souffleur, for a total of thirty-two artists. Smaller roles, three brass instrumentalists, and other chorists, could be recruited locally.¹³

Of course, there were problems, which music critics humorously and sympathetically underline in their reviews. For the singers, there was the fatigue of the long trip and the temperature swings, sometimes very cold in the unheated hall. In 1898, Un Monsieur de l'Orchestre praises the conductor "qui n'a pas bougé de sa place et qui, tout le long de la partition, a battu la mesure avec une mesure dont nous ne saurions assez le féliciter". But there had been a problem the week before when "il conduisait ses musiciens en se baladant d'un pupitre à l'autre ou s'endormant sur le rôti, comme on dit à la Cour". He also notes limitations inherent in the hall itself:

⁸ Letter of 7 September 1894 from Le Président [of the Société Philharmonique] to M. Knosp "publiciste, membre de la Société Philharmonique", Morant-Knosp.

⁹ C. BOURRIN, *Le Vieux Tonkin, 1884-1889* (Saigon, 1935), p. 180.

¹⁰ Various correspondence, CAOM, GGI 10112, 4059, and 3883.

¹¹ *Contrat Debry, saison théâtrale 1895-96*, CAOM, CGI 23814.

¹² Annual theatrical receipts from Haiphong and Hanoi, reported in the *Annuaire de la Société des auteurs et compositeurs dramatiques* (Paris), increased from 1116 francs in 1896-97 to 4752 in 1901-02.

¹³ *Contrat pour l'exploitation des théâtres de Hanoi et d Haiphong pendant la saison theatrale 1898-1899*. CANI.



Fig. 1. Gaston (top, right), Adèle, and their child around 1904 before leaving Hanoi to return to Paris. (Morant-Knosp Archives, reproduced by permission)

Un des principaux facteurs dans les représentations théâtrales s'appelle l'illusion. Or quelle illusion peut-on bien se faire lorsque l'on se trouve dans une salle aux dimensions tellement exiguës que le public n'a pas besoin de faire de grands frais d'imagination pour croire qu'il se trouve lui-même sur la scène ou que les artistes jouent dans la salle. Comment prendre au sérieux un des dieux quelconques de l'Olympe, alors qu'on s'aperçoit que la couture de son maillot a cédé dans un endroit important, ou bien d'extasier devant Vénus quand on constate qu'il lui manque une dent et qu'il est heureux que le corset ait été inventé pour soutenir ses formes célestes et les empêcher d'aller se perdre dans ... dans le trou du souffleur. Dans ces conditions, il est difficile de s'enthousiasmer, nous l'admettons.¹⁴

These difficulties, he assumed, would go away when Haiphong gets its “vraie salle de spectacle” the following year.

In such a context, Gaston spent his first year living as if in France: reading, writing music, and going to the theater. According to his diary (8 October 1898), only months after arriving, he read the biography of Musset, and expressed admiration for those of Beethoven, Chopin, Musset, and Daudet.¹⁵ He composed a waltz for his young cousin Adèle, the daughter of Ferdinand who, with his grandmother, had accompanied him to Hanoi and whom he would marry in 1903, as well as a song setting Musset's “Tristesse” (Figure 1). Later that evening he expressed rage that a march he had written for the local fanfare would not be performed: “C'était la première, c'est la dernière fois que je fais une chose spéciale pour ce maudit pays et ses encore plus maudits habitants, hormis quelques exceptions, tous, une race d'imbéciles et de jaloux, ignorants, mesquins, bourgeois.” Even if a local French woman promised to pass on his new song to a “grande cantatrice à Paris”, the only thing that seemed to raise his spirits was the possibility of “courrier de France” (13 October).

Such disregard for his new neighbors is the backdrop for his first music criticism, written of performances at the Théâtre de Hanoi for *Le Courrier d'Haiphong*. When the new theatrical troop arrived, it opened with *Faust*. “Oh oh, la la, ça va être du propre et un orchestre de quatre sous” he writes in his diary (15 October). On 20 October, he returned to review the production. His diary entry the next day notes: “Hier soir *Faust*. Assez bien pour ici. Les 3 rôles prépondérants, assez bien; orchestre mauvais, comme aussi les chœurs. Beaucoup de monde, tout le monde content.” The review itself – his first – suggests how he construes his job. It begins with his opinion about the “bon goût” involved in choosing such a work. The first third of the review follows the Parisian formula: start with either a plot summary or a performance history overview. Knosp focuses on the latter, giving highly unusual and not always accurate details. He refers to a *Faust* by Joseph Strauss, but gives its composition date as 1814 rather than 1815, one by Lickl in 1815, and a very little-known *Faust* by Seyfried, produced by the Vienna Opera in 1820. Then he mentions the first French *Faust* by Théaulon, but reports its premiere in 1897 instead of 1827,

¹⁴ Un Monsieur de l'Orchestre, “Représentation théâtrale”, *L'Avenir du Tonkin*, 26 January 1898.

¹⁵ This diary is in Morant-Knosp.

and finally Schumann's *Faust* and Verdi's *Mephistopheles*. Particularly unusual is his reference to a Belgian *Faust*: "Le poème de Goethe tenta ensuite M. Pellaert dont l'ouvrage fut joué en 1834 à Bruxelles." For the premiere of Gounod's *Faust*, he indicates 19 March 1855 instead of 1859. These small errors or typos aside, did he imagine that the audience of *hauts fonctionnaires* and military officers included many who had spent time in Paris and may have known the opera well, in which case, was he trying to impress them with lesser-known details? Rather, I would argue, Knosp seems to be using arcane knowledge to establish his authority as a critic.

In the second half of the review, Knosp dispenses his authority, holding forth on Mme Carvalho's importance in the role of the original Marguerite, and noting the "significance" of the fact that Meyerbeer attended the first eight performances. Then he again turns to the Belgians – a performance of Gounod's *Faust* for which they had reserved the hall. Finally, clarifying his aesthetic preferences, he notes with delight that French artists had come all the way from France to interpret a work "qui n'a pas de leitmotifs mais dont la fraîcheur et le beau coloris orchestral assurent une longue vie". After a brief evaluation of the singing – crucial for the season opener – Knosp concludes on a positive note: "un succès au delà de l'attente". He asks only that the director not cut so much of a work that is "universellement connue".

By comparison, an anonymous reviewer of the 1895 Hanoi premiere of *Faust* praises not the "bon goût" of the theater director, Mme Debry, but her "audace" in taking on a work with a history of luxurious productions. Rather than pointing to the limits of the "cadre restreint", he praises the "science harmonique du maître et le talent déployé par les interprètes" as well as the conductor, with his "exécutants de valeur". What made Debry's Marguerite ideal was not just her voice, but especially the way she incarnated the "tendresse, timidité, douceur et, en même temps, fragilité" of Gounod's character. There was also her blond hair, "avec ses longues nattes, sa pose virginale et ses traits fins". This reviewer takes care to note that the work is "difficile et original", the succession of acts leading to a "fatigue écrasante". And, even though there were only five performers in the choruses written for "des masses chorales, ils s'en sont très bien tirés et ont fait plaisir à entendre". Given such a response, it's no surprise that Mme Debry would keep her directorship for three seasons (1893-96).

In 1900, Un Monsieur de l'Orchestra's review of *Faust*, also the season opener at the Théâtre de Hanoi, begins like Knosp's with a list of previous productions. His review is more accurate and shorter, but ends with another gaff, the premiere of Gounod's *Faust* given as 19 May 1539. Apparently missing the irony, he asks: "Y étiez-vous? Moi non".¹⁶ Unlike Knosp, however, this reviewer devotes 75% of his space to discussing not only the individual singers – some of whom seem to

¹⁶ Un Monsieur de l'Orchestre, "Théâtre de Hanoi: Représentation du 16 octobre", *L'Avenir du Tonkin*, 17 October 1900.

have “effroyables tracs” after the long journey there – but also the costumes and the public, categories avoided by Knosp. For him, the opera is not so much a composition as a spectacle to see as well as hear. When the curtain goes up, this reviewer points immediately to Mephistopheles’ “beau costume” with reference to those of Paris: “on aurait dit ce que portait Gailhard lorsqu’il joue le rôle pour la dernière fois”. Besides his powerful “organe”, important too are his “ample, vif” gestures. The reviewer shows particular empathy for their Marguerite – “l’émotion du premier soir ne lui permettant pas de donner tout ce dont elle est capable” – and the difficulty of having three successive key changes in the trio. At the end, he briefly registers a complaint, not about the voices, but the costumes: “Nous ne dirons rien de leurs costumes, étrange mélange de hauts de chausses Monaco et de pantalons directoire”.

Writing in Hanoi on this same performance for the Parisian *Courrier musical*, Jean Marcel addresses the colonial setting and focuses on themes that underlie much of the local music criticism, even if rarely expressed. The arrival of the theatrical company was “la grande nouvelle du jour”, pushing aside the war in China and the terrible floods in Annam, but would there be enough young French women in attendance? Indeed, these performances offered one of the few places where the large number of military officers and other single men could see European women. Reportedly there were only about 200 European females there before 1900 and “congayes et mousmés ne font pas oublier les françaises”¹⁷. Addressing the French back home, Marcel writes: “Pour celles-ci qui viennent avec un fort léger stock de vertu, grandes chances de trouver... des maris. La solitude rend indulgent pour les passés aventureux.” For all its problems, he points out, French colonization “a le réel avantage de porter au bout du monde le goût français”, and “on est heureux de se donner pour un soir, l’illusion d’un *hier* plein de souvenirs et d’un *demain* plein d’incertitudes”. The review then describes the audience, some of the women, “quelqu’unes fort parées”, the ten-part orchestra that does what it can, and the singers, though they seem more suited to operetta. But the theater is small, the decors insufficient. None of this prevented anyone from enjoying it, especially the thought of reliving “des minutes de France, des minutes heureuses, si lointaines, et qui peut-être ne reviendront jamais: c’est si loin”.¹⁸

I have examined in some detail these four reviews because they suggest that, although Knosp may have felt qualified, he seems not to have understood what the job entailed: not so much feeding his readers historical trivia, designed to impress, but rather, given the city’s sacrifices to bring performers from France, attracting a public while providing constructive criticism to help the theater thrive.

Knosp’s next assignment came three days later with the ever-popular *La Mascotte* (Paris, 1880).¹⁹ In part because they knew the work well, singers throughout the

¹⁷ C. BOURRIN, *Choses et gens en Indochine. Souvenirs de bonne humeur, 1898-1908* (Saigon, 1940), p. 85.

¹⁸ J. MARCEL, “Notes d’Asie: Une première (de saison)”, *Courrier musical*, 1 January 1901, p. 12-13.

¹⁹ G. KNOSP, “Chronique théâtrale: Représentation du 23 octobre 1898: *La Mascotte*; Représentation du 24 octobre 1898: *Miss Helyett*”, *Le Courrier d’Haiphong*, 25 October 1898.

French colonies often chose this opéra-comique for their “débuts”, a system by which theater subscribers voted on the first three performances of the major singers to determine whether they could stay or must return to France. Communicating public reception of the singers and suggestions for improvements was important to the singers, newly arrived. Unfortunately, as Knosp notes in his diary, he found the performance “pas fameux, mais mieux que rien”. Moreover, he was starting to get discouraged, “ennuyé, découragé, ne sachant plus où puiser quelques stimulants” (23 October).

In this second review, Knosp was correct to point out that *La Mascotte* is “une des opérettes des plus françaises”. But, again he gets the date of the first performance wrong, giving it as 1877 instead of 1880. Then he confesses, “après le *Faust*, je m’attendais à une plus brillante exécution, surtout une pièce qu’il n’est pas permis d’écortcher”. The main male singer did not please the public, the second one forgot some sections. But one of the women, “dans le physique et dans le jeu”, reminded him of a Mme Cocyle at the Gaîté de Paris. Name-dropping or not, at least it was positive. The rest of the review could even be read as constructive: the orchestra too often covered the delicate voice of Mme Lacroix, but she too, in spite of her “charmantes épaules” and “cheveux d’or”, should have made more of an effort. “Il reste à soigner pour des ensembles plus parfaits et enlevés avec plus d’entrain.”

For the third production reviewed in his diary, *Miss Helyett* on 24 October, called “une bonne représentation” but also “une bien faible partition d’Audran”, Knosp starts to warm up to the performances. He admits that *La Mascotte* was “bien interprété par notre troupe” and that the public “a réservé un frénétique applaudissement à chaque numéro”, an observation not expressed in his review of the production. However, rather than examine the work or the performance, he launches into personal anecdotes and asides, beginning with a book just published, *De la pudeur chez les Japonaises au Tonkin*. When it comes to comments on the singers, he sarcastically thanks one for having made the effort to learn her role.

In the reviews through winter 1899, Knosp hews for the most part to a certain formula. They begin with his opinion of the work. Since most were well-known and had enjoyed multiple performances in Hanoi over the years, it’s not clear what function this served. With *Barber of Seville* on 25 October, a production in his diary he called “de ville de province”, Knosp nevertheless wants his readers to get excited and he is proud that the *Courrier* gave him “toute une colonne” for it. He begins with audiences’ typical enthusiasm and its timeless “étude de mœurs [...] où se reflètent tous les vices humains qui tous sont de nos jours comme ils étaient jadis”. The Hanoi public, he suggests, appreciates the difficulties of mounting it on such a small stage. This time Knosp shows sympathy to the singers’ fatigue, “ce qui n’est pas étonnant”, the roles being “peu faciles à rendre”. And if all the singing was not satisfying, it was the partly the fault of the conductor, “un fervent admirateur du presto”. For his other reviews, if Knosp did not like the work being performed, he didn’t hesitate to tell his readers in the opening sentences. Adam’s *Les Pantins de Violette*, on 14 January 1899, is “une médiocrité parfaite, œuvre écrite pour une scène d’amateurs”.

It may be a “gentille pièce, mais dire que ce truc est beau? Non, vraiment, je ne puis le reconnaître”.²⁰ Likewise, Lecocq’s *La Princesse des Canaries*, on 17 January 1899, is “bien inférieure à *La Fille de Mme Angot*”. The young composer’s voice emerges in criticizing Lecocq for stagnating artistically because of his successes, for no longer having “la préoccupation de faire mieux”.²¹ Since Knosp devotes most of his column to the story, the singers in *La Princesse* get only a cursory review. In the end, he blames the libretto, then the composer for not having demanded a better one.

Not surprisingly, Knosp did not continue long with this kind of work. Some protested his “partialité”, especially for Massenet of whom he wrote “en termes dithyrambiques”, while saying little about “les autres grands musiciens”.²² He also tended to be overly focused on the works as compositions, whereas in Tonkin “divertissement” and escape from “l’ennui” were probably the most important reasons people attended the theater. Knosp, unlike his colleagues, was much less interested in spectacle and public reception. Consider reviews in the same newspaper, two days apart: Knosp on the company’s performance of *La Petite Mariée* at the Théâtre d’Hanoi on 24 January 1899, Un Fauteuil d’Orchestre on the same company’s *La Fille de Mme Angot* at the Théâtre d’Haiphong on 26 January 1899.²³ In both theaters, the stage curtain malfunctioned during the overture. Knosp, who rarely discussed stage events, mentions briefly that in Hanoi “le timbre électrique a accompagné de sa note stridente une partie de l’ouverture” and that, consequently, the curtain came up too soon and the chorists had to scramble to get to their places. In Haiphong where the curtain was also stuck, the reviewer more humorously reported that the orchestra was asked to play the overture again: “Quand M. Clariot le veut, car c’est lui qui commande, il l’a dit à haute et intelligible voix, si fort que nous l’avons entendu.” He also honors the public’s need to know, explaining that the performance started an hour late because the costumes had not yet arrived. And he ends with cordiality: “en terminant, nous souhaitons la bienvenue à tous les pensionnaires de M. Giguët, un bon séjour dans notre ville, une ample moisson de bravos et d’éloges”.

Knosp was dismissed from *Le Courrier d’Haiphong* on February 24, but continued to attend the theater until the company left in early April, especially for the singers’ benefit performances (*Rigoletto*, *Carmen*, *Le Chalet*, etc.). Writing criticism and having long columns of it appear in print, however, did fuel his ambitions. As early as 24 October 1898, he wrote in his diary, “Je ne veux plus travailler que pour ma gloire. L’Institut et la croix, je les aurai, mais que sont ces vaines récompenses?” With most of the works he had to review so uninteresting to him and frequent repeat

²⁰ G. KNOSP, “Théâtre d’Hanoi: Représentation du 12 janvier 1899: *Les Pantins de Violette, Si j’étais roi*”, *Le Courrier d’Haiphong*, 17 January 1899.

²¹ G. KNOSP, “Théâtre d’Hanoi: Représentation du 17 janvier 1899: *La Princesse des Canaries*”, *Le Courrier d’Haiphong*, 21 January 1899.

²² BOURRIN, *Choses et gens*, p. 121-22.

²³ G. KNOSP, “Théâtre d’Hanoi: Représentation du 14 janvier 1899: *La Petite Mariée*”, *Le Courrier d’Haiphong*, 28 January 1899; Un Fauteuil d’Orchestre, “Théâtre d’Haiphong: Représentation du 26 janvier: *La Fille de Mme Angot*”, *Le Courrier d’Haiphong*, 28 January 1899.

performances,²⁴ more compelling were his compositions, his conversations about Massenet and Saint-Saëns with friends (5 November 1898), and his project to write a symphony on Pierre Louÿs's *Aphrodite*. His diary entries throughout the next year document him visiting and performing with his French friends, especially the daughter of Mme Alcan, director of *La France d'Asie*, reading *Ménestrel* when it arrives from Paris, studying Beethoven's counterpoint, writing waltzes and mazurkas, thinking about Schubert, Strauss, Mendelssohn, Schumann, and Bach as he sketched out his own Quintet in C minor, and sending some of his music to Massenet. When asked to play for a concert that would benefit the *métis*, Knosp refused to "travailler pour la progéniture demi-sang d'autrui" (3 August 1899) – the only mention of non-Europeans in his diary during these years. For years, he uses it to record what he is composing and hearing, as well as composers in France to whom he writes letters (e.g. Massenet, Charpentier, and Ravel), staying focused on where he would eventually return.

Discovering a Passion: Annamite Music

Nothing, except perhaps the long, enthusiastic memoir of his 1898 trip from Marseille to Hanoi,²⁵ suggests that this transplanted western composer would emerge as the first serious music ethnographer in French Indochina. To him, Marseille was "la porte de l'Orient [...] où le Turc, le Levantin croise le Chinois, l'Espagnol, l'Italien, et les Français". On the 130 m. long "Yarra", he shared a room with two Swiss and a Chinese tourist; he befriended *fonctionnaires* going back and forth to Indochina or Pondichéry, especially an old Indian with whom he exchanged stamps. "Nous causons avec n'importe qui de n'importe quoi". This included a Polish count raised in Vienna, and a Dutch botanist living in Java; Knosp kept his distance from the Prince d'Orléans, a frequent visitor to Indochina. Enjoying the trip as well as the Suez, Colombo, Djibouti, and Singapore, Gaston was a born traveler, multi-lingual by upbringing, multi-cultural by curiosity and life-experiences.

Knosp's diary is silent from January 1900 until March 1902. But on 5 April 1900, he wrote to Paul Doumer, Gouverneur Général of Indochine, that, since he had arrived in Tonkin, he had been studying Annamite music.²⁶ Given the absence of this interest in his diary, perhaps he was reconsidering the terms on which he might be able to achieve distinction back in France. With this letter was a beautifully handwritten "Étude sur la musique annamite".²⁷ With the upcoming Hanoi Exposition, he told Doumer he would like to undertake a more substantial study of the music of the Far East. In preparation, he would need to travel to Hüé (the capital of

²⁴ In fall 1898 Knosp also reviewed *Mireille*, *Gillette de Narbonne*, *Le Cloches de Corneville*, *Le Grand Mogol*, *Divorçons*, *Si j'étais roi*, *Le Contrôleur des wagons-lits*, and *Giroflé-Girofla*.

²⁵ Re-copied in 1910 as "Notre voyage", in Morant-Knosp, and again in 1941, the mss in BC.

²⁶ Letter of 5 April 1900, Gaston Knosp to Paul Doumer, Hanoi, CAOM, GGI 6202.

²⁷ This "Étude", undated but on similar paper with similar handwriting, was next to the letter to Doumer at CAOM.

Annam), Cochinchina, and Pnom-Penh (Cambodia). Such a trip would provide “de riches éléments d’un travail neuf en ce sens que les musiques extrêmes-orientales n’ont guère été traitées jusqu’à présent que par des voyageurs ethnographes qui ne disposaient pas des connaissances techniques spéciales nécessaires; ils ne pouvaient donc arriver à produire un ensemble homogène et raisonné.” Addressing Doumer’s concerns, his study would add to the “monument intellectuel que vous êtes en train d’édifier en Indochine”. Expressing an ambition earlier revealed in his diary, he concludes,

La réalisation de ce projet serait pour moi d’une importance capitale en ce sens qu’elle serait une admirable recommandation au moment de mon retour à Paris et de mon entrée dans la carrière musicale. [...]

Croyez, Monsieur le Gouverneur Général, que mon avenir dépend en grande partie de la réussite de mon projet et il n’a aucun autre but que celui que je vous expose.

This document is important, not only because it states that Knosp had already been studying indigenous music, but also because it corrects an earlier misapprehension, perhaps his own memory lapse, that in 1898 he went to Tonkin on a government-sponsored mission.²⁸ On 31 May 1900 Knosp wrote to Doumer thanking him for his interest and noting, “Je me suis efforcé de reproduire fidèlement ce que j’ai pu voir sur place et observer concernant cet art en ayant soin d’écarter de mon étude tout ce qui pouvait relever du domaine des suppositions.”

Doumer issued an “Arrêté”, dated 10 July 1900, funding Knosp (in Hanoi) to embark on a “mission d’étude comparative des musiques de l’Extrême-Orient”. This would cover free passage on ships and river boats, plus 1000 francs to cover incidentals. Afterwards, Knosp should submit a written report. Two years later and four months before the Hanoi Exposition would open, Knosp sent it in and asked Doumer for help getting it published by the École française d’Extrême Orient.²⁹ Its director denied the request, but in January 1904, *La Revue d’Indochine* (not the *Revue indochinoise*) apparently published his “La musique annamite et cambodgienne”, dedicated to Massenet. The fuller *Rapport sur une mission officielle d’étude musicale en Indochine* did not appear in print for another decade.³⁰

From the beginning, Knosp’s aim was comparative in nature. Not only did he explain to Doumer that he would begin with the study of Annamite and Cambodian music, he planned to extend to Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Siamese, Malaysian and Filipino Tagalog music. His preliminary “Étude” focuses on the connections between Annamite and Chinese music, both composed by “des peuples stationnaires” whose art “n’a pas pu avancer”. Cultural resemblances had long been important to French

²⁸ HOUZIAUX, *Un musicien belge*, p. 31. This also appears in G. KNOSP, “Über Annamitische Musik”, *Sammelbände der Internationalen Musik-Gesellschaft*, 30 November 1906, p. 137.

²⁹ This letter of 16 July 1902 and the agreement are also in CAOM, GGI 6202.

³⁰ See reference to the article in HOUZIAUX, *Un musicien belge*, p. 275. The *Rapport* appeared in the *Archives internationales d’ethnographie*, XX (1911), p. 123-151, 165-188, 217-244; XXI (1912), p. 59-65, and as a brochure (Leyde, n.d.).

imperialists who argued that annexing Indo-China would give them eventual access to China, the oldest and richest Asian culture.³¹ By the end of the century, however, and explicitly at the Colonial Congress and the Music History Congress in 1900 in Paris, scholars and bureaucrats alike advocated respect for racial distinctions, especially in native institutions and cultures. In this spirit, Knosp points out that many airs attributed in Indochina to the Chinese are “de conception autochtone et non un produit importé”. Not only do the Annamites have their own legends about who created their music, the philosopher Phuc-hi-thi and Pa-Nha, a musical Mandarin who traveled to China centuries ago, they also have different aesthetics, the Annamites with a soul “infiniment plus poétique” than that of the Chinese. Moreover, the Annamite typically spends more time on music than does “le Chinois qui ne vit en quelque sorte que pour le commerce”. For readers who might think of Annamite music as “primitive”, Knosp asks how long it took for us to assimilate “les créations sublimes de Beethoven, Berlioz et Wagner”, even *Carmen*. His affection and respect for Annamite music are evident on every page.

Knosp aspires to tell a narrative that will grip his readers, beginning with fictional conversations of principal musicians from the distant past. He also seeks to articulate a scientifically objective system, illustrated with musical examples. Two sources were consulted. That of J.C. Baurac, a medical doctor who had previously written on Cochinchina,³² was typical of studies by non-professionals focused on documenting the physical characteristics of musical instruments, as if measured and compared like human heads and body parts by those engaged in racial classification.³³ Like Baurac³⁴, Knosp focuses on the instruments, proceeding in the same order from the flute and oboe to the strings, gong and cymbals, and noting that Annamite orchestras were made up of four to ten musicians. Knosp repeats verbatim Baurac’s observation, citing J. Silvestre, that, for the Annamites, strings are the only “noble” instruments, used to accompany their poetry. To demonstrate the instruments’ specificity, Knosp, like Baurac, describes average lengths and widths, hole sizes and construction materials, and generic varieties. However, Knosp goes much further. Besides taking advantage of his musical training to transcribe musical examples, he describes their timbre, outlines their pitch ranges, and explains how they are tuned and played. Knosp also endeavors to clarify their distinction through comparison to Chinese instruments. If Chinese flutes, for example, are superior, it is not just because their construction is less rudimentary, but also because “l’Annamite aime peu la flûte qui, par contre, passionne le Chinois”. Not only are some Annamite instruments of a different size and timbre than Chinese instruments, they have low notes that cannot

³¹ See my “The Utility of Musical Instruments in the Racial and Colonial Agendas of Late Nineteenth-Century France,” *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 129 (2004), p. 24-76, esp. p. 52-54.

³² *Cochinchine et ses habitants* (Saigon, 1894).

³³ J. DENIKER, *Essai d’une classification des races humaines basée uniquement sur les caractères physiques* (Paris, 1889).

³⁴ J.C. BAURAC, “Courtes notices sur l’Indochine: I. Musique”, *Bulletin de la Société des Études Indochinoises de Saigon* (1899), p. 15-18.

be played on Chinese instruments. The bow used with the two-stringed violin has a very different shape than that used by the Chinese, evident in the drawings. Knosp describes an instrument resembling the Annamite “guitar (Cai Tam)”, depicted on a old papyrus drawing, and suggests that the Annamite sixteen-stringed cymbalum (Cai dan thap luc) could be a predecessor of the Hungarian and Chinese cymbalums, or even a similar instrument in Egypt, though nothing he could find would allow him to date the two such instruments to which he had access. Where they differ, Baurac erroneously assumed the Indochinese had no idea of tones and semi-tones, very little musical feeling, and orchestras producing only discordant sounds.

More important is Knosp’s second source, an 1890 study of “airs recueillis et traduits” by G. Dumoutier, Inspector of Education in Annam and Tonkin, between 1886 and 1889.³⁵ Dumoutier’s work is representative of those written by linguists and others interested in what can be learned from song texts about indigenous culture. He knew literary Chinese as well as both popular and literary Annamite and could understand the differences between orally transmitted *rondes populaires* and written songs used by actors and professional singers. Most of the book is song lyrics translated into French. However, there is also a substantial introduction, followed by musical examples and pertinent illustrations. Besides his analysis of the Annamite orchestra, again proceeding from the flute to the tambour, Dumoutier offers a social portrait of female singers (who functioned at the time like devadasis in India); he points out that music was a “lucrative” profession in the cities; he notes that there was a “sous-secrétariat d’État de la musique” in Hué for the Annamite kingdom in charge of airs performed for the king, and that rules for musical composition were taken from a few Chinese books. Based on Dumoutier’s reproduction of calligraphic characters signifying pitches, Knosp builds his own table with three languages used to notate music. He ignores Dumoutier’s discussion of the social role of music-making, but notes that it would be important to investigate the archives of the king’s music administrator in Hué. Like Dumoutier, he mentions the role various instruments serve in ensembles, such as the oboe in funeral ceremonies. Without acknowledging his source, musical transcriptions in the Dumoutier volume, Knosp reproduces two airs for funeral ceremonies that would have been “répété à l’infini”, although explicitly noting “nous avons pu noter l’air suivant”, as if he had been able to penetrate such contexts. Like Dumoutier, Knosp discusses blind musicians and beggars, their music characteristic of the country and often cited in its poetry. Significantly, he pastes in lovely drawings of smiling female musicians performing on these instruments, commissioned from local artists, sometimes with details of their complex construction (Figures 2 and 3). These illustrations, although abstracted from any background, resemble those made by one of Dumoutier’s artists³⁶.

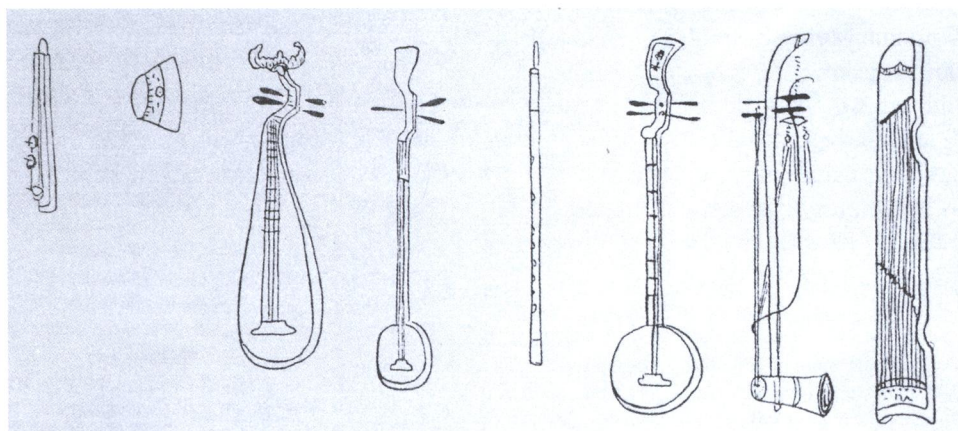
³⁵ G. DUMOUTIER, *Les Chants et les traditions populaires des Annamites* (Paris, 1890). He had also published *Exercices pratiques de langue annamite, Essai sur la pharmacie annamite, Manuel militaire franco-tonkinois, Les Débuts de l’enseignement français au Tonkin*, and *Les Légendes historiques de l’Annam et du Tonkin*.

³⁶ DUMOUTIER, *Les Chants*, p. viii-xvii, xxii-xxvi.



Fig. 2. “Chanteuse jouant de la flûte”, Annamite design reproduced in his *Rapport* (1911), copied from that originally commissioned for Knosp’s “Étude de la musique annamite” (1900)

Fig. 3. “Nhac-Khi (les huit instruments)”, Annamite design reproduced in his *Rapport* (1911), copied and reversed from that originally commissioned for Knosp’s “Étude de la musique annamite” (1900)



Dumoutier's first musical examples are three song transcriptions in calligraphic notation, the first of which, "L'Eau qui coule", follows in western notation. At the end of his "Étude" Knosp reproduces this song, transposed, in both western and Annamite notation, the almost identical nature of the pitch successions pointing to the Dumoutier volume as his source. Dumoutier notes that these two, plus four other songs, are popular music collected and transcribed by his wife. When Knosp wishes to critique an error in one of these that uses the note B as a leading tone, a function absent in pentatonicism,³⁷ he acknowledges its authorship, while also complementing Mme Dumoutier's charming "Allegretto". But Knosp's choice to reproduce and analyze these previously published transcriptions, mostly without acknowledgment, raises questions about his access to local traditions before 1900. At the end of his "Étude", he adopts prudence, suggesting that even the short examples he includes should not be considered "d'une précision absolue [...] il est donc rare qu'on puisse trouver deux notations du même air écrites identiquement de la même manière".

Knosp's "Étude", however, ignores Dumoutier's political subtext, suggestive of why the government supported music ethnography throughout the French colonies, and for decades to come. In reproducing a few patriotic song lyrics of lament and resistance, written during battle with the French, Dumoutier points to the need for his readers to understand their true enemies, the *lettrés* who wrote these texts to discredit the French and render them unpopular. At the same time, as an educational administrator who had spent four years working with Annamite families, "l'âme même de la nation", Dumoutier knew from the *chants populaires* sung by ordinary Annamites that "il nous sera soumis si nous savons être pour lui des protecteurs, si nous savons lui assurer le calme auquel il aspire pour travailler en paix, si nous savons respecter ses sanctuaires, sa famille, ses croyances, ses coutumes, ses traditions".³⁸ Doumer would have agreed, but there is no evidence that Knosp grasped the political implications of his work.

In 1902, after he was able to visit Hué, Cochinchina, and Cambodia, Knosp began to publish widely on this music while composing thirteen new pieces, including his four-act *Jeannine*. Before submitting his mission report to Doumer, in May he published two articles in Germany, including his first on Annamite theater,³⁹ after which he received a letter from Puccini in Torre del Lago, asking for "des tuyaux sur la musique japonaise" (16 July).⁴⁰ On 7 August he was invited to write for the Leipzig publication *Signale*.⁴¹ Back in Paris in spring 1904, he began to become known for his interest in all kinds of Oriental music. In May 1905

³⁷ KNOSP, "Étude".

³⁸ DUMOUTIER, *Les Chants*, p. 117-119, 135-137.

³⁹ G. KNOSP, "Das Annamitische Theater", *Globus* (1902), according to his diary, finished on 2 May 1902; from 17 to 19 May 1902 he also wrote, "Das Theater der Lama" for the *Allgemeine Musik-Zeitung* in Charlottenburg, and on 29 May finished a study of Japanese theater.

⁴⁰ It is not clear how Puccini knew his address or why Knosp might seem an expert.

⁴¹ G. KNOSP, *Diary*. For a list of his collaborations with journals and newspapers, see HOUZIAUX, *Un musicien belge*, p. 277.

Lavignac commissioned essays on Burma and Siam for his *Encyclopédie*, later on the music of Indochina and elsewhere. In July 1906, when the *Mercure musical* had a regular column on “musique orientale”, Knosp attracted the interest of the Société internationale de musique – Échorcheville and Laloy in Paris, Hornbostel and Stumpf in Berlin – with a proposal to create a “Section française exotique”. He was then invited to contribute major articles to French and German journals of the society. From 1902 to 1908, Knosp shared the fruits of this research on Indochinese music and theater in a dozen articles published in four countries, after this, another ten articles on other Asian traditions in three more countries (see Appendix).

When it came to writing about Cambodian music in 1906 during the Exposition Coloniale in Marseille and then in Paris, Knosp’s articles in November 1906 and 15 September 1907 followed one by Louis Laloy. The similarities and differences are striking. Laloy, a scholar of Chinese music, arranged with the Ministère des Affaires Étrangères to meet the Cambodians and bring a phonograph since Gramophone had promised to make five recordings. After commenting on the complexities of their tuning and noticing similarities between their percussion instruments and those of the Siamese, Laloy recreates the scene with great enthusiasm, describing the music as “un jeu subtil et délicat de contrepoints variés”, unlike Chinese music which is melodic, and “un art très raffiné, digne de nos musiciens les plus modernes”.⁴² Their main themes, which he transcribes, resemble Chinese pentatonicism, but, apologizing, he notes that the Cambodians do not use notation and ours isn’t quite appropriate. After the recordings which the musicians got to hear, he turns to the rehearsal with the dancers and the performance at the Pré Catalan the next day. For Laloy, “le lourd Européen” is an “homme d’observation et de calcul”, incapable of comprehending “d’aussi exubérantes et prodigieuses beautés [...] Nous sommes dépassés, éblouis, abasourdis.” And so, he concludes, “pourquoi ne pas avouer la pauvreté de l’art européen, devant les magnificences asiatiques?”⁴³ Like Laloy, Knosp in his 1907 article compares all this to *Mille et une nuits*; the two later even considered doing a dramatic piece together based on Verne’s novel. Knosp agrees that “les Cambodgiens possèdent tout ce dont ils ont besoin pour s’exprimer musicalement”. But exoticism, for him, means an absence of progress, characteristic of the West. And things should stay that way: “Nous formulons des vœux pour que les Asiatiques mettent leurs arts à l’abri de toute tentative de modernisation qui ne s’accomplirait qu’à force de sacrifices que ne rachèterait pas le progrès réalisé.”

Whereas Knosp’s 1906 “causerie” in *Foi et vie* is nostalgic about his experiences there and includes the local colonizers’ perceptions, his 60-page article in *Mercure musical* is scholarly, with frequent citations from the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (London), Hornbostel and Stumpf (Berlin), Land (Java), and even Laloy.⁴⁴

⁴² L. LALOY, “Musique et danses cambodgiennes”, *Mercure musical*, 15 August 1906, p. 104-105.

⁴³ *Id.*, p. 109.

⁴⁴ G. KNOSP, “La Musique annamite, Notes et impressions,” *Foi et vie*, November 1906, p. 700-702; “La Musique indochinoise”, *Mercure musical SIM*, 15 September 1907, p. 889-956.

Without a phonograph, though calling for one “mettant à l’abri de la perte ou de l’oubli les airs si intéressants”, and without anecdotes, probably as he had only limited access to Indochinese musicians, even in Indochina,⁴⁵ Knosp sets out a quasi-scientific study, divided into two parts: Cambodian and Annamite music. Both start with their “origins”, followed by discussion of melody, harmony, “harmonie exotique”, rhythm, dance,⁴⁶ instruments, scales, tunings, and performances practices. As in his 1900 “Étude”, Knosp proceeds through comparison. In his first sentence, he asserts that Cambodian music is “identique” to Siamese music. Of course, Chinese traditions were influential, but “la Chine restait figée dans son esprit de tradition”. As he also writes in 1908, Cambodian and Annamite musical contours tend to be “gracieux” and spontaneous, while Chinese expression is “intellectuelle et réfléchie”. His point: Indochina had a “supériorité musicale sur la Chine”.⁴⁷ One major difference between Annamite and Cambodian music, he suggests, comes from the fact that the former are largely a rural people whereas the latter knew cities, such as Angkor. And yet, like the Angkor ruins, in some sense its people are “dégénéré”, “étant données toutes les richesses artistiques que lui ont léguées ses pères”.⁴⁸ Significantly, Knosp’s comparisons extend to other Asian music. Supporting each idea are comparative musical examples used to suggest reciprocal influences between Cambodian and Thai, Javanese and Annamite music, with the occasional reference to gypsy music as well as Western music and dance. Suppositions abound, but balancing dismissive comments about being “incapable de progresser sans transgresser”, there is no shortage of respect and admiration for the musicians’ “haute musicalité” and “intuition du Beau”. With the “désir de lui créer des amis”, Knosp hopes he has shown that this music is “digne d’intérêt”.⁴⁹

In Lavignac’s *Encyclopédie* and his 141-page *Rapport*, Knosp keeps the same succession of subjects and language, with a longer introduction, more extended musical analysis, and more attention to social context. He reprints the same musical examples (including Mme Dumoutier’s funeral songs), adding related ones, more songs (including a three-page, nine-part “Prélude cambodgien” in western and Annamite notation), and more illustrations (new photographs, near-exact copies of the original drawings from the 1900 “Étude”, and those in Dumoutier’s volume). There are also expanded sections, such as on “les chanteuses annamites” referring back to Dumoutier’s commentary about their “mœurs légères”. Since Cambodian music here follows Annamite music, Knosp opens with an evaluation not present

⁴⁵ In *Foi et vie* and *Mercure musical*, he refers only to “le chant d’un marchand ambulant chinois” heard in Phnom-Penh, a court soloist in Hué, and a “samppannier” who performed with a woman on the boat while crossing the river near Hué.

⁴⁶ This section borrows from his review of the Cambodian dancers at the Marseille Colonial Exposition: “Le Roi du Cambodge en France,” *Le Petit Parisien*, 6 June 1906.

⁴⁷ KNOSP, “La Musique indochinoise”, p. 890, 892, and G. KNOSP, “De la mélodie annamite”, *Revue musicale de Lyon*, 25 October 1908, p. 36.

⁴⁸ G. KNOSP, “L’Histoire de la musique en Indochine”, *Encyclopédie de la musique*, dir. A. LAVIGNAC (Paris, 1913), p. 3130.

⁴⁹ “De la mélodie annamite”, p. 41; “La Musique indochinoise”, p. 896, 956.

in 1907 article: Cambodian melody is “incontestablement supérieure” not only to Chinese, but also to Annamite melody.⁵⁰

Knosp also responds to critique of his 1908 essay on Indochinese theater, a genre that has stimulated considerable attention in France and Vietnam since 1889. Whereas he claims that Cambodian theater has Siamese origins, Leclère points to the importance of the Khmer dynasties in Angkor from India.⁵¹ In his 1911 *Rapport*, Knosp admits Hindu influences, but without denying Thai ones. The most important addition is a section on Laos, borrowed from his 1906 article published in Germany and his 1908 French article on the subject, reproducing airs collected by an explorer in 1880 and an image of a near-naked musician from an explorer account in 1879.⁵² Knosp notes the influence of its neighboring cultures as well as the “autochtone” nature of its Khen accompaniment, calling Laotiens “les créateurs de la polyphonie dans cette partie de l’Asie”.⁵³

Out of all this came the beginnings of his unprecedentedly large scholarly bibliography, begun in March 1907.⁵⁴ And as he turns to publishing on other music traditions – the most virtuouse in its musical and scholarly references being “Les Chants d’Amour dans la Musique Orientale”,⁵⁵ a tour from Arabic Spain to Japan – Knosp also becomes increasingly aware of the problems in writing about exotic music. In his essay on the Canary Islands for Lavignac’s *Encyclopédie*, he notes the lack of precision inherent in transcriptions – a problem many have struggled with then and now⁵⁶ – the difficulties in discussing changes over time, including the relationship between the old and the new in contemporary practices, in separating out external influences from the distinct characteristics of a tradition, and in locating music and musicians not yet importing European qualities.

While still living in Hanoi, Knosp thus transformed himself into a self-taught music ethnographer, which suited his interests much better than newspaper journalism. In Paris, he continued to review concerts in *Courrier musical*, the *Revue musicale SIM*, and the *Revue musicale de Lyon*, and to compose, signing many of his *Encyclopédie* articles “compositeur de musique”. But it was not until his writing on exotic music began to dominate his reputation that he turned to composing Orientalist music. Surprisingly, other than an unpublished “opéra annamite” written

⁵⁰ Cf. KNOSP, “La Musique indochinoise”, p. 895, 897; “L’Histoire”, p. 3129, and his *Rapport*, p. 14, 84.

⁵¹ G. KNOSP, “Le Théâtre en Indochine”, *Anthropos* (1908), p. 280-289, as reviewed by A. LECLÈRE, “Le Théâtre cambodgien”, *Revue d’ethnographie et de sociologie* (1910), p. 257-282.

⁵² This source, given as L. DELAPORTE, *Voyage au Cambodge* (Paris, 1880), is incorrect and more likely his 1873 volume with Francis Garnier. It is unacknowledged in KNOSP, “Über....Annamitische Musik”. See also J.L. DUTREUIL DE RHINS, *Le Royaume d’Annam et les Annamites, journal de voyage* (Paris, 1879), discussed in PASLER, “The Utility of Musical Instruments”, p. 65-68.

⁵³ KNOSP, “L’Histoire,” p. 3146.

⁵⁴ G. KNOSP, “Bibliographia musicae exoticae”, *Revue musicale SIM*, supplement, 15 November 1910, 15 February and 15 April 1911.

⁵⁵ *Revue musicale SIM*, 15 July 1908, p. 768-791.

⁵⁶ TRAN VAN KHE, *Vietnam* (Paris, 1967), p. 65-66.

with a friend in Tonkin, none of this draws on his Indochinese tastes and experiences. Instead Japanese, Chinese, and Arab-influenced music inspired his compositions, beginning with his “conte dramatique en quatre actes” *Sheherzad* (1905) – an excerpt premiered in 1914 with Delage’s *Poèmes Hindous* and Stravinsky’s *Lyriques Japonaises* – followed by the “ballet indien” *Nalla* (1906) and a “drame japonais” *Le Yakounine* (1909). As he once explained,

Harmoniser les plus jolies mélodies annamites d’après les exercices du Conservatoire serait entreprendre une besogne stupide. N’insistons pas! Mais étudier ces mélodies, rechercher leur essence, s’en imprégner jusqu’à oublier toutes ces insipides résolutions imposées (par les retardataires) après chaque accord dissonant, voilà le prisme à travers lequel il convient de considérer la musique exotique.⁵⁷

With his essays on Oriental music, Knosp aimed to interest the new breed of music scholars, such as Laloy and Lavignac, perhaps to be viewed as the French Hornbostel. Although he never analyzed them, unlike Hornbostel, he called for more recording of indigenous music. Knosp’s melodic orientation, remarked on by Massenet, made the essentially melodic nature of Indochinese music an ideal subject. The comparative method allowed him to search for difference in the context of related Otherness. But comparisons can be flawed by generalities, or the assumption that entities are comparable, such as when Knosp compares the scales of gypsies to those of Japanese and Chinese music. And he often uses this method to produce value judgments, implying an order of relative superiority. Such shortcomings raise the question: does one’s cultural background inevitably determine how one hears music? Tran Van Khe, a South Vietnamese expert in this music, once reduced his predecessors’ perceptions to their experience of “monotonie” in Indochinese music.⁵⁸ If viewed narrowly, this may be accurate. But, ironically, Tran Van Khe builds on their work. To show how each musician brings “son cachet personnel” to a popular tune, he transcribes and analyzes various versions of “L’Eau qui coule” that both Dumoutier and Knosp reproduce.⁵⁹ His 1962 monograph follows the same structure as Knosp’s various essays, starting with historical origins, proceeding to instruments, questions of scale and notation, and ending with sections on melody, rhythm, harmony and counterpoint.⁶⁰ Inevitably, Tran Van Khe fleshes out far more about this musical tradition, its history, and its musical genres up through contemporary times. But neither Knosp nor he could have predicted the rich new scholarship on individual genres that would follow,⁶¹ nor the ambition of some to study the music of Vietnam’s fifty-seven ethnic minorities.⁶²

⁵⁷ KNOSP, “De la mélodie annamite”, p. 40.

⁵⁸ TRAN VAN KHE, *Vietnam*, p. 14–15.

⁵⁹ Cf. *Id.*, p. 36, 48, 52; DUMOUTIER, *Les Chants*, p. xviii–xix; and KNOSP, “L’Histoire”, p. 3104.

⁶⁰ TRAN VAN KHE, *La Musique Vietnamiennne traditionnelle* (Paris, 1962).

⁶¹ See P. T. NGUYEN, ed., *New Perspectives on Vietnamese Music* (New Haven, 1991), especially the extensive bibliography, p. 104–125.

⁶² This is the current work of To Ngoc Thanh in Hanoi and his students. My thanks to Tran Quang Hai for all his help over the years.

Gaston Knosp's Writings on Exotic Music

- “Étude sur la musique annamite” (1900, unpub)
- “Das Annamitische Theater”, *Globus* (Braunschweig) (July 1902) [finished 2 May 1902]
- “Das Theater der Lama”, *Allgemeine Musik Zeitung* (1902)
- “Die Musik in Hinterindien”, *Neue Musik Zeitung* (December 1903)
- “La Musique annamite et cambodgienne”, *Revue d'Indochine* (Hanoi) (January 1904)
- “Die Annamitische Melodie”, *Die Musik* (Berlin) (1903-04)
- “La Birmanie”, *Encyclopédie de la musique*, ed. Lavignac (1913) [commissioned May 1905, signed July 1906]
- “Le Théâtre cambodgien”, *Le Journal* [submitted 23 March 1906, diary]
- [unsigned], “Le Roi du Cambodge en France”, *Le Petit Parisien* (6 June 1906)
- “La Musique annamite, Notes et impressions”, *Foi et vie* (November 1906)
- “Über Annamitische Musik”, *Sammelbände der Internationalen Musik-Gesellschaft* (30 November 1906)
- “La Musique indochinoise”, *Mercure musical SIM* (15 September 1907)
- “L'Histoire de la musique en Indochine”, *Encyclopédie de la musique*, ed. Lavignac (1913) (signed 1907)
- “Le Théâtre en Indochine”, *Anthropos*, 3 (Vienna) (1908)
- “Le *Eulh-Ya* et la musique chinoise”, *Le Guide musical* (Bruxelles) (August – September 1908)
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