



THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Potsdam

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Crane Personnel Committee, Dean Woods, Provost Bergeron, President Esterberg, SUNY Potsdam
Administration
State University of New York at Potsdam
44 Pierrepoint Avenue
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To the Reappointment, Tenure, and Promotion Committee,

I am writing in strongest support of Dr. Erin Brooks' promotion to Associate Professor at the Crane School of Music, SUNY Potsdam. When I first began teaching at Crane two and a half years ago, Dr. Brooks helped me feel welcome and supported as I navigated the various challenges that came with being a new faculty member. In addition to her collegiality, Dr. Brooks is also a beloved professor, a prolific scholar, and has gone above and beyond in her service to SUNY Potsdam and the discipline of musicology alike. SUNY Potsdam has been made an even richer, more dynamic institution thanks to Dr. Brooks' extraordinary contributions, which reveal a steadfast commitment to her students, her colleagues, her discipline, and higher education at large.

With her course offerings, Dr. Brooks provides a cutting-edge music historical education to students. On several occasions, students have expressed to me that Dr. Brooks' seminars have profoundly changed their lives. In addition to her sincere passion for any topic she teaches, Dr. Brooks makes discussions of diversity, equity, and inclusion part of her core mission in every one of her courses, including one newly designed for this spring semester titled "Opera & Race in the United States." She does not teach the mere textbook version of music history but involves students in the difficult discussions central to musicology *right now*, as our discipline reckons with its racist, ableist, and sexist past. Dr. Brooks has also been a pedagogical role model for me on multiple occasions. From offering advice about how to increase the visibility of underrepresented composers

in survey courses to exchanging ideas about how to facilitate student discussions on controversial topics, she has been an invaluable sounding board in my own path to growing as a teacher. Dr. Brooks is also a willing collaborator, as demonstrated by our coordinated teaching of “Music, Gender, and Sexuality” as a chronological two semester sequence (pre-1800 and post-1800). This collaboration has provided students with a much deeper view of this topic than could be offered in a single semester, and we hope to broaden these course offerings to students across campus in the future.

In Fall 2020, I had the pleasure of observing one of Dr. Brooks’ upper-division seminars, “Music and Disability Studies,” that took place synchronously over Zoom. Dr. Brooks opened the class with a “check-in” through the Zoom chat feature: she asked students to write into the chat 1) their favorite comfort food and 2) anything they had coming up that week. This small task was brilliant: it recreated the informal chit chat that happens organically in face-to-face classes, both before and after class. In other words, it helped achieve that ineffable sense of classroom “community,” which is often lost in remote instruction. After moving through some announcements, Dr. Brooks put a 5-minute free-writing prompt up on a PowerPoint slide. The prompt asked students to reflect on if they had ever felt excluded from playing an instrument or participating in musical performance based on presumed bodily “deficiencies.” When students shared their free-write reflections with the larger class, I was struck by the ease in which they spoke about their personal experiences. It was immediately clear to me that Dr. Brooks had established a learning environment for students that was open and welcoming, where they felt comfortable sharing with their peers despite the personal nature of the subject matter. Dr. Brooks in part established this rapport with the students by sharing her own experiences from this prompt too. Moreover, as each student shared, Dr. Brooks deftly highlighted how each of their anecdotes related not only to the assigned reading for that day, but to larger themes within musical disability studies. If I had been a student in the course as an undergrad, I know this discussion would have made me feel less alone and less at fault for any “deficiencies” I may have been told to have as a musician.

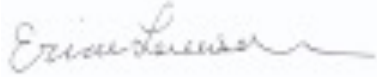
In the second half of the class, Dr. Brooks put students in breakout rooms to discuss what they had written about in their Moodle forums. Students were asked to respond to a reading about Ravel’s Left Hand Piano Concerto, famously performed by the pianist Paul Wittgenstein whose arm had been amputated during World War I. Dr. Brooks gave students about 10 minutes to share their reactions in breakout rooms and then used much of the remainder of the class to discuss key take-aways as a larger group. She made a point of gently nudging the students who had yet to participate to share their thoughts with the class and gave them a variety of ways through which to do so. She then led the class in a discussion about two-hand arrangements of one-hand piano music – namely, how did they feel about such arrangements? Dr. Brooks guided the discussion skillfully: she gave each student a chance to speak, empathized with the difficulties in speaking about the topic, and all the while guided the discussion towards a central lesson, which she framed as further food for thought. This lesson—should we be valuing a dead composer’s intent more than the health of a living performer’s body?—will undoubtedly resonate with students well beyond their college careers. In sum, Dr. Brooks does not merely teach music history; she motivates students to think critically about the past in order to actively shape their own futures as musicians and educators. This is masterful teaching that was an inspiration to witness. It is no wonder students come away from Dr. Brooks’ classes feeling as though she has changed their lives.

Dr. Brooks’ manifold scholarly contributions are impressive not only for their relevance to pressing discussions happening within musicology, but also for the ways in which they bring together scholarly subfields across disciplines. A prime example of this is Dr. Brooks’ work that brings trauma studies into dialogue with music history. She has built numerous international connections with scholars working on this topic, and with them, she has contributed several publications, including a colloquy to be published in one of musicology’s most prestigious peer-

reviewed journals. She and her colleagues have also put a tremendous amount of work into organizing an upcoming conference, titled "Music, Sound, and Trauma: Interdisciplinary Perspectives," that has attracted hundreds of participants. But Dr. Brooks' work on trauma does not stop at her scholarship: it has informed her teaching and service alike, as evidenced by a planned co-edited publication on "Trauma-Informed Music Pedagogy" and by her role as facilitator for the "Trauma-Informed and Anti-Bias" sub-committee here at SUNY Potsdam. All of the above would be remarkable on its own, but Dr. Brooks' musicological expertise also crosses into film studies, media studies, gender studies and, most recently, she has examined studies of the voice in conjunction with studies of race in America. Last but not least, Dr. Brooks has given me an incredible amount of support in my own academic pursuits. I can speak with her openly about undeveloped research ideas without reservation, she has given me invaluable feedback on my conference papers, and we have in the past year established writing time routines to help one another stay on track with our research.

In short, I reiterate my greatest esteem for Dr. Brooks as a teacher, scholar, and colleague. She has demonstrated excellence in every aspect of her career and has made immense contributions to SUNY Potsdam's academic life. I give her my full support for promotion to Associate Professor with no reservations whatsoever.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Erica Levenson", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Erica Levenson
Assistant Professor of Music History
Crane School of Music
SUNY Potsdam