

PROMOTION RECOMMENDATION  
The University of Michigan  
School of Music, Theatre & Dance

Matthew Bengtson, assistant professor of music, School of Music, Theatre & Dance, is recommended for promotion to associate professor of music, with tenure, School of Music, Theatre & Dance.

Academic Degrees:

D.M.A.	2001	Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University, Piano Performance
M.M.	1997	Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University, Piano Performance
B.A.	1996	Harvard University, Computer Science

Professional Record:

2016 – present	Assistant Professor, Department of Piano, School of Music, Theatre & Dance, University of Michigan
2013 – 2016	College House Music Fellow in Piano, University of Pennsylvania
2003 – 2016	Piano Instructor, Private Study Program, Haverford and Bryn Mawr Colleges
2011	Artist Lecturer in Piano, Carnegie Mellon University School of Music
2002 – 2006	Staff Pianist, Curtis Institute of Music
2002 – 2005	Piano and Music Theory Faculty, Settlement Music School, Philadelphia
2000 – 2002	Teaching Associate, Music Theory Department, Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University

Summary of Evaluation:

Teaching: Professor Bengtson fills a specialized pedagogical niche in the piano program at SMTD that balances the deft navigation of tradition with an infusion of new ideas and repertory. He teaches both a broad set of eight survey courses in piano repertory—what is referred to in the field as Piano Literature—as well as historically informed performance techniques on the fortepiano, an instrument of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in Europe that is the direct predecessor to the modern piano. He is the only fortepiano instructor at SMTD. His is a hybrid position that combines artistry and studio pedagogy with academic research, publication, and classroom teaching. In this way, his position bridges across SMTD’s performance and academic departments. Professor Bengtson is also in demand as a clinician at universities throughout the United States.

Professional Activities: Professor Bengtson is a scholar-performer with significant accomplishments as a pianist on both modern and historic instruments, as well as the author of award-winning and well-reviewed publications of original research. Professor Bengtson’s main creative and scholarly impact has involved championing the art of composers from the 18th through 21st centuries that he feels are unjustly neglected—writing about their art and its interpretation, recording their music, and creating videos and other public humanities projects that help to spread awareness of their compositions.

Since joining the SMTD faculty, Professor Bengtson has released five commercial compact discs, including a 3-CD set of works by Karol Szymanowski, including both piano solo and duos for violin and piano, a disc including the piano quintet of Dmitri Tymoczko with the Amernet String Quartet, and a CD of the works for cello and piano of Roberto Sierra with cellist John Haines-Eitzen. These recordings have been cited for two awards by “The American Prize.” As a performer, Professor Bengtson has appeared in more than 40 performances since fall 2016 on modern piano and fortepiano, mostly at universities and at academic conferences in the United States and Canada. In 2018, he presented two recitals in Poland and later that the same year he performed with Philadelphia’s Network for New Music in premieres of music by Gareth Haynes and Jennifer Higdon. In addition, Professor Bengtson has published his analytical and historical research to significant acclaim. He made a major contribution to the *The Alexander Scriabin Companion: History, Lore and Performance* (2017), co-written with musicologist Lincoln Ballard and pianist John Bell Young. Bengtson’s 2018 article “‘The Szymanowski Clash’: Harmonic Conflict and Ambiguity in the Szymanowski Mazurkas” appeared in the Canadian academic journal *Intersections* and won the Wanda Wilk prize for research in Polish Music, awarded by the Polish Music Center at the University of Southern California.

Service: Professor Bengtson was widely praised by colleagues and his department chair for his academic service work. He is seen as an “indefatigable” departmental citizen, who administers the Piano Department’s weekly Piano Forum and has served on a range of SMTD committees (Faculty Research Committee, Scholarship Committee, Graduate Curriculum Council [FCGS], and a range of doctoral committees). For the university, he has assisted with campus interviews for the Fulbright fellowships, and he served as member-at-large for the executive committee of UM’s Center for Russian, Eastern European, and Eurasian Studies. For the profession at large, he served as the director for the annual festival of the American Liszt Society held at UM in fall 2021. He also serves as a member of the board of directors for the Westfield Center for Historical Keyboard Studies and as a member of its diversity and membership committees. He served as a session chair, discussant, and as a member of the organizing committee of the 2018 national conference of the Historical Keyboard Society of North America. He was likewise a key member of the organizing committee of the SMTD/Westfield conference “Diversity and Belonging: Untold Keyboard Stories,” hosted at UM in January 2022.

External Reviewers:

Reviewer A: “He has recorded extensively, with premieres of new music, and advancement of the cause of more marginalized music that is worthy of greater exposure.”

Reviewer B: “...significant recording projects and video broadcasts, a large variety of performances...his advocacy of historical keyboard performance...a very strong track record of service and teaching of a high caliber.”

Reviewer C: “Dr. Bengtson’s contribution of chapters 9-14 is equivalent to a small monograph within this lengthy volume...his writing contains numerous insights into Scriabin’s musical structures and they relate to musical interpretation and pianistic technique.”

Reviewer D: “In a profession where any tend to specialize in one particular field, instrument, or repertoire, he distinguishes himself on multiple fronts...His work as a scholar and performer

informs his duties as a teacher of piano literature at Michigan, where he has developed a rigorous and relevant curriculum for the pianists.”

Reviewer E: “I believe Matthew’s performing accomplishments, scholarship and excellent teaching skills make him a valuable asset to any world-class music department. His vast skill set in early music performance practice, new music performance practice, and romantic piano literature interpretation and analysis makes him truly unique as performer and a scholar.”

Reviewer F: “I am truly impressed with the record of Dr. Bengtson’s musical life. It is comprehensive, diverse, and is as expertly deep as it is wide in his professional activities as a scholar, performer and teacher. His professional life exudes the renaissance ideal of person who lives and practices the liberal arts.”

Reviewer G: “It is rare, verging on unheard-of, to encounter a pianist with abilities as varied as those of Dr. Bengtson’s. Most of us are happy enough to play and teach the piano; someone who also writes scholarly articles, performs on period instruments, masters a large range of technology, champions new music, lectures and records widely, and designs a vast range of courses, goes far beyond what might be expected to achieve tenure at most institutions.”

Reviewer H: “His scholarly interests and keyboard repertoire are far-ranging...He is a great asset to your piano/fortepiano faculty as well as to your DMA program at Michigan. His knowledge of older instruments is impressive.”

Reviewer I: “Dr. Bengtson’s strengths are as a performer. Although his preferred repertoire is that of the early twentieth-century, he is a self-described ‘musical generalist.’”

Reviewer J: “What impresses me most about Dr. Bengtson’s résumé is the sheer variety of his accomplishments, both artistic and academic, and the wide array of his specialties. There are very few keyboardists equally adept at performing music from the 16th through the 21st centuries...”

Reviewer K: “Professor Bengtson’s accumulated work in the Research category is extremely impressive and, as one would hope in this new age, spans a variety of distribution categories...Not only are his media types diverse, but also the content of his work is exceedingly broad...This is no small accomplishment in an age of specialization.”

Reviewer L: “He is a virtuoso of the first rank...What makes Matt unique within the rank of virtuoso pianists is his immense intellectual capacity...”

Reviewer M: “I do not know anyone of his peer group who is just as active in all fields of piano performance as he is; this is a most welcome development, showing that there need not be any rejection of part of the instrument’s history in order to embrace another part.”

Reviewer N: “I find Dr. Bengtson’s work to be of very high quality and his contribution to the field substantial. In terms of impact, I believe he ranks among the top tier of the rising generation of faculty. In my judgement he is becoming an outstanding scholar in our discipline, one who is making a significant impact at this time by addressing broad and significant issues at hand.”

Summary of Recommendation:

Professor Bengtson fills a strategic role in the department and the school in the best possible ways. His achievements as a scholar-performer are exemplary and have contributed to the fields of piano performance, piano literature, and musicological research. His teaching has inspired and advanced the work of our students, ranging from first-year piano performance majors through piano principals and doctoral students. He works successfully with colleagues as a collaborator and offers valuable service to the school and the profession. With the unanimous support of the school's Executive Committee, I strongly recommend Matthew Bengtson for promotion to the rank of associate professor of music, with tenure, School of Music, Theatre & Dance.



---

David Gier  
Paul Boylan Collegiate Professor of Music  
and Dean, School of Music, Theatre & Dance

May 2022