

To the Crane Personnel Committee and Dean Sitton,

I write this letter in the strongest support of Dr. Brooks and her achievements at the Crane School of Music. Both in terms of her teaching and research, Dr. Brooks has broadened offerings in the music curriculum and strengthened her department's aims towards diversity and new scholarly perspectives. Her demeanor and work ethic have also helped to foster an ethos of inclusion and integrity. I know from first-hand observation and from student feedback that Dr. Brooks has quickly become a respected and admired asset to the school. Students are always very enthusiastic about taking her courses and her fresh approach to pedagogy.

I first met Dr. Brooks during the search for her position in 2016. After interviewing her and observing her teaching and scholarship demonstrations, I knew she possessed the dedication and energy necessary for success at the university. It is clear to me that she knows her subject thoroughly. At the same time, her personal enthusiasm for music shines in nearly everything she does in the classroom and in her performing endeavors. She is an engaged music maker working in a number of local venues and has quickly become an established member of ONNY as well as of the St. Lawrence University Orchestra. Beyond this, Dr. Brooks is an accomplished scholar who has guided a number of students through detailed research projects concerning topics that are not frequently studied in other courses in the curriculum. This makes her work an essential part of the university's goal of fostering greater diversity in the modern music curriculum.

I recently had the pleasure of attending a class meeting of Dr. Brooks's course on Music, Gender, and Sexuality. The subject for the day focused on the phenomenon of the castrato in Baroque opera, with its attendant issues of gender identity, sensuality, taboo, and extremes of vocal technique. This is a topic that could be very difficult to navigate, but Brooks was so well organized and polished in both her lecture and in the general discussion that there was no sense of the awkwardness or hesitation that one might encounter among students. In fact, the students were very much engaged and eager to share their ideas, notably about a reading that had been assigned to them in groups. The classroom was set up for conversation in seminar format, and before beginning the discussion of the assigned reading, students reviewed the material in their groups. So, everyone was ready to move through the reading at a good pace, but also in detail and with ample room for extemporaneous sharing of thoughts. It was clear to me that everyone had done his or her homework and was well prepared. The reading concerned interpretations of scholarship about the castrato Farinelli, and the students adroitly picked up all the major points (biographical, critical, historiographical, etc.), so that the discussion was enjoyable and provocative, with very little prodding or digging required on the teacher's part. This allowed Brooks to get at the chief points in her lecture and to move from a deep reading of the

assignment to larger concepts. This kind of discussion can bog down and actually come to a halt if students are not prepared and engaged, but here there were no such problems. This told me that Brooks has a firm grasp of her students' capabilities. Coupled with an excellent sense of timing, this enabled Brooks to move the class from one point of knowledge to another through learning by discovery. Strengthening her approach were audio-visual examples that brought other matters pertaining to the castrato – interpretation, technical limitations, recording technology, perceptions versus realities – to light.

Throughout the professor's lecture, and through their reading and discussion, students connected historical perspectives on the phenomenon of the castrato to somewhat problematic contemporary views. For example, the reading dates from the 1990s. Viewpoints of, and even language used to write about, the castrato would be somewhat different today. Brooks stressed this a number of times, so that students would get a sense of the fluidity of scholarship over even just a few decades. A recording of one of the last castrati (Moreschi) from the early twentieth century then presented the students with another perspective from another time, raising questions about practices among castrati within the context of 19th-century performance. The result was a multi-layered, complex historical view that ranged far beyond the simple reportage of facts about castrati in the past and the music they sang, their social standing, techniques, etc. To add yet another layer, students watched a clip from a film about Farinelli in which the singer's voice was modified electronically to reproduce the effect of a castrato voice. But just what were those original sounds, and what new problems emerge from the process of alteration to suit an imagined sense of the sounds produced by 18th-century singers? The students were totally engrossed in this web of issues and problems, incorporating perceptions about the body as it is used to produce sound, the mythologizing of the artist, and notions about the sensuality that people of the past seem to have attached to the castrato. I was impressed by the degree to which students and teacher grappled with these sophisticated and complex aspects of the subject.

A glance at her CV will give a good idea of Dr. Brooks's many and varied achievements over the past years. I will point out just a few that are particularly important for the school, her scholarship, and the students. Apart from her work in the history sequence, Professor Brooks's courses in gender, politics, and opera provide a needed boost to departmental offerings. Students in these courses are given the opportunity to explore aspects of their own experiences, be they in terms of their training, performance, or internalization of music, within the realm of their developing identities, socialization, and growth as individuals. While one might argue that such experiences should theoretically take place in all courses, it is rare for music students to integrate politics, gender, environment, or connections between the body and interpretation in their studies. The professor's course on opera in the 20th and 21st centuries also expands the history area's coverage of contemporary music, and I would encourage her to continue work in this direction, and perhaps to offer courses on any number of topics in 21st-century music. The

history area has a difficult time covering both very early and very recent developments in music, and such courses would greatly help bridge the gap.

I know Dr. Brooks's scholarship from her presentations and publications and can state without reservation that all of it is of the highest caliber, original, and extremely rigorous. It demonstrates professional integrity, is integrated logically within the bibliographic frame of previous research, and exhibits a thoughtful and scholarly approach that is engaging and accessible. I find the work on constructed persona in relation to Sarah Bernhardt's voice quite compelling. Its implications range from creating a new history of the voice in terms of the drama of physicality to an expansion of our understanding of the Gesamtkunstwerk as it has evolved. The more recent work on music and silent films is also potentially groundbreaking in that it recovers a culture of sound within the technical, artistic, and social milieu of early films. The professor's work on music and politics in France, especially as these interact in opera, has contributed hugely to new ways of looking at a well-trodden area of musicological inquiry. Brooks looks not only under the conventional "rocks" of stylistic development, performance, and reception, but under the "boulders" of gender, trauma, bodily gesture, and space, agents that have always informed musical experience in a highly politically charged French landscape. I eagerly look forward to further contributions to this area, the subjects of which have long been hiding in plain sight, as it were.

I would only add that Dr. Brooks is a pleasure to work with as a colleague. Her contributions to the T/H/C Dept. have clearly helped us achieve updated pedagogical objectives. But her new perspectives on music have additionally inspired many of us in our own work and have brought a fresh energy to the Department in terms of both teaching and scholarship. I could not express stronger support for Dr. Brooks's reappointment, and after the coming years' achievements in scholarship and teaching, her promotion to continuing appointment.



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