

PROMOTION RECOMMENDATION

The University of Michigan
School of Music
Department of Theatre and Drama

Mbala D. Nkanga, assistant professor (theatre and drama), School of Music, and assistant professor, Afroamerican and African studies, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts, is recommended for promotion to associate professor (theatre and drama), with tenure, School of Music, and associate professor of Afroamerican and African studies, without tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts.

Academic Degrees:

Ph.D.	1995	Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois
M.A.	1990	Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana
B.A.	1979	Université Nationale du <u>Zaire</u> -Institut National des Arts

Professional Record:

1999 – present	Assistant Professor of Music, Department of Theatre and Drama, School of Music, and Center for African-American and African Studies, College of LSA, University of Michigan
Oct 1999-Jan 1999	Visiting Assistant Professor, Department of Theatre and Drama, and Center for African-American and African Studies University of Michigan
1997-1998	Visiting Fellow, Center for African-American and African Studies, and International Institute, University of Michigan
1996-1998	Assistant Professor, Institut National des Arts/Kinshasa, The Democratic Republic of the Congo

Summary of Evaluation:

Teaching:

Professor Nkanga's leading teaching qualities are clarity, measure, and formality. He has made significant curricular contributions despite the fact that he came to both Theatre and Drama and CAAS without any relationship to existing curricula. Professor Nkanga has developed a number of successful courses that evidence impressive command of multiple literatures and disciplines, including Theatre Studies, African Studies, Performance Studies, African History, African Literature, and (indirectly, via his cross-cultural analyses of world performance and Black drama) Anthropology. His syllabi are well organized, with clear attention to details in expectations, assignments, scheduling, and reading lists. In their evaluations and solicited letters, his students provide laudatory reviews, commenting especially on his breadth of knowledge, his interdisciplinarity, and his ability to draw them into the material and make it meaningful for them. Professor Nkanga's contributions to the School of Music and the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts curricula are exceedingly valuable and, moreover, the combination of his being both an influential scholar and a recognized, talented arts practitioner make him a unique asset to this University. He has developed a number of original and well-received courses for both his home departments, teaching an overload without compensation for the last three years. He is a devoted and committed teacher, spending large amounts of time mentoring his students. Professor Nkanga has taught an overload of one extra course each year

for three consecutive years (2003-04, 2004-05, 2005-06). This may have had consequences for his scholarly productivity and should be given due consideration.

Professional and Creative Activity:

Dr. Nkanga has been involved in theatre ever since he held a position in Kinshasa (Democratic Republic of the Congo). He is a rare combination of scholar/artist/practitioner. He navigates with agility between performance as an object of study and performance as agency - to be experienced, practiced, enunciated, and enacted. This relationship between theory and practice drives Dr. Nkanga's scholarship, pedagogy, and creative activity. It is not uncommon among scholars writing about international theatre to publish most of their work in journals rather than books. A close reading of external reviewers' comments conclude that he is among the best scholars in the field of African theatre studies today. In his years at Michigan, Dr. Nkanga has produced many works in progress and has participated energetically in theatre performances at the University. His scholarship has in turn been actively influenced by the theatrical work he has done.

Service:

Professor Nkanga's contributions to the University have been considerable. He serves the Theatre and Drama Department as B.A. advisor and has worked on more than one occasion with graduate students in the Center for World Performance Studies (CWPS) interdisciplinary seminar outside the classroom. He has served on several dissertation committees from Anthropology, American Culture and Theatre. He was instrumental in planning and developing the minor in African American theatre and is an invaluable founding member of the steering committee of CWPS. He has initiated and will bring to fruition over the next academic year an exciting joint endeavor with the Sojourner Truth Underground Railroad Center in Adrian.

External Review:

Reviewer (A)

"Professor Nkanga is developing an interesting body of scholarship, so I hope to read more soon. He has much to offer the institution in terms of teaching, service, and scholarship. It has taken him some time to develop a voice but his voice is being heard from the numerous invitations and workshops he has given. He has much knowledge to share and is beginning to increasingly publish as attests the completed book he has submitted to Iowa University Press."

Reviewer (B)

"I have known Prof. Nkanga for fifteen years, and in that time have been continuously impressed with his commitment, intellect, breadth of knowledge, theoretical sophistication, and gracious collegiality. The University of Michigan is fortunate to have such a promising emerging scholar as Prof. Nkanga, especially in the context of the great strengths Michigan has with International Studies and African Studies. Prof. Nkanga's research expertise would appear to be an excellent fit for the institution. His ability to teach theatre not just as a scholarly endeavor, but also as a practice and process allows students to experience African theatre and performance from the inside."

Reviewer (C)

"Dr. Nkanga's profile is very unique in academia. Most faculty members I know tend to favor one side of the scholarship/artistic production work dichotomy. I believe it would be essential to take into full account Dr. Nkanga's scholarship as well as his theatre practice relationally in order to understand the full spectrum of his work and the deep interconnections between the two.

I wholeheartedly support his promotion.”

Reviewer (D)

“I find Professor Nkanga’s research to be both original and engaging. Professor Nkanga’s remarkable ability to turn a mundane and banal theme into an engaging piece of scholarship is one of his strengths as a scholar, one that bodes favorably for his future scholarship. I would like to stress that although one might feel underwhelmed by Professor Nkanga’s fairly small publication record, one should not dismiss his credibility as a scholar. In fact, his modest publication record should be mitigated by the fact that Professor Nkanga is both scholar and practitioner; as a director he has staged fourteen plays between 1981 and 2003. His ability to weave the most sophisticated theoretical analyses with his knowledge of local practices and performances as well as his penchant for original topics could decisively enrich his scholarship and benefit his field.”

Reviewer (E)

“He writes clearly, accessibly, and with great conviction and style in English. He has also continued to work as a director, to my mind an invaluable, but increasingly rare qualification in a scholar. The presses and journals that have published his work are of high quality, consistent with my expectations for faculty working in this area in my department. I was very impressed with the quality and originality of his thinking and writing. His work is global and comparative. I see Professor Nkanga’s scholarship as a good sign of his continued ability to allow research to fuel his teaching, a must for any professor to continue to grow after tenure.”

Reviewer (F)

“He states very clearly that one aspect of his mission is to promote better understanding between human beings from different cultural backgrounds. It seems that he has wide-ranging interests, a good focus, and the commitment to grow into a fine scholar. As a scholar and theatre artist, Mr. Nkanga brings an important and unusual perspective to his writing, directing, and teaching. There are few scholars who have substantial practical experience with the stage and are able to understand a dramatic text as a blueprint for performance.”

Reviewer (G)

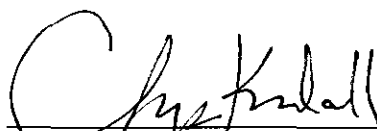
“Here, too, I can identify few people who write with Professor Nkanga’s ability for analyses and research. I would thus place him among the best scholars in African theatre studies, no matter what their academic status. Without question, Mbala Nkanga is among the best young scholars in the field today. He also knows why the arts are of crucial and critical importance to people. He wants to tell this important story.”

Internal Review:

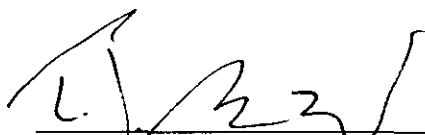
Professor Nkanga is a well-trained, highly organized, and extremely knowledgeable colleague. He is a fair, balanced, and humane man who makes important contributions to the University through his critical work on themes in the studies of African cultures and cultural production. He is also a gifted teacher who exposes his students to a wide variety of global issues. The general consensus among his colleagues is that he is a rising scholar and accomplished artist; he brings a broadening international recognition to the University by tackling some challenging topics of African culture.

Summary of Recommendation:

Professor Nkanga is on the cusp of a first-rate, internationally recognized reputation as a scholar/artist. There exists a splendidly synergistic relationship among Professor Nkanga's teaching, his artistic/scholarly work, and his service. Dr. Nkanga is a rising scholar who is interrogating such provocative themes as rumor and gossip in an effort to refashion them as mechanisms for political resistance; a teacher willing to give unlimited time to his students; a well-established actor and director with international experience which enhances and enriches both the curriculum and production season of the Department of Theatre and Drama. He brings a perspective that would otherwise be lacking and sorely missed. Dr. Nkanga is a dedicated interdisciplinary colleague who is an attractive, singular, irreplaceable addition to the University community. It is with the support of the Executive Committee's of the School of Music and the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts that we recommend him for promotion to associate professor (theatre and drama), with tenure, School of Music, and associate professor of Afroamerican and African studies, without tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts.



Christopher W. Kendall
Dean, School of Music



Terrence J. McDonald
Dean, College of Literature, Science, and
the Arts

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