

Wahlfors Laura

Piano Performance and the Queer Ethics of the Neutral

performance lecture

As has been shown in the field of cultural musicology, music is a well-suited vehicle for queer – mobile and non-normative – subjectivities. In contemporary society, however, gender fluidity and liberated sexuality are easily harnessed to serve the goals of capitalism and neoliberalism, which is why we need sustained analysis of how human beings become agents. One potent way to carry out this sort of historically informed ethnography is zooming into the processes through which musicians, as gendered and sexual beings, work their embodied relationships to musics of different times.

I consider Roland Barthes's ethics of "the Neutral/Neuter" fruitful for this project because – in its aspiration to outplay normative identities and ideological structures – it stresses the resistance of singular bodies. Reading Barthes through contemporary queer theories, my presentation will demonstrate how his strategies for catching nuances of the insistent uniqueness of the irreducible individual can be applied to piano practice and performance.

Bio:

Laura Wahlfors works as a postdoctoral researcher at the Sibelius Academy, University of the Arts Helsinki, Finland, and as a performing pianist. She completed her doctor's degree in music at the Sibelius Academy in 2013, and she also holds an MA in comparative literature from the University of Helsinki. Her areas of research include continental philosophy (particularly Barthes, Kristeva, and Nancy), the study of musical performance, cultural musicology, gender and queer studies, and artistic research. Her current project *Queering Musicianship. Sexual Otherness in the Changing Field of Classical Music* is funded by the Kone Foundation.

