

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

Nancy Murphy, 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:

Ph.D.	2016	University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada, Music Theory
M.A.	2009	University of Western Ontario, London, ON, Canada, Music Theory
B.Mus.	2007	University of Western Ontario, London, ON, Canada, Theory & Composition

Professional Record:

2022 - present	Assistant Professor of Music, Department of Music Theory, School of Music, Theatre & Dance, University of Michigan
2017 - 2022	Assistant Professor of Music Theory, University of Houston, Houston, TX
2015 - 2017	Lecturer, Music Theory and Ear Training, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL
2010 - 2015	Lecturer and Teaching Assistant, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada

Summary of Evaluation:

Teaching: Professor Murphy is an extremely experienced, versatile, and effective teacher who has offered eighteen distinct undergraduate courses and six distinct graduate courses at the university level. She has taught a diverse repertoire of course offerings ranging across art music, jazz, and pop music, from basic courses in theory, analysis, and musicianship to advanced seminars. Her syllabi and teaching materials are outstanding. She thoughtfully broadens the music curriculum to diversify course content far beyond the Western canon, which she complements with inclusive and accessible teaching practices. In the classroom, she creates a dynamic learning environment with a highly interactive approach to teaching and engages students with innovative and effective classroom activities, exercises, and student-centered projects. With a forward-looking approach that incorporates current trends and perspectives in the field, Professor Murphy coordinates her teaching with department goals and integrates interdisciplinary initiatives.

Professor Murphy receives strong teaching evaluations for her clarity and precision as a lecturer and has completed additional training and workshops to continually improve as a teacher. She has been recognized by teaching award nominations and by appreciative students who praise her encouragement, scholarly wisdom, and individual guidance.

Professional Activities: Professor Murphy is an innovator in pop music studies who expands the terrain of music theory as a field. She conducts deep, original, generative musical research on self-expression—through elements of meter, voice, and timing—in popular song, centering on well-known singer-songwriters but with wider application across music studies. She has a superb publication record, including peer-reviewed articles in top-tier journals including *Music Analysis*, *Music Theory Spectrum*, and *Music Theory Online*. She has also written a monograph: Times A-

Changin’: *Flexible Meter as Self-Expression in Singer-Songwriter Music*, an innovative analysis of vocal production published by Oxford University Press in 2023. This is one of the few music theory books that focuses on singer-songwriter performance practice from the 1960s and 1970s. Her pedagogical research has focused on diversifying and modernizing the music theory classroom, which has the potential to contribute to substantial changes in the way the subject is taught nationally. Professor Murphy receives regular invitations to speak at national and international colloquia, to present peer-reviewed papers at major conferences in the field, and to give guest lectures at prestigious universities. Current projects expand into the 1960s United States folk revival generally with a specific focus on Buffy Sainte-Marie, an understudied Indigenous woman songwriter and activist acclaimed for writing protest songs that call attention to Indigenous rights. Professor Murphy has established herself as an important and productive scholar, whose trajectory predicts continued prominence at the highest level of her discipline.

Service: Professor Murphy has a solid record of service in the School of Music, Theatre & Dance and has been involved as a member of the graduate admissions committee, music theory pedagogy committee, musical theatre faculty search committee, and student exam committee. She has served as a Ph.D. dissertation advisor, as a dissertation committee member, and she has had success recruiting Ph.D. students who seek to study with her.

At the national level, Professor Murphy has an extraordinary scholarly service record in her field, especially for an assistant professor. She has served as reviews editor and on the editorial board for *Music Theory Online*, a top-tier journal in her field, as well as associate editor for *Engaging Students: Essays in Music Pedagogy*. For the Society for Music Theory (SMT), she has served as an executive committee member for the Midwest region, chaired the SMT popular music interest group, advancing papers and events serving underrepresented artists and underrepresented areas of research, and participated on multiple conference program committees and as a peer reviewer.

#### External Reviewers:

Reviewer A: “...there are basically four top-tier journals in music theory: *Music Theory Spectrum*, *Music Theory Online*, *Journal of Music Theory*, and *Music Analysis*. Prof. Murphy has already published in three of them. For books, the field strongly favors university presses over trade presses, with Oxford University Press probably being the single most prestigious. Prof. Murphy’s forthcoming book is with Oxford University Press. She’s also spoken four times at the Society for Music Theory annual conference, the preeminent national conference in the field, as well as at a healthy smattering of regional and topic-specific conferences. From a quantitative perspective, this would be a tenurable research record at almost any school in the country...”

Reviewer B: “I think it is likely that Dr. Murphy would be awarded tenure at my institution...which requires ‘superior’ performance in two of the three categories of research, teaching, and service, and at least ‘reasonable’ performance in the third. She has only a few peer-reviewed publications, but they are all in top music-theory journals: the top three North American music theory journals are the *Journal of Music Theory*, *Music Theory Spectrum*, and *Music Theory Online*, and the top UK journal in the field is *Music Analysis*; Dr. Murphy has published in three out of these four and has plans to submit an article to the fourth in the near future. The number of publications would probably be considered slightly low at my institution, but this would likely be

outweighed by the publication of her dissertation-based book by *Oxford University Press*, which is probably the most prominent publisher in the field.”

Reviewer C: “Her dossier is impressive, and I think she’s a tremendous asset to one of the strongest music theory departments in our field. Her just-published book with Oxford University Press, [ ]*Times A-Changin’: Flexible Meter as Self-Expression in Singer-Songwriter Music*, alone ought to be enough to assure her tenure. But she’s also had several articles published in our top journals, spoken at quite a few strongly juried conferences, given far more guest lectures than one would expect for a junior scholar, and has performed considerable service to our field and, clearly, to her institutions. I’ve never seen her teach, but her teaching statement and the pedagogical materials she provided resonated very strongly with me. In short, yes, she should absolutely be promoted and tenured.”

Reviewer D: “By any measure (including a comparison with her professional peers), Dr. Murphy’s scholarship is excellent and holds the potential for significant impact. Regarding her future contributions, I anticipate that Dr. Murphy will continue producing high quality work...As pertains to Dr. Murphy’s service contributions to the discipline, she has been visible in her editorial work with the journals *Music Theory Online*, *Indiana Theory Review*, and *Engaging Students*. Her roles on the program committee of the International Conference on Analytical Approaches to World Music, as Chair of the Popular Music Interest Group of the Society for Music Theory, and as a peer reviewer for various academic journals further reflect her stature as a recognized scholar and as a good citizen...Whenever I see that Dr. Murphy has a new publication, or a new paper to present, I eagerly pursue it. I consider her a professional equal, and I strongly endorse her application for promotion and tenure.”

Reviewer E: “Professor Murphy’s disciplinary service is exemplary. She has not only contributed the expected pretenure service of regular peer reviewing, editorial board memberships, and conference program committees, but she has also served in a leadership capacity rare for pre-tenure faculty. Two leadership positions are of particular note: Professor Murphy’s two-year stint as chair of the SMT’s Popular Music Interest Group (whose membership exceeds 100) and her ongoing position as Reviews Editor for *Music Theory Online*. Professor Murphy’s research and service records would unequivocally qualify her for tenure and promotion at my institution.... Here, a book on Oxford University Press would likely earn the author tenure on its own, and coupled with her handful of high-profile articles and commitment to professional service, her portfolio would be a slam dunk.”

Reviewer F: “Nancy has become synonymous with the analysis of expressive timing in popular music vocal deliveries. This is largely because the tools she has continually put forth for the analysis of this music have essentially invented a field. Whenever somebody is giving a talk about vocal delivery in popular music, if they don’t engage with Nancy’s published work, they are sure to hear about this lacuna in the question and answer session! (The same goes for me when I am reviewing journal submissions on popular music vocal delivery; if it doesn’t cite Nancy, it’s going back to the author!).”

Reviewer G: "...the greatest contribution Murphy makes, even more than focusing on underexplored repertoire, is providing a methodology for studying flexible meter that can be applied to a wide variety of music. To my mind, this is one of the signs of lasting scholarship: it teaches us about a particular body of music but also gives us tools to explore other music...The publication of an excellent book by a premier academic press is a huge accomplishment, and as sure a sign as any of Nancy Murphy's success and promise as a scholar. In terms of quality of scholarship, I would say Murphy's work compares favorably with some of the best scholars writing about popular music. She is a well-regarded scholar, and I expect that her book will be used and cited widely."

Summary of Recommendation: Professor Murphy is an experienced, student-centered, versatile teacher who has taught a wide range of courses at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Her research, published in top-flight journals and in a book by a top university press, is already vital to specialists in her field of popular music studies, and her innovative methods promise to shape other branches of music theory. Her service record at the national level is extraordinary for her point in the career trajectory. With the support of the school's Executive Committee, I enthusiastically recommend Nancy Murphy for promotion to the rank of associate professor of music, with tenure, School of Music, Theatre & Dance.



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

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