

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

Robin M. Wilson, associate professor of dance, with tenure, School of Music, Theatre & Dance, is recommended for promotion to professor of dance, with tenure, School of Music, Theatre & Dance.

Academic Degrees:

M.F.A. 1995 Temple University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Choreography
B.A. 1977 Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri, Dance

Professional Record:

2003 – present Associate Professor of Dance, Department of Dance, University of Michigan
1995 – 2003 Assistant Professor of Dance, Department of Dance, University of Michigan
1982 – 1982 Adjunct Lecturer, Hunter College, City University of New York (CUNY), New York, NY

Summary of Evaluation:

Teaching: Professor Wilson teaches numerous courses in the Department of Dance, including Dance Composition, Improvisation Lab (“a mainstay of learning and growth for the BFA Dance students”), First-year Touring Company, Dances in Culture, Intro to Afro-Caribbean Dance Techniques, Teaching Methods, Dance Repertory, courses surrounding the dance traditions of specific cultures, and a course which explores intersections between performance, gender, race, and culture in Harlem. She works to saturate her courses with principles of social justice, “empowering others to speak their truth,” by embedding aspects of intercultural dialogue within her courses. Her teaching responsibilities also include choreography for student performances, and she has choreographed 12 such works, 10 of which have been performed on campus. Professor Wilson also advises MFA students (the MFA is considered the terminal degree in dance, and is the department’s only graduate program), and has supervised eight theses since her promotion to associate professor.

Professor Wilson has made significant contributions to the Department of Dance through her efforts to develop courses that center immersive community engagement, helping students build their intercultural competence and developing equitable partnerships with local organizations within the community. One example is her 2018 study abroad course, *Cuba: Roots, Culture, & Rhythm*, which examined race, identity, equity, and power through the Arts and was held in Havana, Cuba. Another example is *Dance 126: First Year Touring Company*, a course for first year dance students constructed around off-campus performances and community engagement in the region, with a particular emphasis on Detroit.

Professional Activities: Professor Wilson is a choreographer, dancer, presenter and self-described “community-based artist/activist” whose work centers around the “influences of the African diaspora in historical and contemporary dance/culture and the impact of African heritage artists in the world at large.” Much of her work employs improvisatory movement, mixed genres (dance,

music, and storytelling), and themes of social justice, culture, and spirituality. Since promotion to associate professor, Professor Wilson has generated 21 significant performances or choreographies. Many of these have been as part of Ann Arbor Dance Works, and in collaboration with SMTD colleagues and community partners. She has presented regularly at national and international venues, such as the American Dance Guild Performance Festival in NYC, the National Theatre of Ghana, and most recently, Jacob's Pillow, one of the most important summer dance festivals in the US. She has also appeared regionally at the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History, the Carr Center, and the Detroit Dance City Festival, and presented regularly at American College Dance Association conferences, and colleges and universities (UCLA, Duke, Brown). Professor Wilson has sustained collaborations with important artists including Diane McIntyre, Peter Sparling, the Liz Lerman Dance Exchange, and composer Stephen Rush.

In addition, Professor Wilson has several research projects ongoing, including participatory action research, archival research, a community engaged co-investigation, and an oral history project focusing on documentation of the work of groundbreaking Black female dance artists of the Black Arts Movement of the 1970s and 1980s. She has received over \$70,000 in grants to support her work, a significant achievement in the performing arts, and a strong indication of the relevance and impact of her work.

Service: Professor Wilson has engaged in consistent and generous service at local, state, national, and international levels. Her service within the SMTD and the broader campus is especially notable, and includes contributions to the work of important SMTD committees, including the Merit Review Committee, DEI Committee, and both the graduate and undergraduate curriculum committees. She has contributed to many important university-wide committees, including the Fulbright Program Campus Evaluation Committee, Center for World Performance Steering Committee, Women of Color in the Academy Project Steering Committee, and the SACUA Committee on University Values.

She has a strong commitment to and record of engagement with local and regional communities, as evidenced by her service as a master teacher at numerous Michigan high schools and the Parkridge Community Center in Ypsilanti, choreography for local churches in Ann Arbor, participation in the Willis C. Patterson *Our Own Thing Chorale*, and service with the Michigan Youth Arts Festival, Michigan Dance Council (chair), and the Michigan Department of Education. Nationally and internationally, she is extremely active as an adjudicator (evidence of her standing in the field), has helped lead the Urban Bush Women Summer Leadership Institute, and has provided over 20 years of service to the American College Dance Association, serving on the National Board of Directors from 2017 to the present, and recently having been appointed as the organization's Equity and Justice Committee chair (2021).

Finally, she has provided untold hours of undocumented, "invisible" service as the only faculty of color in the Dance Department. Professor Wilson has served as a powerful role model and mentor for students of color, and her expansion of the dance curriculum, emphasis on social activism, and incorporation of inclusive pedagogy has served, in the words of one colleague, to elevate "the histories, perspectives, and experiences of historically undervalued students." Professor Wilson was selected as the winner of the 2012 University of Michigan Shirley Verrett Award, which

“recognizes a faculty member whose teaching, performance, scholarship or service supports the success of female students or faculty in the arts who come from diverse cultural and racial backgrounds.” Her record of service to the institution, the dance profession, and her community is exemplary.

External Reviewers:

Reviewer A: “I am impressed with the high level of her choreography and collaborative artistic work; by her career as a performer in both her own work and the work of other nationally-renowned choreographers; by the depth and range of her scholarly work; by the contributions she has made as a teacher and creative artists in the many community schools and organizations in which she has worked; and in the scope of her dance affiliations and contributions, from the University, community and state level to a national and international level.”

Reviewer B: “I am continuously struck by Professor Wilson’s intelligence and scholarship. Her publications, papers and presentations reflect her passion, commitment, insightfulness and capacity for deep analysis. I believe that her wealth of experiences and her interdisciplinary interests demonstrate exemplary knowledge in the field.”

Reviewer C: “Wilson has crafted an impressive and coherent career as an artist of dance concerned with improvisation and embodied healing aligned with Black women’s possibilities in the world. She is an outstanding dance performer and pedagogue, whose work encourages a witnessing public to imagine community as a vector of creativity and social responsibility. Her creative craft has modeled presence and excellence as reasonable expectations for Black women in public discourse as artmakers for decades.”

Reviewer D: “Based on my review of her materials, it appears that the breadth and depth of her teaching--ranging from Modern Dance, Dance Composition, African Traditions, Afro-Caribbean, and others, are specific quality indicators of Ms. Wilson's teaching effectiveness and excellence. Additionally, Associate Professor Wilson has also been invited to conduct master classes and lecture demonstrations at many high-profile venues on national and international levels. These opportunities further strengthen her teaching profile and clearly indicate how others in the field regard her work...She owns and presents a broad spectrum and dynamic range of movement ideas and vocabulary. Her work is narrative, yet not *too* literal; innovative, yet not overly abstract; powerful without overstating.”

Reviewer E: “As a viewer, I found Wilson’s solo work exceptional; she is truly a major artist in this genre. In the two solos presented, she is a master at weaving movement with text, music (at times her own compositions), and acting to create vital, engaging, and sophisticated works. [*Shattered Globes, Slave Moth*]...Of particular importance is her service to the American College Dance Association (ACDA)...Typically, ACDA adjudicators are selected from the most highly respected dance educators and choreographers in the field. To be chosen so many times as an adjudicator for these festivals is an indicator of Wilson’s strong standing amongst her peers.”

Reviewer F: “Professor Wilson has impacted generations of dancers and her contributions place her squarely among leaders in this area...Robin Wilson is an engaging and productive multi-hyphenate artist with ongoing investigations into the potential and contemporary artistic

possibilities of African diaspora movement systems....Her contribution in history is unquestionable. Her packet holistically demonstrates contemporary scholarship and service that advances the founding ideas rooted in Black Arts manifesting as deeply engaging local and study abroad courses and workshops, interdisciplinary performance work, and service to the university, field, state and local communities.”

Reviewer G: “Her experiences cover regional, national, and international partnerships and collaborations, which are highly valuable for a global world-view...it is evident that Associate Professor Wilson is a storyteller, perhaps a ‘kinetic storyteller’ as she mixes traditional storytelling using movement, voice and media..[S]he is not only a model with a level of artistic distinction in her creative work, but she serves as a role model to her students for creating a life in ones chosen field that continues to grow and change.”

Summary of Recommendation:

Professor Wilson is a highly regarded artist-activist, teacher, and generous contributor to the communities that she serves. Her teaching, creative activity, and service interweave a commitment to community engagement, and have centered Black dance practices and vocabulary in a groundbreaking and influential way. With the unanimous support of the school’s Executive Committee, I enthusiastically recommend Robin M. Wilson for promotion to professor of dance, with tenure, School of Music, Theatre & Dance.



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

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