



St. Cecilia, a portrait (Mrs. Richard Crowninshield Derby) by John Singleton Coply (1738-1815)

NOËL WAN

DIS-/EMBODYING THE FEMALE HARPIST

FRIDAY OCTOBER 8, 2021 AT 1:00

FREE - EVERYONE IS WELCOME!

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Despite decades of image revitalization and professional advocacy, the idea of the “female harpist” continues to conjure the same stereotypes: (blonde) angelic waifs, bourgeois society wives, and pretty, begowned girls—their slender bodies all perfectly positioned, and their smiles simultaneously demure and inviting. While contemporary harpists, both in and outside the Western classical domain, acknowledge these stereotypes as cultural constructions (i.e., of race, class, and gender), there is less recognition of how these constructions have tangibly lingered in performance practices comprising a “classical training.”

In this talk, Dr. Noël Wan will unpack the material history of the female harpist’s cultural image and discuss the relationships between instrumental learning, music-making, and embodiment. Using the paradigm of the female harpist, she will re-imagine the classical music concert as something more monstrous and vulnerable: a material space of confrontation, subversion, and play between her body, her instrument’s body, and the bodies of her spectators.

Lauded as “a huge talent [with] hidden power and amazing maturity” (Bart van Oort), Taiwanese-American harpist Dr. Noël Wan (she/her) made her international debut with the Utrecht Symphony Orchestra in 2010. She has performed across North America, Europe, and Asia and has been featured as a soloist at Carnegie Hall, the Muziekgebouw, and the Yellow Barn Summer Music Festival. Her international distinctions include First Prize in the 2010 Dutch Harp Festival Competition; Grand Prize in the 2014 Carmel Music Society Competition; and Second Prize in the 2021 Prix Orford Musique. Dr. Wan is an alumna of the University of Illinois (BM, DMA) and the Yale School of Music (MM). As a scholar, she has written and presented on topics of performance practice, ecocriticism, affect theory, new materialism, feminism, and race. She currently serves as Assistant Professor of Harp in the Don Wright Faculty of Music at Western University.

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