Although exotic characters had long been a part of French ballets, late seventeenth-century and early eighteenth-century opéra-ballets began to explore foreign cultures particularly through love plots. Many of these spectacles promulgate stereotypes to iterate markers of difference between cultures; in particular, composers and librettists represented French men as fickle, Spaniards as loyal, and Italians as violently jealous.

This talk argues that while Jean-Philippe Rameau’s opéra-ballet Les Indes galantes (1735-36) continues to reinforce cultural differences, it also critiques contemporary French concepts of love delineated in other genres including plays, operas, and early feminist literature.