

Self-Appraisal for Promotion Review
Bonnie Miksch
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I. Research and Creative Activities

My passion for the creative process has kept me active as a composer throughout my career. In the midst of a busy teaching schedule and my involvement in university affairs and community engagement, I have continued to nurture the creative side of my career. It is my intention in this review to document exceptional work and recognition in the area of my creative activities.

In the past five years, my accomplishments in the area of research and creative activities have included two awards for achievement in composition, a Portland-based people's choice award, several commissions, two publications of recordings of my music, several performances and scholarly presentations at the international and national levels, and a number of positive reviews of my music by informed music critics from our region and beyond. I will address each below.

A. Awards for achievement in composition

In August 2012 I received notice that I had been chosen as a winner of the "Sejong Prize" in the 2012 Sejong International Music Composition Competition by the Sejong Cultural Society for the work *Song of Sanshin* for violin, cello, and piano. (Honorable Mention) This international composition award included a cash prize. While my works have been chosen for performance at several international festivals in the past fifteen years, this is the first time my work has been chosen for an international award, and thus represents a new level of creative achievement for me.

In February 2012 I received notice from the Oregon Music Teacher's Association that I had been chosen as "Oregon's Composer of the Year." This award recognizes recent and past achievement in music composition and includes a commission and premiere of a new work. As a result "Like water, like sound, like breath" for mezzo soprano, cello, and piano was premiered in June 2011 at the annual OMTA "Oregon Composer of the Year" concert.

B. People's choice feature on FearNoMusic

In the past several years, I have received several fine performances by the renowned Portland-based ensemble *FearNoMusic*. In March 2012, I had two pieces chosen as "People's Choice" selections via online voting by FearNoMusic followers. Both *Man dreaming butterfly dreaming man* for violin and piano and *Ever expanding rings of being* for percussion and computer-realized recording were chosen via online votes, and the latter was scheduled for performance on FearNoMusic's People's Choice concert in April 2012.

C. Commissions

In June 2012 I received a commission from *March Music Moderne* with support from the Baby Leroy Memorial Trust to compose a new string trio *March Music Moderne 2013*. This particular project features "six of the region's best composers who have been asked to reflect upon a fragment and/or aspect of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*" (quote taken from

March Music Moderne 2013 Press Release in August 2012), this new work was premiered in March 2013 and the project as a whole was very well-received.

In January 2011 I received a commission to write a new work for the renowned chamber ensemble *Beta Collide*. The resulting work, *Slippery glimpses of your strange world* for flute and trumpet, was performed on the International Contemporary Music Festival in Seoul, Korea.

In 2011 I worked with Ethan Sperry to create a new work for PSU's Chamber Choir for their "Shattered Faith" Concert in Fall 2011. The resulting work, *The Ballad of Y2K*, was premiered and presented in various concerts in Winter and Spring 2012, following a controversy from St. Mary's Cathedral which prevented its premiere in Fall 2011 on the original "Shattered Faith" Concert. Described by the Oregon Arts Watch as "hilarious and irreverent," it will be featured on the Portland Vocal Consort on an upcoming "Best of the Northwest" concert in Winter 2013.

In 2013 I received a commission from Oregon Symphony violist, Joël Belgique to compose a new work for violin and viola. The resulting work, *Somewhere like you, my darling*, will be premiered in September 2015 as part of a recording project with FearNoMusic. *Somewhere I have never traveled*, another work which will be premiered on that concert, is a newly commissioned piece by FearNoMusic for string quartet, piano, and percussion. It will be featured as the centerpiece of the CD we are producing together.

D. Recordings and Publications

In the past five years, three commercial releases of music have become available. Most notable among these, I released a full-length CD of my electroacoustic music *Every tendril, a wish* on the North Pacific Music label in 2011. In 2009, pianist Roger McVey released the premiere recording of my work *Fathoms* for prepared piano on his "American Journeys" CD. Also in 2009, Oregon Catholic Press published my choral work *There is no rose*. This publication includes a recording produced by OCP and has resulted in increased dissemination of the work, including performances at the College Music Society and by the critically renowned choir *Scholar Cantorum* in Washington D.C.

E. Performances at Conferences and Festivals (National and International)

In the past five years, my music has been performed at several national and international festivals. At the national level, I have had my music performed at four College Music Society conferences in the last five years (2009, 2010, 2012, 2013). These performances included my choral work *There is no rose*, my sextet *Divinity roused*, and a premiere of my piano trio *Song of sanshin*. I have found these conferences to be useful to connect to faculty performers at other institutions and to increase visibility for our composition program at PSU.

In Fall 2013 Southwestern University invited me to do a visiting composer residency. During this residency I taught classes, gave presentations on my compositional techniques and on live-interactive computer music. In addition, three of my works were performed by faculty performers and presented in an evening concert. This type of outreach is

particularly valuable to me because it gives me an opportunity to combine my teaching with my creative worlds.

In the span of fifteen years my works have been performed at over a dozen International conferences. Recent international performances include my work *Fanfare for the common cold* which was chosen for performance at the 2010 International Computer Music Festival at SUNY Stonybrook in conjunction with Vox Novus's 60x60. In addition to this performance, it was featured in 60x60 concerts in Argentina and the UK. The renowned new music ensemble *Beta Collide* presented my new work *Slippery glimpses of your strange world* at the International Contemporary Music Festival in 2011. In 2012 the Women Composers Festival of Hartford (which curates music from abroad in addition to domestic selections) featured my electroacoustic work *Every tendril, a wish*.

F. Scholarly Presentations

In 2014, I was among three regional composers chosen to present my music and compositional ideas as part of the launch of *OregonComposersWatch*, a new resource where online listeners can locate music written by Oregon's composers. Also in 2014 I delivered a lecture for the Oregon Music Teachers Association entitled "Chord Mutation in the Music of Chopin: Making Sense of His Most Difficult Passages." This lecture was received with great enthusiasm, and the organization discussed the possibility of having me back to give regular theory lectures.

In 2010 I attended the National College Music Society Conference in Minneapolis, MN where I designed and led a panel discussion "How to Teach the Unteachable: Composing a Pedagogy of Composition." Leading this panel discussion was an excellent way to gain visibility for PSU's composition program. I delivered another presentation with a pedagogical focus for the College Music Society's 2009 National Conference, "Teaching Chromatic Chord Identification" with theory colleague Leon Couch.

In 2011 I was featured as a guest lecturer for the local music festival *Electrogals*. I presented "Skirts in the studio: Ten Women Pioneers of Electronic Music," a multi-media presentation which delved into the historical, technical, and aesthetic of women in electroacoustic music from the 1940s to the 1980s.

In 2009 I presented *Harmonic Abundance in the Fertile Realm of the Electroacoustic* as featured composer of The Cascadia Composers' Chapter of NACUSA. This lecture gave me the opportunity to share techniques I use to tune source sounds to harmonic contexts of my design.

G. Critical Reviews

Critical reviews are somewhat difficult to come by for composers, as critics are often more interested in reviewing music of the traditional musical canon. Nevertheless, I received several positive reviews in the last two years, including the following:

“The show closed on a high note with PSU music prof Bonnie Miksch’s dazzling *Divinity roused* for a mixed sextet. The initial easygoing melodies soon gave way to eccentric rhythms and glittering sound textures. It’s one of the coolest new works by an Oregon composer I’ve heard this year... Whether she’s working with acoustic or electronic instruments, Miksch is proving to be one of Oregon’s most vital musical voices.” – Brett Campbell, Oregon Arts Watch (September 2011)

Bonnie Miksch’s *Man dreaming butterfly dreaming man* for violin and piano was stuffed with lovely moments from the gossamer exchanges of tremolos and trills (all played *sul ponticello*) to the enraptured climax. – Lee Hartman, KCMetropolis.org (September 2010)

The evening's highlight was "Man Dreaming Butterfly Dreaming Man," written by Portland State University composition professor Bonnie Miksch ... it used simple elements—spare motifs and a generally meditative violin line—ingeniously and economically; ... creating lovely, unexpected harmonies. – James McQuillen, *The Oregonian* (March 2010)

H. New Areas of Creative Inquiry:

In the past few years, my work has branched out to include new areas of inquiry. I recently delved into traditional Korean music, resulting in my composition *Song of Sanshin* which is a set of loose variations inspired by Sang-ryung-san, a traditional Buddhist Korean work. During my sabbatical I found time to perform with Portland’s *Venerable Showers of Beauty Gamelan*, where I delved into traditional Javanese music, and my involvement resulted in several public performances as well as generation of new creative ideas for composition. This work culminated in PSU’s acquisition of gamelan donated from Baltimore, and we now have a brand new student ensemble exploring this music. I have also been actively researching the nature of the dreaming self and human consciousness, which has been a longstanding area of inquiry in my creative work. My current recording project with FearNoMusic, *Somewhere I have never traveled* explores personal themes of human consciousness.

II. Teaching, Mentoring, and Curricular Development

While I have pursued excellence in all aspects of my career, teaching and mentoring have remained my highest priorities. It is my hope that this review will serve to document exceptional work in this area.

A. Area Coordinator for Composition Studies

As Area Coordinator for Composition Studies at PSU, I created, revised, and implemented a brand new degree, the Bachelor of Music in Composition. While modest in scope, this degree has drawn students who would otherwise not pursue music at PSU. The degree has been offered now for eight years, and we have graduated nearly every student we have taken into the program. The numbers of upper-division students has varied in size between eight and fifteen.

The strength of our composition program lies in a carefully constructed curriculum with emphasis on theory and compositional techniques. We assure that majors are well-suited for the degree using a portfolio review process. Intended majors take a year of composition at the 200 level and then submit a portfolio of their works to be evaluated by composition faculty.

With the implementation of our new composition major, we redesigned our three-term composition class as a 200 level class geared towards prospective composition majors. My goal has been to provide a variety of interesting and provocative projects to help students explore a range of musical expressions. In the fall term, we focus on creating works for wind quintet, in the winter we turn to string quartets, and each spring students design their own project which will involve performers, performance groups, arts organizations, or collaborators from outside the class and in many cases from outside of PSU.

Ensuring the academic integrity of our composition major is a priority for me. I responded to NASM's criticism that our composition degree was weak in computer music by adding a new course to the composition curriculum. Students now take Computer Music Composition, a class I designed and teach every summer and once every other winter. This course introduces concepts, applications, and projects in sound synthesis, sampling, and digital signal processing. After reporting back to NASM with documentation of our new class, they sent a letter not only approving the change but with added commendation for the thoroughness with which I addressed their concerns.

Teaching applied composition lessons has become a much larger part of my teaching responsibilities. During most academic years I teach five students out of a range of 9-12 majors, with colleagues in my area teaching the remainder. As area coordinator for composition, I am responsible for advising all current and prospective students in the major. We have all seen the quality of the students' work rise in the eight years we have offered the composition major, and graduates have gone on to excellent graduate programs including Syracuse University, SUNY Stony Brook, and Longy School of Music at Barnard College.

B. Classroom Teaching

To document the effectiveness of my classroom teaching, I have included student evaluations and comment sheets from F2009-S2014, a summary of these results, and student letters originally included in my tenure file. Courses I have taught during my ten years at Portland State include MUS 111-113 Music Theory I, MUS 114-116 Sight Singing and Ear Training, MUS 211-213 Music Theory II, MUS 214-216 Keyboard Harmony/ Sight Singing and Ear Training, MUS 520 Analytical Techniques, MUS 240-242 Composition I, II, and III, MUS 476 Computer Music Composition, The New Music Ensemble, Composition Seminar, and Applied Composition.

I have included an analysis of data collected on student evaluations from the past five years, and the results showed me that a wide-range of students consistently rate me as an effective teacher. These students are diverse in age, life experience, musicianship, and

comfort with the material in classes. The average range for all questions on evaluation forms was between 4.38 and 4.94 out of 5.

Another measure of classroom effectiveness is evident in student retention rates. While I do not have comprehensive data to show in terms of student retention, I would like to note that I generally finish the academic year with most of the students I began with, both in my Music Theory II class and Composition. The numbers in my Music Theory II class interest me the most because it is an excellent indication of how many students will enter upper-division studies in our department. While I cannot take full credit for this level of retention, I believe that students in my classes benefit from the consistent quality of my instruction, the clarity of my expectations, and my willingness to help them excel in the class. I would describe myself as a demanding but fair teacher with a knack for inspiring students to set high expectations for themselves.

I have maintained a consistently busy teaching load during my time at Portland State and have seen my contact hours and the number of students in my classes grow. My contact hours have expanded as a result of implementing the new composition degree, and the number of students in my classes has grown as a result of a shift in my load from freshman to sophomore theory where the class is taught as a single section. As my classes have gotten bigger, it has been a challenge to balance students' various levels of experience. This has led me to find creative ways to foster peer-to-peer learning. I find student success to grow in direct relation to their involvement with their peers. Stronger students refine their understanding through assuming the role of teacher while weaker students benefit from hearing explanations by their peers.

Turning challenges into opportunities has always been my objective. It is not possible to teach music theory without providing consistent feedback on students' homework submissions, however, grading the papers of large theory classes without the benefit of a graduate teaching assistant has been a consistent challenge. Nonetheless, I have found a way to get the grading done efficiently with the help of an upper-division student grader. The student enrolls for credit by arrangement and receives instruction from me in evaluating the work of lower-division students. Undergraduate graders are often better than graduates since they have already excelled in the classes they will assist, and with consistent supervision gain valuable mentoring from the experience of working one-on-one with the professor. The benefit to prospective undergraduate assistants is apparent, and each year I have multiple interested students to choose from.

C. Projects and collaborations benefiting composition students

In conjunction with PSU's New Music Ensemble, Ken Selden and I have created a competition for our composition students which we now offer every other year. In the fall interested students apply to the competition by submitting anonymous pieces for consideration. A departmental committee then chooses four students as finalists, and each writes a new work for the New Music Ensemble to perform. Several rehearsals allow for composers to experience their music in the rehearsal process, and the final session doubles as a public performance. In past years we brought judges in from outside

PSU to choose a finalist. These judges were consistently delighted by the high quality of our students' compositions.

To celebrate the centennial birthday of John Cage in 2012, I collaborated with Wynn Kiyama and Lisa Marsh in the creation of the Caged Piano Project. Dr. Kiyama prepared a piano using Cage's original specifications. We set this piano aside in a student practice room and invited composition students and faculty to create new works for the instrument to be played by our student pianists. The students and faculty dove into this project with enthusiasm, and the resulting compositions were fantastic. Although the performance was modest in scope and intimate in size, this collaboration brought together elements of musicology, history, performance practice and composition in a tangible and delightful way! To date, this was my favorite collaboration at PSU.

I have also collaborated with Ethan Sperry and PSU choirs, and they have publicly presented compositions written by our student composers. This year the composition area is also collaborating with Wynn Kiyama, Joel Bluestone, and students playing taiko drums and western percussion. I am especially eager to get our composition students involved in explorations with non-western instruments, and our new gamelan ensemble in addition to our taiko ensemble are excellent points of departure for these explorations.

Occasionally, we have the opportunity to have a visiting ensemble work with composition students in a reading session of our students' compositions. For example, I arranged for the Fireworks Ensemble to come to PSU and work with our upper-division composition majors. This visit was incredibly significant to those students involved, and they all received valuable feedback about their pieces. Experiences like these help to prepare students to learn how to present themselves and their work in professional settings.

III. Community Engagement

Over the past ten years I have become increasingly involved with musical communities in Portland. From April 2009 until June 2012, I served on the Board of the newly-formed Cascadia Composers Chapter of NACUSA (National Association of Composers in the United States). This group is Portland's first organization which brings together regional composers with the common purpose of supporting members' music and facilitating professional performances of new works. My official role on the board was Outreach Coordinator, and as the only board member with a current university position, I was largely responsible for fostering student involvement in the organization.

I have gained experience with grant writing over the past several years. During my time on the board, I helped Cascadia Composers to receive three important grants, two of them from RACC (Regional Arts and Cultural Coalition), and one from the Multnomah Cultural Coalition. These skills translated to a new community venture I have worked with since 2011, Crazy Jane Composers, a group of women composers operating under the umbrella of Cascadia Composers. As a founding member of this group, I have helped raise money for three concerts using kickstarter as a significant funding source. In addition, I serve as technology consultant and director of multi-media for Crazy Jane concerts.

Many of the our PSU students have benefited from my engagement with Cascadia Composers and Crazy Jane, as I have encouraged them to become involved both artistically and administratively. Currently, one of our former composition students, Jay Derderian, serves on the board of Cascadia Composers. Other former students have had their works performed on juried concerts, including Matthew Steele, Charles Copeland, Jay Derderian, and Stacey Philipps.

One of the missions of the Cascadia Composers organization is to provide a forum for regional composers to speak about their music with other members and with the community. These lectures happen once a month, frequently enough to create a stimulating group of participants. In the past I have delivered lectures on my music to enthusiastic groups of colleagues. Audience members attending these lectures include professional composers, students, and community musicians. As more and more members of our Portland State community get involved in this organization, I would like to see some of these lectures given at Portland State, and this community collaboration will serve to bring together and benefit our current students and alumni. I believe that this will help to deepen the connection between the music department here and the larger contemporary music scene in Portland.

I believe that the most significant community engagement is that which involves our students and creates a learning environment where the community becomes the classroom. This type of engagement blurs the distinction between pedagogy and service, learning and doing. I have developed an assignment for my composition class which seeks to foster this type of engagement. Students compose works for any medium, from solo viola to choir to percussion and electronics, in collaboration with individuals, performance groups, organizations, or venues outside the classroom. They are strongly encouraged to involve musicians outside of Portland State. Proposals have been highly creative, and students have worked on collaborations with film makers and poets, created pieces for high school choirs, and completed commissions for interested performers. Since the act of music composition is itself a mostly solitary activity, it is important to show students how to make connections within the larger creative community and how to increase the relevance of their music.

IV. Service to the Department, School, University, and Creative Community

This year is my third year on the Promotion and Tenure Committee in the School of Music, and my first year chairing the committee. I have gained valuable insight on this committee about effective mentoring, documentation, and evaluation criteria. I have become more intimately acquainted with our guidelines and how they apply to a wide range of faculty in different types of positions.

I have served as chair of the Curriculum Committee in the music department/school of music for a total of seven years. During my time serving in this capacity, we have improved our curriculum with revisions to all of our undergraduate degrees. These revisions have needed approval from the department, school, university senate, and our accrediting organization the National Association of Schools in Music (NASM). I have helped to prepare several documents in response to suggestions for curriculum revision from NASM. In some cases, we just needed to

show more explicitly what we were covering in various classes. In other cases, we revised our curriculum to address concerns of NASM and strengthen our programs. As chair of the departmental/school curriculum committee, I also serve on the COTA Curriculum Committee which oversees proposals from Music, Art, Theatre, and Architecture.

My involvement with the University Curriculum Committee has greatly increased my competence and confidence serving as chair of our departmental/school committee. During the 2006-2007 school year I served as the Chair of this committee, following two years as representative from FPA on the committee. The work of this committee, reviewing all new proposals for undergraduate courses and programs, is of paramount significance to the university. As chair I was responsible for running our twice-monthly meetings, reporting to the senate and senate steering committee, and working directly with faculty to amend tabled proposals. It is highly unusual to take on such a time-consuming and critical position as an untenured faculty member (some would even say it is risky!), but I learned much in this role and my knowledge has helped me to strengthen proposals for The School of Music and COTA.

I have served for five years on the Advisory Committee. This committee meets at least once a month with the School of Music Director, and my participation in this committee keeps me involved with the most urgent issues within the department, school, and university. I have also served on the NASM Committee which was responsible for assembling and editing the accreditation review document and ensuring that our documents were in order for the NASM review visit in the Spring of 2008. I expect to be actively involved in our program review coming up in 2017.

From S2010-S2011, I served on the Sustainability + Music Committee in the Music Department. As a member of this committee we created a mission statement and invited four lecturers to bring issues from acoustic ecology to sustainability of musical cultures to PSU. We created this committee in response to the university initiative encouraging new areas of inquiry involving environmental and sustainability issues. This was the only project of its kind in COTA and drew some interesting attention across campus from a variety of disciplines. I would like to see more dialogue between disciplines inside and outside the arts and find my role in fostering these connections.

When appropriate, I have contributed my service to national music organizations. Most notable, I served a two-year term as Vice President for the International Computer Music Association. In this role, my main duty was to develop membership. During my term, I helped to revise our categories of membership and implemented a new three-year membership option which helped to increase our membership by nearly fifty percent. I also completed a term as Regional Director of the Americas for the same organization. Also at the national level, I served as a member of the music jury for the College Music Society's National Conference which took place in Portland in 2009. I helped to choose twenty-five works for performance from a pool of nearly two hundred submissions.