Java did not enjoy a significant place in the American imagination during the nineteenth century, and in contrast to India, China, or Japan was rarely an artistic subject. In the early years of the twentieth century, adventurous artist-travellers occasionally gave exhibitions of paintings and sculptures of Indonesian subjects. In the days when illustrated lectures were still a popular entertainment, one might also attend a talk on Java by itinerant lecturers such as Dwight Elmendorf. In a ‘picture journey’ that concluded his lecture series ‘The other side of the world’, Elmendorf showed magic lantern slides and motion pictures of Java ‘as proofs that the stories of the island’s wonderful agricultural wealth and beautiful scenery are not exaggerated’ (See Java 1914). He also demonstrated the use of angklung rattles and explained that the angklung was a musical instrument used in Java to accompany hobby-horse dancing and was ‘played like the chimes one sees in vaudeville or the musical glasses’ (Gossip 1916). Java and other islands of the archipelago could occasionally be glimpsed in sensationalist newsreels and photographic exhibitions of volcanoes and tiger hunts. Some turn-of-the-century American art lovers were vaguely aware that Javanese dance was held in high repute in Europe. The Javanese Village at the 1893 Columbia Exhibition in Chicago created a sensation at the time, but unlike belly dancers performing at this world’s fair did not inspire American imitators. More pervasive were the novelistic impressions of Joseph Conrad, the sailor’s Java of seedy entrepôts, treacherous merchants, racial mixture, opium dens and loose morals.

The artist responsible for making North Americans associate Java with more than coffee or a brand of rice-based facial powder was the French Canadian

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1 This article, based on research funded by the British Academy, was presented in earlier forms at the ASEASUK conference in Oxford University and the multi-disciplinary Fusion Cultures at Greenwich University in 2006. I would like to thank the two anonymous BKI reviewers for their learned comments.

2 A prime example of this was the American painter Maurice Sterne, who lived in Bali between 1912 and 1914.
mezzo-soprano Eva Gauthier, known to interwar American audiences as The High Priestess of Modern Song. Gauthier’s biographical and artistic trajectory from second-rate opera singer to international artist through the crucible of Javanese culture encapsulates important trends in American involvement with Asian arts and culture during the early twentieth century. Her salutary journey speaks broadly to issues related to cross-cultural communication, cosmopolitanism and transnational careers. Gauthier was a pivotal figure for a generation of American performing artists who embraced the arts of the Other to the degree that they publicly identified as Indian singers and Javanese dancers. These concert artists rejected nineteenth-century modes of spectacular Orientalism in order to engage in intimate communications with their audiences about far-away cultures. Gauthier romanticized traditional Java, and some of the words attributed to her in the popular press were likely penned by reporters with no direct experience of the Dutch Indies. But her manifest respect for Javanese court culture inspired other performers to look to Indonesia for inspiration and helped to spark interest in the textiles and crafts of the archipelago. Popular imagery of Java before Gauthier was dominated by jungles and South Sea ports; after her it was Javanese princesses and rarefied art.

Canada to Java

Gauthier was born in Ottawa in 1885. Her family was of moderate means but politically well connected: her uncle was Wilfrid Laurier, prime minister of Canada from 1896 to 1911. Laurier’s financial backing and faith in her talents allowed Gauthier to travel to Europe in 1902 to study with such famous voice teachers as Jacques Bouhy, Carlo Carignani, and Giuseppe Oxilia. (A later patron was the Scottish-Canadian politician and philanthropist Lord Strathcona.) Gauthier was coached by Caruso’s sister-in-law for her operatic debut in Milan in 1909 in the role of Micaëla in Carmen, and she went on to perform with Dutch, Danish, German, and French orchestras. After she was replaced at the last minute by another singer in a 1910 Covent Garden production of Lakmé, she turned her back on the world of opera and left for Java to join her fiancé Frans Knoote, a Dutchman who had also studied with Oxilia in Milan and was then managing a tea plantation outside Bandung. The couple married in 1911 and divorced in 1917. They resided in separate rooms and did not have children. Gauthier later reflected that she would never have joined Knoote in Java if not for her Covent Garden fiasco.

Gauthier’s retreat from opera did not by any means mean cessation of her artistic career. Within weeks of arriving in Java in September 1910, she was performing concerts of arias by Tchaikovsky and Rossini in Batavia’s schouw-
burg, the premiere theatre of the Indies, accompanied by a local pianist and the house band (stafmuziek). In the months that followed, Gauthier toured Java, playing all the major concert halls and sociëteiten (European clubs). Sponsorship from the Robinson Piano Company (an Asian firm specializing in pianos built for the tropics) underwrote a tour to Deli, Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Singapore, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Tianjin, and Peking in 1911; tours to Japan, Siam, and India followed over the next two years.

When Knoote received a job with a Semarang commercial firm, Gauthier moved with him to this Central Javanese port city, where they each had a room in the same hotel. It was while living in Semarang, it seems, that Gauthier discovered gamelan music.

From there I went to the other cities of the island. Often on the roads I would see groups of natives playing queer instruments, and hear them singing songs of many peculiar harmonies. I immediately became curious. Here was a music of which I had never heard! I, who had made music my life study! I inquired about these strange melodies. All my friends shook their heads, and said it would be impossible for me to understand the native music, no white people did, and as for singing it—! (Strakosch 1915.)

It was apparent that if Gauthier was to progress she would need to broaden her circle of friends.

The man who provided entrance into the world of Indonesian music for the vocalist was the composer and pianist Paul J. Seelig (1876-1945), whom Gauthier later described (perhaps half tongue-in-cheek) as ‘the brother of Mata Hari, who later became a spy’.³ Seelig was the son of a Dutch music publisher and music store owner, born in Dortmund, Germany, but brought up in Bandung. He had studied composition, conducting, and piano in Germany, and was abreast of modern musical developments. Upon his return to Java in 1900, Seelig was appointed by Paku Buwana X (reign 1893-1939), the susuhunan of the royal court of Surakarta, as the conductor of the royal band, and retained this position until 1908. During this time, Seelig documented the repertoire of the royal gamelan ensemble in Western notation, publishing some 200 pieces under the title Gending Djawi (Musical pieces for Javanese gamelan) in 1922.⁴ He also collected Malay songs from the kroncong and stambul repertoires, adapting them for voice and piano in an art music style under the influence

³ Beaudry cited in Turbide 1986:126f. Seelig was in fact no relation to Mata Hari, though it is revealing that Gauthier would identify him as such to a North American popular magazine. Like Mata Hari, who mediated between Europe and Java for modern Europeans, Seelig would open gates for Gauthier’s entry into the rarefied world of Javanese culture. Mata Hari represented herself as Eurasian (though she was of Dutch descent), and while Gauthier identified Seelig as Eurasian, Seelig was in fact born in Germany of German parents.

⁴ For a brief biography of Seelig, see Mak van Dijk 2007:151-91.
of Debussy. Many of these arrangements were later published by the family publishing firm of Matatani. Seelig served in the 1910s as the conductor of the Royal Orchestra of Bangkok, where he collected Siamese music. One source credits him with composing the Siamese national anthem. He returned to Java and ran a chain of music stores as well as the family’s music publishing house until Japan invaded in 1942. The Batavia art critic Hans van de Wall (cited in Mak van Dijk 2007:151) considered Seelig to be ‘the most richly talented composer ever to be inspired by the Netherlands Indies’.

The account of Gauthier’s meeting with Seelig makes for a good story – one which the singer repeated (with some variation) on a number of occasions. Most female artists of Gauthier’s generation toured with a chaperone, typically a manager, accompanist, mother, or spouse. Gauthier toured alone, and performed with a local piano accompanist or orchestra at each stop on a tour.

One night, a few hours before my concert, my accompanist met some friends, and in his joy drank well, but not too wisely. I was left at the last moment without an accompanist. The audience was already seated. In desperation, I inquired if there might be any one in the assemblage who could play the piano. A dark-skinned man arose, and said he would try! His appearance (I thought him a native) did not impress me with his ability, but I gratefully consented. To my great surprise he played my accompaniments beautifully. Later, answering my questions, he told me he was only half-caste, and that he had been educated musically in Europe. He was very modest, and said but little of himself. (Strakosch 1915.)

Gauthier met Seelig again while on tour in Bangkok in 1912 and got to know the ‘half-caste’ man better. He provided Gauthier with a number of his Malay song arrangements and she liked these enough to commission some new Malay song adaptations from Seelig. Seelig remained her frequent accompanist and constant confidant over the next two years.

Gauthier began performing Seelig’s Malay song arrangements in Java in 1912 with mixed results, but a 1913 Melbourne performance of Seelig’s arrangement of the Malay song *Anak udang* (The child of a shrimp) evoked for one reviewer ‘an atmosphere which gave more than a suggestion of brown faces, gleaming teeth, and swaying forms against a background of the moist, hot jungle’ (Turbide 1986). While a contemporary reader is likely to find racialist commentary of this sort offensive, Gauthier seems to have been encouraged by the reception, and she expanded her repertoire to include settings of Malay songs by the Surabaya-born composer Constant van de Wall (1871-1945) as well.

It was almost certainly Seelig who encouraged Gauthier to seek musical tuition from his old Javanese employer, the royal court of Surakarta. Gauthier applied for permission to the Dutch authorities and the susuhunan, and was
granted leave to live in a room within the walls of the kraton while studying Javanese music and culture. She paid the equivalent of $15 a month, which included the hire of nine servants.\[^5\]

Gauthier later wrote and spoke in highly romantic terms about her studies in the kraton, and it is difficult to ascertain what she actually studied or for how long. Much of her time seems to have been spent conversing in halting Malay with the wives and daughters of the susuhunan and learning about their rarefied cultural world. She saw how ‘within the palace walls the women bathe, and dance and sing and weave batik. They chew betel nut and eat sweetmeats and intrigue power.’ (Gauthier 1915.) She admired the autonomy of the women, their skill in batiking, attention to personal hygiene, and the muscular control of the royal srimpi dancers, though she disliked the look of the women’s betel-stained teeth and found Javanese men to be more physically attractive than their wives. Gauthier’s relations with the royal court’s all-male gamelan musicians were mediated through the royal wives.

These wives looked at me curiously, indeed. I was the first white woman within the palace walls! At first, they were very shy, but as they became used to me, they helped me. At their command the Sultan’s musicians played, so I heard as much of the native music as I wished for, and as often. This naturally gave me great opportunity for study. (Strakosch 1915.)

Musicians of all kinds would gather together to play before me, and one after another of their instruments, or all together, would be played, some that are familiar to Europeans, and others that are not (Imogen 1914).

In her published accounts of her life in Java, Gauthier does not state directly the names of the musicians she studied with, though she does affirm they were ‘the best Javanese musicians, some of whom are very learned’ (Greville 1922-23). However, a September 1939 photograph outside New York’s Rockefeller Center of Gauthier and Raden Mas Wiradat has the caption ‘my teacher at the Kraton, Solo’ (Turbide 1986:138). At the time the photo was taken Wiradat was performing daily with a Javanese troupe in the Netherlands Building of the World’s Fair. He was known in Java as a master dancer and teacher, as well as an occasional writer on the subject of Javanese performance.

From Wiradat and others in the gamelan ensemble, Gauthier learned the basics of gamelan theory. She was taught, for example, that the drum was the ‘chef d’orchestra’, and that the vocal part ‘is merely a tone color in the ensemble, and the singer’s voice counts as another instrument in the orchestra’ (Mll. Eva 1915). She transcribed melodies, though she struggled with the

\[^5\text{Likely Seelig provided the initial introduction to the kraton. Gauthier (1915) writes that ‘accompanied by a native accompanist, a great local musical genius, I paid my first visit to the court of the sultan’.}\]
differences between Javanese and European tuning systems. Gauthier was frustrated by the oral-aural system of musical transmission, and baffled by samples of notation presented to her. She became convinced that genuine understanding of Javanese gamelan could only come after years of devoted study of the sort that Seelig had put in.

Gauthier also studied singing with some of the younger women of the kraton. ‘After I had gained the confidence of the women I worked with them daily, learning their songs, which have a plaintive quality, an appealing pathos which is not unlike the Russian folk-songs.’ (Secrets of Java 1915.) Most likely these songs were tembang or classical Javanese sung poetry, which was actively rehearsed by many in court circles through the early twentieth century. Gauthier recounts as well attending numerous performances and even singing along with the royal gamelan ensemble (My experience 1915).

Gauthier had high regard for the virtuosity of unmetered ‘cadenza’ sections of gamelan music, the use of quarter and eighth tones in vocal ornamentation, and for the general sense of rhythm and ensemble playing. As an operatically trained singer, she found that the Javanese style of vocal production taxed her throat, and could not imagine how Javanese female vocalists could sing in this manner all night. She later admitted that although she generally enjoyed Javanese music, as an ‘occidental’ she did not like the sound of Javanese singing due to its use of ‘falsetto’. Nonetheless she did study ‘the trick of singing a la Javanaise’ (Whittaker 1917).

The flow of knowledge was not all one way. In exchange for a demonstration of traditional singing and dancing,

I sang to them a bit of colorateur and they thought the screaming on the high notes was hideous; they thought I was going to burst. Then I sang to them a melody. But they looked bewildered. They could not grasp it in the least. Then I sang Debussy to them, and they went into raptures. Him they understood, for he tried his best to introduce into his music the quarter tone. (Fleischman 1915.)

Gauthier was looking for cultural connections, and found one in Debussy’s modern harmonies and modes. Later commentators, rightly or wrongly, saw a genetic relation between Debussy and gamelan, claiming that the experience of hearing gamelan at the 1889 Exposition Universelle de Paris influenced Debussy’s pentatonicism. Gauthier lacked the theoretical vocabulary to give a precise account of why her Javanese audience liked Debussy, but she had sound musical instincts.

Upon the formal completion of her kraton studies in 1914, Gauthier gave a command performance of entirely Indonesian items (un concert seulement de ces choses indigènes) in Javanese costume before the susuhunan. Details of the performance were overseen by the susuhunan’s brother, likely Prince
Suraningrat, a *gamelan* authority who tutored Wiradat and his twin-brother Kodrat in music. Seelig provided Gauthier’s piano accompaniment. After the performance, Gauthier had her single official audience with the susuhunan.

In my court robe I entered the throne room and approached him. He sat on his throne a majestic figure. A man of forty, dark skinned, his face as impassive as though it were carved from dark marble, he looked at me with the cold eyes his many spouses [had seen], been upon the white woman, one of the hated foreigners.

‘I have finished my study of the native music your Majesty’, I said, as I curtsied.

‘I thank you for affording me the opportunity.’

‘I am glad if it has been of benefit to you’, he returned, through his interpreter. (Gauthier 1915.)

As a graduation present, the laconic susuhunan gave her a complete Javanese costume of the sort worn by *srimpi* dancers, including all accessories.

Gauthier recognized Javanese anti-colonial sentiments, but evidently saw art as a way of side-stepping politics. She became such an enthusiast of Javanese performance that she hatched a plan to produce a tour of Javanese dancers and *gamelan* to Europe. She was convinced that the *srimpi* dance would captivate European audiences as much as it had her. In a 1915 interview, she gushed that:

In executing their dances they move so sinuously and imperceptibly that in transversing a certain space the onlooker cannot at any time note their progress. Attired in skin-tight vesture of the most gorgeous colors and design, the movement of every muscle on their splendid young bodies is displayed. There is, however, nothing offensive about these dances – none of that wild ‘oriental abandon’ which is commercialized in the midways and bazaars of America and Europe. It is the embodiment of music and poetry in motion. (New bride’s arrival 1916.)

Working together with Seelig, she found a *gamelan* to purchase, roped in Dutch financiers, and obtained the susuhunan’s consent for the tour – *srimpi* was officially a royal dance with *pusaka* status and needed royal permission to be shown outside the *kraton*. Gauthier worked with her husband to generate publicity material (including photographs) and wrote to Léon Bakst, scenic designer for the Ballets Russes, to request that he design sets. Only Gauthier’s contracted tour to Australia and New Zealand with violinist Mischa Elman, starting in June 1914, stood in the way.

The outbreak of World War One resulted in a change of plans. Ships were requisitioned for military needs. Gauthier had planned to go from the antipodes to Europe to join her husband for a Christmas holiday (and likely to prepare the ground for the Javanese tour). Instead, Gauthier and Elman caught the last ship leaving Sydney harbour – and went to the United States via

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6 Letter from Eva Gauthier to her parents cited in Turbide 1986:136; Martin 1939.
Hawai‘i. While Gauthier promoted her concept of touring Javanese dancers and musicians for some years to come, this dream was never to be realized.

**Gauthier in New York**

Gauthier arrived in late 1914 in New York, then as now the hub of American performing arts. She promptly broke off communication with Knoote. That chapter of her life was closed. (Knoote recounts not having received a single letter for some years before their 1917 divorce.) Gauthier’s single-minded ambition was now to establish herself as an artist of international repute. Vying for public attention with the many artist refugees from the war in Europe, she relied on the distinction of her Javanese experience.

Gauthier made her New York concert debut in a private recital with baritone Robert Maitland at the home of Frank Damrosch, conductor of the Oratorio Society and director of the New York Institute of Musical Art. She sang a set of three Malay song arrangements by Seelig – *Jika begini* (Unreturned love, literally If that is so), *Pakai cincin* (Put a ring on my finger), and *Kupu-kupu* (Butterfly). The latter two were commissioned by Gauthier and dedicated to her in the 1914 edition published by Matatani (Seelig 1914). She then returned with a group of Malay songs by Constant van de Wall, *Apaka guna berkain batik* (Why wear the printed cloth if it is not embroidered, literally Why bother wearing batik), *Lagu bersusah hati* (Why light a lamp if it has no wick, literally Song of a troubled heart), and *Kaluk tuhan jalan dahulu* (A safe journey to heaven, literally If you leave before me).7

This set of pieces formed the nucleus of a programme Gauthier would repeat often over the following years in public and private concerts around the United States and Canada, in such diverse locations as Carnegie Hall, the Waldorf Astoria, Cornell University, and the home of Wilfrid Laurier. During the Seelig songs, Gauthier wore the *srimpi* outfit given to her by the susuhunan, which she described as a ‘royal Javanese costume’ or ‘a duplicate of that worn by the court ladies’. For the Van de Wall songs, she changed to ‘Malay costume’ ‘representing the garb of those in a humbler walk of life’.8 Appropriately for someone who had studied in Solo and imbibed Solonese prejudices against the perceived *kasar* (unrefined) rival court centre of Yogyakarta, the Malay costume’s batik was made in Yogyakarta – perhaps purchased along with other batik pieces from the Dutch representative of the East Indian Exhibit of the 1915 Panama Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco (Turbide 1986:153).

7 All three songs are from Van de Wall 1910. I have used modern Indonesian orthography for the titles of the Seelig and Van de Wall songs. The loose translations provided by Turbide (1986:151-2) are taken from later programmes.

8 Undated concert programme; n.a., 1915; *Mlle. Eva* 1915.
Eva Gauthier in batik (undated, untitled clipping in Gauthier scrapbook)
Eva Gauthier, Java to jazz

Gauthier found from experience that audiences were also interested in what the *New York Times* called her music’s ‘ethnographic significance’ (*Miss Eva sings* 1917). She thus took to inserting short talks on Javanese music, batik, and related topics before her songs, giving her recitals what Gauthier called ‘the air of informality’. Gauthier reported:

It was necessary to tell people about the unusual music, and the costumes worn […], giving a little impromptu talk. Audiences were most grateful for this information; and many singers have followed the custom, thus breaking down the barriers between audience and artist in a really friendly fashion and so adding much to their own success. (Armstrong 1942.)

To supplement her knowledge, Gauthier wrote to the British Museum to ask about *gamelan* and studied the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s musical instrument catalogue.

In her introduction to a programme, Gauthier typically told something of her experience studying in the *kraton* and described *gamelan* and its stratified structure and use of polyphony, even claiming that Seelig’s modern harmonies were influenced by the atonal pitches of the *rebab*. The sort of things she spoke about before singing her Malay songs can be glimpsed from a programme in which she describes the lullaby *Nina bobo* (*Go to sleep, Nina*).

*Nina bobo* (Slumber song)

*Nina* (name given by native nurses to all white female children), will you go sleep? To-morrow you can play, and when you are hot I shall bathe you in the stream. Sleep quickly – tuck in your baby feet. Nina, go to sleep, etc.

(This melody is sung only for the white children by their native nurses, apparently the only one used throughout the island since the coming of the first white settlers.)

The translation is accurate, as is the explanation that it is a slumber song. But ‘native nurses’ (*babu*) call their charges Nona not Nina, and the melody is sung by all Malay speakers in Java, not exclusively to ‘white settlers’. *Nina bobo*, as one might gather from the name, is a staple of the *kroncong* repertoire, a ballad tradition brought to Java by the descendents of Portuguese slaves from eastern Indonesia. While all the words in the text that Gauthier sung were in Malay (with the possible exception of the Portuguese addressee’s name), the song was still being sung in the characteristic Portugis patois of the Tugu neighbourhood of Batavia (present-day Jakarta) into the 1880s (Kartomi 1997:661). Gauthier was right to ascribe a cross-cultural origin to the song, even if the particulars were inaccurate.

9 ‘Programme for Song Motion concert by Eva Gauthier and Roshanara’, Comedy Theater, New York, circa January 1917.
Gauthier’s authority in the field of Javanese music was rarely questioned by the press, however, and her accounts of her studies in the kraton were published in many American and Canadian newspapers under titles such as ‘My experiences in a harem’. Gauthier recorded two Malay songs for the Columbia label, Seelig’s arrangements of Nina bobo and Jika begini, in late 1914 and early 1915. The latter was not issued, but the former appeared in 1917 on an RCA 78 RPM recording, with Gauthier singing Josef Dessauer’s Le retour des promis on the flip side. Upon its 1938 reissue by the International Record Collector’s Club, Gauthier stated that ‘since I made my reputation, more or less, on that music, which was part of my programs for over twenty years, so much so that many thought that I was Javanese, it seems most fitting for IRCC to issue this’ (Turbide 1986:153).

Long available only to devoted record collectors, Gauthier’s Nina bobo was recently uploaded to the internet on the Canadian Historical Sound Recordings website.10 On this recording, Gauthier’s presentation is confident and assured, but her Malay diction is uneven – her ‘r’ consonants are sometimes trilled and sometimes not, she drops a number of final consonants (impairing comprehension), she mispronounces the schwa of the Malay word dalem as dalém, and during the song’s B section when the tempo suddenly increases she does not clearly enunciate her words. In general, however, as the New York Times notes, Gauthier’s voice displays a ‘pleasing quality, brilliancy, and power’, and this focused intensity pushes the lullaby’s simple vocal line forward against the lush chromaticism (described by the Times as ‘very modern French harmonies’) and lilting phrasing of the piano part (Miss Eva sings 1917).

Van de Wall’s rather sparse scorings – generally more faithful to the Malay originals down to the notated gong strokes – were overshadowed by the daring harmonies of Seelig in critical opinion, though the New York Globe’s music critic Pitts Sanborn (n.d.) felt that Seelig’s songs were ‘probably not very good Malayan and certainly very indifferent Debussy, despite the slavish imitation of the celebrated composer’. This was not a majority opinion, and Seelig’s arrangements were repeatedly used by international performers of Java and Bali in the decades ahead.11

Most found Gauthier to be professional in delivery, and charming in personality. Unlike many vocalists of her generation, Gauthier was not a glamorous stage figure, and at 4 feet 11 inches could hardly be called imposing. She con-

11 Among the dancers and choreographers who used Seelig’s music to accompany their interpretations of Javanese and Balinese dance were: Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn (for Balinese fantasy, 1924), Stella Bloch, Vera Mirova and Antony Tudor (Atalanta of the East, 1933). Seelig was a musical informant for pianist-composer Leopold Godowsky during a 1923 concert tour of Java, and in his Java suite (1925) for solo piano Godowsky quotes Seelig’s Rhapsodie javanaise (circa 1913) in homage.
veyed instead a convivial attitude of warm intimacy, an ideal stage demeanour for introducing the distant world of Java to a nation on the cusp of entering a world war, wavering between isolationism and international commitment.

**Songmotion**

Gauthier’s aspirations were artistic rather than commercial, but the possibility of making a profit out of her unique Javanese aura did not escape the notice of entertainment managers. Gauthier signed a 52-week contract with Martin Beck, owner of the Orpheum circuit of theatres, and at the end of October 1915 left New York to tour the Keith-Albee-Orpheum chain, which controlled all the big-time American vaudeville houses.

Gauthier was partnered with the Boston-born exotic dancer Regina Jones Woody (1894-1983), who danced under the name Nila Devi (Sanskrit for ‘Blue Goddess’). Woody had just finished up a run dancing at Jardin de Danse, a rooftop theatre atop Times Square’s New York Theater. She had had fancy dancing lessons as a child, three years of daily Dalcroze practice at Dana Hall School, and two years of ballet lessons in London and Paris. Woody acquired her exotic nom de théâtre from her signature dance L’Idole turquoise. In this dance she performed in blue bodypaint in imitation of the Musée Guimet’s Nataraj statue and Nijinsky’s Le dieu bleu. In 1913, she was a principal on a bill at the Folies Bergère, La revue en chemise. Nila Devi danced solo as a gypsy, the Greek courtesan Phryne, and in a ballet number, and she partnered with a South American dancer in a tango. On the same bill, Mata Hari performed the Habanera against a backdrop copied from a Goya painting. The senior dancer provided tips about how to keep ‘innocent youth and beauty unspoiled in the midst of this cynical world of the theatre’ (Woody 1959:197). American publicity made much of the fact that Nila Devi had studied authentic Oriental dancing in Algiers (where she had danced at the Alhambra Theatre), though in fact she had seen only a single performance in a bedouin camp outside Bou Saada with the assistance of the British Council.

Gauthier and Nila Devi rehearsed for two months to create a novel 15-minute act titled ‘Songmotion’ in which Nila Devi illustrated Gauthier’s Indonesian songs in dance. Publicity for ‘Songmotion’ had it that

> it is an Occidental adaptation of the Oriental theory that the dance is incomplete without vocal accompaniment. The singer interprets the musician with melody and verse. She controls the orchestra in its harmonies, while the dancer brings to the interpretation the beauty and grace of her art. (Orpheum 1916.)

12 Rooftop theatres were a New York innovation. Revue shows on top of buildings were popular during the hot months of the summer, when theatres were overly hot and stuffy. The Jardin de Danse, according to Woody (1959:218), was ‘Diamond Jim Brady’s hangout’.
Gauthier seems to have been inspired by the organic relation between song and dance in Java. A likely source for her was langendriya, a form of Javanese musical drama associated with the royal courts in which the singers also dance. Langendriya enjoyed great prestige among Javanese elites, and was often likened to opera by European observers (Sutton 1997).

In an interview, Nila Devi described Songmotion’s arduous and genuinely collaborative process. They began by selecting a song with ‘rhythm and a clear melody’, then marked out time with a metronome, and determined precise choreographic units to allow for swift changes of mood. Nila Devi improvised dance steps for each unit and finally Woody told Gauthier, ‘Ad lib – as you choose. Hold your high notes, take your own time, do as you wish and I will follow.’ In rehearsal as in performance, Woody reported, ‘we are both trying to please the other’ (Singer and dancer 1916).

Songmotion divided into three scenes. In the first, set against a painted backdrop of Borobudur, Gauthier portrays a Hindu ‘priestess, and she sings “Brahma” while the dancer illustrates the themes with sinuous and serpentine poses of the body’. The second scene, ‘The adoration of the elephant’, was set in front of a blown-up Yogyakarta batik image of an elephant from Gauthier’s collection. A chorus line of four female dancers imitated Nila Devi’s reverential poses. The act concluded with a Malay pantomime.

A fragile butterfly, seeking love amongst the flowers becomes exhausted. During her reverie she hears a voice which is the Spirit of the Silver Lily. Blinded by the poisonous flower’s dazzling beauty, the Butterfly is drawn slowly to it, and is gradually overcome by the Lily’s deadly fragrance. Unheeding of the impending harm, the Butterfly embraces the fatal flower and sings, dying to the ground.13

A stage manager named Smith and a pianist-cum-orchestra director, Carlo Edwards, who also accompanied Gauthier in her solo recitals through 1919, travelled with the principals, but as was customary for vaudeville the corps de ballet and band musicians were rehearsed anew weekly at each stop on the tour.

The Keith-Albee-Orpheum chain was known to performers as the ‘Sunday-school circuit’ due to its long-standing policy of ‘no profanity, no suggestive allusions, double-entendres, or off-color monkey business’ (Gilbert 1963:201). This was fast-paced family entertainment, a far cry from the sawdust and beer of the gaslight days of the business. Songmotion shared a bill with acts such as comedian Frank Terry’s ‘Mister Booze’ sketch; Evelyn and Dolly’s cycling and roller-skating tricks and Chinese impersonations; Harvey O’Higgins and Harriet Ford’s comic love-triangle sketch ‘The dickey bird’, with famous stage actress Mary Shaw; boomerang throwers Van and Belle; dainty young violinist Marie Bishop; a comic Hawai’ian musical act by The Harmony Trio; juggler Lucy Gillett; blackface comedians Comfort and King; and aerialist Queenie

13 Advertisement for ‘Eva Gauthier and Nila Devi and Ballet’ in Gauthier scrapbook.
Dunedin. With few exceptions, acts lasted between 15 and 25 minutes. Acts requiring a full stage alternated with acts in front of the stage curtain. Even the most complex sets were assembled and struck in less than 15 minutes. The pace was gruelling for performers: Songmotion generally was performed twice daily during the week, three times on Wednesdays, and five on Sundays.

In her colourful dance memoir, *Dancing for joy* (1959), Nila Devi (writing under her married name of Regina Jones Woody) describes the opening in Davenport, Iowa, as an unqualified ‘disaster’. The story, though perhaps exaggerated for comic effect, is worth quoting as an instance of cultural negotiation between art and commerce, mediated Javanese culture and American vaudeville values.

We were booed, laughed at, and made targets for pennies and programs. Almost hysterical, Eva and I changed into street clothes and sat down with Mr. Smith [the stage manager] and the conductor to discuss what to do. We had a fifty-two-week tour ahead, but if this was a preview of audience reaction, the Gauthier-Devi act wouldn’t last two minutes in a big city.

The stage manager, Mr. Smith, was outspoken. He took Madame Gauthier apart first. ‘Take off that horse’s head thing you’re wearing and get rid of that sarong with its tail between your legs. Scrap that whiny music. You’re a good-looking woman. Put on your best evening gown, sing the Bell song from *Lakmé*, and you’ll get a good hand.’ Madame promptly fainted.

On being revived, she stalked out of the room, announcing, ‘We’ll close before I prostitute my art’.

I came next. According to Mr. Smith I look bowlegged as I moved my feet and legs in Javanese fashion. Even he had to laugh. My native costumes were ugly. Why did I have four eyebrows? And if I could really dance, why did I just wiggle and jiggle about? Why didn’t I kick and do back bends and pirouettes? (Woody 1959:219.)

Woody then describes how she takes charge of the act, introducing an ‘Indian dance, a plastique dance, a czardas, and a toe solo’ and flashy, balletic crowd-pleasers in place of the vaguely Javanese dances she had devised to accompany Gauthier. She persuades Madame Gauthier to ‘sing opera and forego the lovely gold-leather headdress (jamang) which Mr. Smith insisted made her look like a horse’.

Madame talked about art. She talked about culture. She insisted our job was to ‘raise standards’. I didn’t agree. Our job was to entertain, and if what we did was above the heads of the audience, then why not lower it a bit? Were opera music and ballet such a bad combination? Why not give the audience what it wanted, not what we thought it ought to have. She was hard to convince, for she was an innovator and a cultured artist. While I yearned only to please and to perform, she wanted to originate and instruct. (Woody 1959:220.)
Nila Devi and Eva Gauthier (undated, untitled clipping in Gauthier scrapbook)
Nila Devi and Eva Gauthier (undated, untitled clipping in Gauthier scrapbook)
Woody’s arguments won the day. Gauthier opted for a mixture of European scorings of oriental songs, including a Ravel setting of a Greek song, a Smyrna folk song in a setting by French composer-musicologist Louis-Albert Bourgault-Ducoudray, and Granville Bantock’s ‘Nautch girl’ (from the composer’s Songs of India cycle, published in 1896). Gauthier also sang some European items such as French chanson and Haydn Wood’s ballad ‘Bird of love divine’ (1912). Only one or two of the Seelig and Van de Wall songs were retained. The use of modified Javanese costumes and settings nonetheless gave American audiences the impression of Southeast Asia.

Songmotion toured to at least 16 more cities over a five-month period: New Orleans, Minneapolis, Winnipeg, Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, Stockton, Sacramento, Fresno, Los Angeles, Salt Lake City, Denver, Colorado Springs, Lincoln, Chicago, Kansas City, and Milwaukee (where the show closed during the week of 20 March 1916). For most of these cities, it was the first time a staged representation of Java had been seen, and was thus a novelty in both form and content. Gauthier was frequently requested to lecture on Javanese music at women’s club luncheons, and even Woody was asked occasionally to demonstrate steps and talk about choreography and making new dance.

In her memoirs, Woody (1959:221) speaks about delighting audiences, persistent applause, and curtain calls as the duo gained in ‘assurance and poise’. Newspaper articles and reviews of the tour tell a different story. Mainstream vaudeville audiences were largely indifferent to Songmotion, though its novelty and aspirations to high art were appreciated by some critics as ‘futuristic’ (meaning avant-garde). A critic sitting in the audience of one performance purported to record some young women in the audience as follows.

Say, this is going to be great all right. I bet she can sing. Look at her dress. I’m glad she sings in English, ‘cause you know what it means then. What do you suppose those elephants on the curtain mean. Nothing to do with the dancers, has it? Say, I wish she’d stick to English like her first song. I know she’s singing something about Sara and Romeo, but what has the prayer book got to do with it? They ought to leave church out of things like this. I came here for a good time. Say, ain’t that a pretty back drop? Looks like a lot of targets, but I guess that’s the kind of flowers they have in Java. Maybe they’re coffee plants. Gee, I wish you’d find that ring. That Gauthier woman can sure sing all right, but I bet she didn’t live in a harem like the paper said. I knew a French-Canadian once and she could sing too.14

Milwaukee audiences were ‘bewildered… asking what it was all about’. The lack of cultural references left the average theatregoer feeling frustrated. Variety suggested that more ‘signposting’ was needed: ‘Just what the girls are aiming at is a problem, but it might be consistent to advise the audience’ (Wynn

14 Undated, untitled clipping in Gauthier scrapbook.
n.d.). But even detailed programme notes did not provide a solution, as a San Francisco observer noted.

Eva Gauthier’s act looms large on the program, taking up more space than any other announcement. And, apropos of this, Mr. Orpheum, good, kind Mr. Orpheum, couldn’t you flash up the lights at such points on the program, so that the weary wayfarer may know what it’s all about? You know, it is scarcely worth while to spend the money on all that printing if we are not supplied with light to read it by. I envy the smokers their match lights sometimes, and at desperate moments I have thought almost seriously of carrying an electric pocket-light. If Nila Devi is trying to express, or join in the expression, of a Hindu lament by interpretive dancing I want to know it. But, as it was, I didn’t really have a chance until the musical intermission was due to find what she thought she was getting at. You know, between you and me and the door-post there isn’t much interpretation in the dancing anyway. Eva Gauthier has merely used all her Oriental setting and the dances of her prima ballerina and ballet as accessories to the exhibition of her trained and ornamental singing voice. She wears lots of good clothes, trails around majestically, seats herself with a regal air upon a dais while her dancing maidens disport themselves before her, and, with her heavy Egyptian features and pronounced brune tints, looks quite magnificently Cleopatresque. Her prima ballerina is not much more than fair in her dancing, and in spite of all the elaboration of dance, costume, music, and setting there is a sort of pointlessness about the whole thing. Just an exhibition without a core of meaning, or a soul. (The Orpheum 1916.)

Audiences did give temperate applause in some cities. But one critic believed that this was just due to intellectual pretensions.

The two out-future futurism in a puzzlingly beautiful manner. You know the singing is beautiful, the dancing remarkable, and the costumes and scenery mean something vast and deep and intellectual – but you don’t know exactly what; so if you are wise you will applaud and look learned and if you are impressionable you will find yourself thinking of Burne-Jones and Rossetti and Verlaine and Aubrey Beardsley and – absinthe.\(^\text{15}\)

Gauthier avoided operatic gestures and tried to put across some of the sense of intimacy conveyed in recital to ‘warm the audience’ (Vaudeville n.d.). But subtle gestures of this sort would have been lost on the cavernous stages of vaudeville.

A major problem for many in the audience was likely that Gauthier and Nila Devi did not display flesh. The Keith-Albee-Orpheum chain did not countenance the minimal costumes of burlesque, but exotic dance in 1910s America did customarily involve gyrating bodies and exposure of parts not normally seen in public. According to one bluenose critic, ‘the dancing is of the kind where often bare-skinned young women flit about the stage, but

\(^{15}\) Los Angeles Courier, 2 February 1916, as cited in Turbide 1986:158.
there are no bare-limbed dancers in this act, a matter for felicitation, for the artistic achievements are quite equal, if not superior, to those of extremists who conceive art to be but a near approach to nudity’ (Orpheum n.d.). An opinion of this sort might have been shared by a small minority.

It was clear that Songmotion was not long for vaudeville. What is more, before long the circuit’s exhausting pace took its toll on Gauthier. Though they travelled by a private railway car that could be ‘hitched on to any old freight train that was handy’,

There was no rest. If we weren’t traveling Sundays, we played matinees and evening performances as usual. More than once only half dressed, Madame clutching her corsets under her arm and I still in tights under my winter coat, we panted up the station platform at midnight to catch a train being held for us. (Woody 1959:221.)

The singer spent an hour a day on vocal exercises and scales and avoided high notes so as not to strain her voice. But the demands of travel and contractually obligated frequency of performance were not suitable for the operatically trained mezzo, and in March 1916, five months into her year-long tour, she wrote to Beck to request two weeks’ leave for an operation. Beck was unable to comply, and Gauthier left the vaudeville circuit soon after, while Nila Devi’s dancing career ended a few months later due to a skating accident.¹⁶

*Ballet intime*

Gauthier’s lukewarm popular reception did not deter her enthusiasm for the Songmotion concept. Although she flirted with the popular, she was not a populist, and Songmotion made few concessions to mainstream audiences. To prove its artistic worth, Gauthier revived Songmotion in an afternoon programme that played to a capacity audience, including many artistic aficionados, at New York’s Comedy Theater on 23 January 1917. Due to Nila Devi’s unavailability, Gauthier replaced her with Roshanara, who had been travelling the vaudeville circuit at the same time as Songmotion in a solo act of Eastern dances. (Woody in her memoirs notes that Songmotion had replaced Roshanara’s act at the Salt Lake City Orpheum after Roshanara had been booed and pelted with rotten tomatoes and oranges.)

Roshanara (also known as Olive Craddock) was an English dancer (born in Calcutta, according to some sources) who made her stage debut dancing in Oscar Asche’s *Kismet* in London. She performed with the Ballets Russes and Pavlova and toured her own company of dancers through Europe.

¹⁶ Woody’s memoirs suggest that the duo played out the 52-week contract, but as there are no reviews after March 1916, this seems unlikely.
Her specialty was South and Southeast Asian dance – Indian, Ceylonese, Burmese. When Roshanara toured India in 1915 one newspaper declared that ‘so thoroughly does she enter into the spirit of her subject that it is difficult to realize she is not herself a native of the country whose art she has studied so closely’.17

Roshanara brought strong dancing and expressive mime skills to Songmotion, and New York audiences enjoyed the revamped act. While Roshanara did not appear to have any particular knowledge of Javanese dance, her choreography was ‘read’ as Javanese. ‘Especially in the movements of her supple arms and marvelously eloquent hands, there were reminders of the pantomime posturings which make up nine-tenths of dramatic action in the Javanese theatre.’ (Krehbiel 1917.) The Comedy Theater performance was a major concert, with the support of three classical ballet dancers, a string quartet, and a quartet of male voices to accompany French-Canadian folk songs which Gauthier sung. In addition to her contribution to Songmotion, Roshanara performed her specialty numbers – a Burmese court dance of greeting, a modern Burmese butterfly dance, a Ceylonese harvest dance, and an ‘incense dance’ in which a young widow consecrated herself to a temple. Gauthier performed her sets of Seelig and Van de Wall arrangements in Javanese and Malay costume. Alberto Bimboni conducted and played piano. One critic mused that all that was missing was a ‘Javanese band, with its wonderful gongs, bells and xylophones’ (Krehbiel 1917).

The association with Roshanara was fortuitous, for it brought Gauthier into a cosmopolitan circle of New York-based artists coalescing around the artistic polymath Adolph Bolm (1884-1951) and his Ballet Intime. Bolm and this coterie were to play catalytic roles in Javanese dance and music in America over the next two decades, and while Gauthier’s collaboration with Bolm was brief, the principals of Ballet Intime are worth considering individually.

Bolm was a St Petersburg-born graduate of the Imperial Ballet School and a former dancer with the Imperial Ballet at the Mariinsky Theatre. He had been the principal character dancer for the Ballets Russes from the company’s first Paris season in 1909, and had occasionally choreographed works and acted as ballet master for Diaghilev as well. During the Ballets Russes’ 1916-1917 American tour, Bolm cracked a vertebra in his death scene as the Prince in Fokine’s ballet Thamar. Stage hands had neglected to provide a mattress to cushion his fall. Bolm quit the company and decided to stay in America.

Bolm’s principal collaborator in the Ballet Intime’s first season was the Japanese dancer and choreographer Michio Ito (1892-1961), who saw Bolm frequently while the Russian was convalescing in a body cast. Ito had studied eurhythmics at the Dalcroze school in Hellerau, Germany, and had performed Japonesque character dances on the London commercial stage from 1914.

17 Times of London quoted in Talley 1926:41.
While hardly an expert in traditional Japanese culture, he had been a consultant to W.B. Yeats’s secretary, the American poet Ezra Pound, when Pound revised translations of Noh plays collected by Ernest Fenollosa. The influence of the Fenollosa-Pound translation project rubbed off on Yeats, who was unsatisfied with conventional stage realism, and had been collaborating with Edward Gordon Craig to transform theatre into a concentrated liminal space to reenergize Western culture. A primary means of this for Yeats was the use of the mask performed in close proximity to a select audience in chamber dramas, without the use of theatrical lighting to separate actor from spectator. Yeats called on Ito to perform the role of the Guardian of the Well in his play *At the hawk’s well* (1916). This was the first of his ‘plays for dancers’, a richly symbolic telling of an episode from the Celtic culture hero Cuchulain, infused by techniques and dramaturgy of Noh theatre. The play received two performances in 1916 at private houses. Yeats’s innovative ‘aristocratic drama’ had a profound influence on Ito’s understanding of performance, and Yeats in turn admitted that Ito’s ‘minute intensity of movement in the dance of the hawk so well suited [to] our small room’ was instrumental in the play’s success (Yeats cited in Caldwell 1977:53).

In the fall of 1916, Ito left Britain to appear in a New York commercial theatre. He was dissatisfied with the work, however, and gravitated to art circles – choreographing an English-language Kabuki play for the Washington Square Players, dancing in private concerts in the homes of New York society matrons, and presenting a solo recital at New York’s Comedy Theater the month before Gauthier and Roshanara performed Songmotion. Ito, like Bolm, was in America to stay.

Another Ballet Intime principal was Ratan Devi (Alice Ethel Coomaraswamy, née Richardson). Ratan Devi had moved from London to America in 1917 when her husband, the brilliant art historian Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy (1887-1947), was appointed Keeper of Indian and Islamic Arts at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. Ratan Devi was one of the first serious European performers of Indian music. Before marrying Coomaraswamy, she had studied voice in London with Alexia Bassian and Ethel Richardson. She then went to India, where she studied singing and tambur with Abdul Rahim of Kapurthala (Hadland 1916:27). While not hiding her English origin, she used her stage name consistently in performing. Coomaraswamy had an academic interest in Asian performance, and was Ratan Devi’s frequent collaborator, speaking at Ratan Devi’s performances and writing her programme notes, and co-authoring an anthology of Indian songs with his wife.

The final principals were Roshanara and Gauthier – joined by a small number of musicians and supporting dancers.

From this cosmopolitan and eclectic cohort of transcultured artists and recent émigrés Bolm created what he called an ‘American ballet’ dedicated to
'flashing new ballets bright with tones of life, symbolic of moods of wistfulness and wonder' (Carbonneau 1999:225). ‘American ballet’ for Bolm was not a nostalgic search for the American heartland à la Agnes de Mille, but instead ‘encompassed the notion of international dances representative of a nation of immigrants’ (Carbonneau 1999:226). Bolm wanted to go beyond the ‘exotic hokum of Fokine’ and work together with Asian artists, and Europeans who possessed a deep and coherent understanding of Asian performance (Carbonneau 1999:235). Bolm, Ito, Gauthier and perhaps others in the company were frustrated with the commercialism of mainstream performance and wanted to work on a small scale, performing in concert halls rather than opera houses.

The Ballet Intime’s debut tour of Atlantic City, Washington DC, New York, and summer colonies of the northeast in the summer of 1917 attracted rave notices and distinguished spectators. (President Woodrow Wilson attended the Washington opening night.) Bolm presented character dances from the Ballets Russes repertoire and choreographed a new pantomimic ballet in Fokine style, a homage to Edgar Allan Poe titled *Danse macabre*, set to a score by Saint-Saëns. Ito performed character dances and created a new mimetic ballet titled *Shojo* or ‘The spirit of wine; A symbol of happiness’ with composer Charles T. Griffes, based on Japanese motifs. Ito danced the role of the intoxicated youth while his wife, the dancer Tulle Lindahl (identified in publicity as either Danish or Dutch), performed as the beautiful but elusive maiden who is the object of his drunken desires.18 Griffes travelled with the company and seems to have played a vital role in overseeing musical aspects of Ballet Intime. Gauthier sang her Malay songs in Javanese and Malay dress, performed a Mussorgsky song preceding Bolm’s dance ‘Gopak’, and gave a rendition of ‘The star-spangled banner’. She added the ‘Hymn of free Russia’ at performances benefiting the American Ambulance in Russia volunteer corps. Roshanara danced Indian, Burmese, and Ceylonese dances, accompanied on voice and *tambur* by Ratan Devi for her Indian numbers.

Commentators are in agreement that the most ‘exotic’ moment of Ballet Intime was Gauthier’s ‘weirdly juggled’ rendition of the American national anthem (Turbide 1986:171). Bolm’s ‘American ballet’ can be read as an intervention in cultural nationalism. The United States had declared war on Germany on 7 April 1916. President Wilson, who was an isolationist in his first term, had committed the country to internationalism. Ballet Intime reflected this political mood swing, and pushed forward the idea that American identity

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18 *Shojo* ‘is a legendary dance of old Japan and illustrates the vagaries of a youth who smiles continuously and invites his friends to drink. In his happiness under “the spirit of wine” he has a vision of a beautiful maiden whom he desires and vainly attempts to ensnare. She escapes him, but his exhilaration continues, until, exhausted, he drops to sleep.’ (*Oriental nights* 1917.) Ito had choreographed an earlier version of *Shojo* to Japanese music.
Eva Gauthier with a wayang golek puppet
(undated, untitled clipping in Gauthier scrapbook)
was not only defined by what was going on in Europe, but was also related to Asia. The dramaturgical decision for Gauthier to perform Francis Scott Key’s familiar-but-hard-to-sing anthem in the accent of a French Canadian singer trained in Europe and recently returned from Southeast Asia, and incorporate this ‘weirdly juggled’ piece into a programme of avant-garde and culturally distant performance, was an act of estrangement of the culturally intimate. ‘The land of the free and the home of the brave’ was given a new spin: freedom to fashion one’s own identity, and bravery to confront the pluralistic heritages represented in the United States.

Ballet Intime was not a ‘straight’ presentation of Asian tradition, but a free yet honest American confrontation with it. Coomaraswamy, in an article in The Modern Dance Magazine generally critical of Oriental terpsichorean appropriation on the commercial stage, endorsed the work of Roshanara, Gauthier, and Ratan Devi as an instance of ‘Oriental dancing as it exists’ offered to ‘a western audience’ with ‘the necessary sensibility and devotion’.19

An emblematic photograph (printed in Carbonneau 1999:225) of the Ballet Intime’s principals posed on the sands of Atlantic City’s beach shows that they were not above self-mockery. Griffes, Gauthier, and Roshanara are in the centre of the frame. Griffes stands with a parasol over his head and his two hands up, palms forward in imitation of a Hindu attitude of blessing. Below him kneels Gauthier, her hands in a similar position. Below Gauthier, Roshanara sits cross-legged, her eyes downcast, her hair in Tamil braids, holding an upside-down hat – the symbol of the busker. Ito, Rita Zalmani (a dancer in the company), Beata Bolm (Bolm’s wife), Ratan Devi, and Adolph Bolm surround this idol-like trinity. All are on their knees and paying obeisance by bringing their hands together in a salaam or sembah. The picture is subtly ironic, crossing crass commercialism emblematized by the Atlantic City setting and the upturned hat with Asian iconography.

Java to jazz

Gauthier was not a part of Ballet Intime tours after 1917, though she continued to produce recitals of modern Asian song and dance with Ito and Lindahl through 1918. One can see Gauthier’s subsequent career, however, as emerging from connections engendered by the Ballet Intime. Gauthier became an enthusiast for the work of Griffes, the composer of Ito’s Shojo, later even claiming to have ‘discovered’ him. She premiered Griffes’s song cycle, Five poems of ancient China and Japan, in a November 1917 recital, and promoted the modernist’s musical developments of Asian tradition. Gauthier also gave Griffes a number of

songs she had collected in Java, and the composer scored the song cycle ‘Three Javanese songs’ in 1917 for her. This consisted of three songs for piano and voice titled Hampelas, Kinanti, and Jakoan, all based on Sundanese-language texts. There is no record of Gauthier performing these songs in a solo recital, though possibly they were included in the Ballet Intime programme. Later, Gauthier loaned her Javanese notebooks to Maurice Ravel, who had been enamoured with gamelan since the 1889 Exposition Universelle de Paris, and also presented her notes to the California composer Henry Eichheim.

The collaboration with Bolm likely perked Gauthier’s interest in twentieth-century French modernists. As a musically literate member of Ballets Russes, Bolm was intimately familiar with modern French music from his involvement in premieres of ballets by Stravinsky, Satie, Auric, and Poulenc, names little known in America in 1917. Gauthier became an ardent supporter of Les Six, and Maurice Ravel was her favourite composer. *Musical America* described Gauthier’s New York premiere of Stravinsky’s *Three Japanese lyrics* (1913) as representing ‘the furthermost outposts of futurism to which this city has ever been led musically’ (H.F.P. n.d.). Moreover, Gauthier shared with Bolm an enthusiasm for American vernacular music. In 1922, Bolm created the first jazz ballet, *Krazy Kat*, based on African American George Herriman’s surrealist comic strip, with a score by John Alden Carpenter. The following year, Gauthier gave a now famous New York recital of ‘Ancient and modern music for voice’ which introduced Tin Pan Alley composers Jerome Kern, Irving Berlin, and George Gershwin (with Gershwin himself at the piano) to the American concert stage and transformed the relation between high and low culture. This recital led directly to the commissioning of *Rhapsody in blue* (1924) and Gershwin’s later jazz-classical syntheses. Gauthier’s signature programme of the 1920s was titled ‘Java to jazz’, which typically began with her Seelig and Van de Wall songs – continued to Beethoven, Arthur Bliss, Debussy, Ravel – and ended with Gershwin, Berlin, and Kern.

Gauthier established her reputation with Seelig and Van de Wall’s Malay songs, and like Mata Hari was forever identified with her Javanese image. While the last Indonesian number she added to her musical repertoire was Seelig’s *Malay epik* (1913), which she introduced to the American public in November 1917, she habitually dressed for concerts in flowing batik robes and heavy Oriental jewellery, even for concerts with no Indonesian numbers. Moreover, Gauthier’s interest in Indonesia was not limited to performance. Gauthier collected batik and contributed items to a 1919 New York batik exhibition, where she also sung her Malay songs (*Batik art work* 1919). She decorated her New York home with batik wall hangings, a batik portrait of herself, Javanese tablecloths and couch draperies, and what one visitor

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20 ‘Three Javanese songs’ were published posthumously in Anderson 1995:50-9. See also Anderson 1983.
described as ‘hideous little manikins – the actors of the Javanese theatre – some life-size, others tiny, but all showing a high development in the art of carving, and a pre-Gordon Craig belief in the superiority of the mechanical doll to the human mime’. Photographs of Gauthier at home show that these dolls included various sorts of wayang as well as a tableau of dolls of gamelan players and Javanese dancers.

Gauthier wore designer batik gowns, but she also had her own sense of style which was imitated by many others in the 1920s. In an interview with The Christian Science Monitor on batik, Gauthier reported that Javanese fashion inspired her evening gowns.

As for their fashion in clothes, I like those so well that I am making my own evening gowns along these same lines: that means that I can buy pieces of beautiful silks or brocades and am not obliged to cut them. I do add shoulder straps and make a few slight changes, but I am not obliged to call in a dressmaker and it saves me a great deal of time and money. Then I add a scarf, just as they do, only, instead of the pineapple silk which they drape about them, I use bright colored tulle. I have always insisted that a beautiful fabric did not need trimming, and I like the simplicity of the Javanese costume. So, you see, I found something to learn from the people there aside from their interesting folk songs. (*Batik making* 1918.)

Illness and financial woes led to a cessation of concertizing in 1928, and while she resumed performing in 1931 Gauthier was not as active as she had been, finally retiring from the stage in 1937. She instead shifted her efforts to teaching, and advised many singers on how to prepare an attractive programme.

Here is a point that I would like to emphasize. If possible, have something which the public associates with you alone. Perhaps it will be a song or the way the hair is dressed, or the style of clothing affected. Even to this day, people tell me of some dress I wore many years ago, that had made a lasting impact by its individuality. I never followed the style of the day, but made my own. (*Armstrong* 1942.)

Gauthier’s Javanese style was not a perfect fit with the Indonesian music she sang in concert. Gauthier studied in the kraton, but never performed Javanese songs – her Indonesian repertoire was exclusively Malay-language songs. Ever the enthusiast for gamelan, however, as late as 1923 Gauthier was still talking up a tour of gamelan and dance from Solo. ‘I wouldn’t be surprised if it [Javanese performance] should find sudden popularity, just as Hawaiian music did a few seasons ago’, she told one reporter (*Hale* 1923).

The Javanese court arts did not achieve the sudden popularity of Hawaiian music, but there are direct links between Gauthier and the American performance makers inspired by Indonesian arts in the 1920s and early 1930s.\(^{21}\)
– including Bolm, Ito, Bloch, Mirova, Eichheim and Ruth Page – and indirect links with others, such as Ernest Belcher and Dorsha. Most of these artists presented ‘impressions’ or ‘interpretations’ rather than authentic reproductions of traditional materials. The licence taken in stage interpretations of Java likely inspired the many debutants who dressed as Javanese princesses at costume parties. One can also trace links between Gauthier’s popularization of high Javanese culture with the Greta Garbo vehicle, *Wild orchids* (1929). The film’s two memorable set pieces are an elaborate Javanese feast with tumpeng rice cones and an interpretation of courtly dancing accompanied by gamelan in the first act (the Java portrayed by Gauthier) and a deadly tiger hunt in the third (the Java of the pre-Gauthier popular imagination).

Gauthier’s interpretations of Java were not always accurate. In her articles on life in the ‘sultan’s harem’, she was prone to reproducing the hoary myths of European settlers in Java, such as the propensity of Javanese women to poison their sexual partners. She mixed Indonesian and European stylistic elements in her concerts with little regard to cultural authenticity. Her accomplishments were many, however, and if she failed to bring a first-rate performance group from Java to America, she did succeed through her concerts and promotion of Javanese style in showing Americans that Java possessed a high culture worthy of consideration and respect.

The narrative of Gauthier’s involvement in Indonesian music provides a salutary journey from indifference to embracement of the arts of the Other. Gauthier did not travel to Java with the intent of expropriating its artistic riches; her priority was in developing her career as a singer in her native operatic and art song idioms. This was an era when artists frequently played the backwaters of colonial empires, but for Gauthier and others of her generation economic necessity provided unexpected possibilities for artistic enrichment. It was only by chance that Gauthier was introduced to Javanese music, which she experienced as a challenge to her as a cosmopolitan student of music. It was chance again that brought her together with Seelig, who provided the necessary contacts that allowed her to study this music in depth at its kraton source. But it was her own persistence and dedication that resulted in *un concert seulement de ces choses indigènes* before the sultan. Gauthier recognized that Javanese music was difficult to master and hard to comprehend, and in her concerts in New York she tried to show this through her interspersed speeches. Vaudeville had no love for difficult art; if an audience did not ‘get’ an act after the first minute, it would stop paying attention. To make a living on vaudeville Gauthier had to substitute classical pieces for her Javanese and

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22 Only Page, a former Ballet Intime dancer and Bolm’s disciple who studied briefly with Balinese dancer I Ketut Mario, attempted to accurately reproduce Indonesian performance, and even Page’s *Two Balinese rhapsodies* (1929) was accompanied by a piano score by Louis Horst rather than actual Balinese music.
Malay numbers and adjust her visual aesthetics, but in the Ballet Intime her art found a more comfortable home. As composer Griffes boldly proclaimed, apropos of his Shojo, ‘In the dissonance of modern music the Oriental is more at home than in the consonance of the classics’ (cited in Maisel 1984:205). Gauthier’s cosmopolitan Ballet Intime collaborators further opened her eyes to the new music of the time, which complemented her knowledge of great traditions and eventually established her as a well-rounded artist. We see thus that Gauthier’s career was built out of travel, chance encounters, social relations, experimentalism and persistence – the necessary components of almost any artistic career in the modern age.

Gauthier was known as a musical explorer; the 600 or so songs in her repertoire included opera and oratorio, modern settings of Asian songs, American popular songs, folk songs, baroque and classical airs, and modern songs by ‘French, British, American, Spanish, Italian, Russian’ and German composers (Turbide 1986:546). Gauthier’s encounters with traditional Asian music, and particularly Javanese and Malay song, at a pivotal point in her career opened her mind to the diversity of world music and made her rethink her cultural values. As she remarked, ‘It was actually a serious study of all Oriental music that enabled me to understand and master the contemporary or so-called “modern music”’.23 Her musical eclecticism was her calling card. Though she had a limited vocal range and her small size limited her voice’s power, Gauthier held ‘her audience by her rare taste and rarer relish for the unusual’.24 Her uniquely transnational career holds our attention still.

24 Undated clipping from New York Tribune, Gauthier scrapbook.

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